

The Quilter's Apprentice

1. At the quilting party when Joanna is a child, the elder Mrs. Chester says slave owners are "enslaved as much as [slaves] are and must resign ourselves to it" (p. 55). How is this true in her perception? What does this say about her understanding of Joanna's life? Do you agree or disagree with her?
2. Joanna sees Miss Evangeline's engagement as "being sold off to the highest bidder" (p. 132). Do you agree with Joanna's impression of antebellum courtship for people of Miss Evangeline's social class? What are some differences and some similarities between the marriage arrangements of Colonel Harper and Miss Evangeline, and Joanna and Titus?
3. Joanna gets off to a rough start with Leah and Leah's daughter Lizzie. Why, then, does Joanna risk her own safety, and possibly her life, by helping Leah when she is punished with the stake? What does she mean when she tells Titus "I am Leah" (p. 142)?
4. Joanna and Leah both face very difficult situations during their lives. What finally breaks Leah? What makes Joanna stronger?
5. When Titus has the chance to run while fetching Miss Evangeline from Charleston, he doesn't take it because he can't bear to leave Joanna and their unborn child. But later, he makes the decision to join General Hunter's colored regiment at Hilton Head. What caused him to change his mind about leaving Joanna and Ruthie behind? Why was Joanna able to forgive him both times?
6. After her violent encounter with Missus Givens, Hannah stops speaking entirely. Joanna has to hide her reading ability from all her masters but tries to use it to prove her story of being a freed woman. How does the power of language and literacy affect the slaves' lives?
7. Despite having a comfortable life, Miss Evangeline lies and exaggerates about everything. Why do you think she does so? What does she gain, if anything, and what does she sacrifice?
8. When Mr. Lewis approaches Joanna about being a spy, she is understandably distrustful of his motives. Her price is the freedom of Hannah and Ruthie, should they be split up and sold. Do you think Mr. Lewis is really capable of keeping his promise? Do Joanna's reports truly help Mr. Lincoln's army?
9. Joanna's Birds of the Air scrap quilt is a record of landmarks on the way back north to freedom. What, aside from a map, does the quilt represent? What does it mean to the modern women at the historical museum on Edisto Island?

10. Sylvia finds great satisfaction in learning about Joanna North's story, even though she has not conclusively proven that Joanna North is the Joanna that Gerda mentions in her memoir. Do you think Sylvia will eventually prove they are one and the same? Why or why not? Do you agree that "it was enough to know that such a woman existed" (p. 336)?

Adapted from www.readinggroupguides.com