

# ***PinkMonkey***<sup>®</sup> Literature Notes on . . .

SAMPLE EXCERPTS FROM THE MONKEYNOTES FOR  
"Black Like Me"

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## ***BLACK LIKE ME***

by

**John Howard Griffin**



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## **KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS**

### **SETTING**

This book is an autobiographical diary of John Howard Griffin, a white journalist from Texas, who undergoes medical treatment to temporarily color his skin black, so that.....

### **LIST OF CHARACTERS**

#### **Major**

##### **John Howard Griffin**

A sensitive white journalist. The whole book is a shocking account of his personal experiences, when he transforms himself temporarily into a Negro for six weeks. During this period, he suffers raw hate and violence, crudity and inhumanity, from the white racists.

#### **Minor**

The minor characters are many, both white and Negro, friend and foe. Most are .....

### **CONFLICT**

#### **Protagonist**

The protagonist is the author himself. He sets out on a.....

#### **Antagonists**

The antagonists are not one, but many. They are the numerous.....

#### **Climax**

The climax of the book is reached when some .....

#### **Outcome**

The book ends tragically, with the ominous fear that the.....

### **PLOT (Synopsis)**

The book is a real life account of the experiences of a white author, John Howard Griffin, who temporarily transforms himself into a Negro for six long and intense weeks. This is so that he can personally experience Negro oppression and exploitation. It begins on October 28, 1959, with the author's dramatic decision to undergo medical treatment to .....

### **THEME (S)**

#### **Major**

##### **Theme of White Racism**

The main theme of the book is the white author's experience of white racism, when he temporarily transforms himself into a Negro. The author describes this theme of white racism as the story of men who destroy the souls and bodies of other men and in .....

#### **Minor**

##### **Theme of Negro Strength**

A minor theme of the book is the bittersweet simplicity.....

## **Theme of White Sensitivity**

Another minor theme of the book is that of white .....

## **MOOD**

The mood of the book is very startling and shocking. It is not an arid account filled with generalizations and statistics on the Negro problem, or an abstract scientific research .....

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Historical Information**

The book starts on October 28, 1959, and ends on August 17, 1960. Thus the period which the author describes is the 1950's. This was a period of bitter racism practiced by the whites and a time of deep and intense yearning for righteousness by the Negroes.

During these years, America was two separate and unequal societies — one black and one white, without any real communication between the two. For the Negroes, there was widespread racial discrimination and segregation, oppression and inequality. They suffered poverty, hunger and homelessness. They were unprotected and unrepresented, unemployed and .....

## **SUMMARIES WITH NOTES**

### **OCTOBER 28, 1959**

#### **Summary**

The book begins as a diary of the white writer, John Howard Griffin. For years the author has been living in Texas and specializing in racial issues. For quite some time now, the author is haunted by a particular idea; what would it be like, if a white man became a Negro in the Deep South. As the book opens, he is deeply disturbed by a report about the rise in suicides among the Negroes. He wants to probe the cause for this and he realizes that he can only do so, if he himself becomes a Negro and personally experiences discrimination based on skin color. But at the same time, he also realizes that the whole idea is very mysterious and frightening.

#### **Notes**

In this first entry in the autobiographical diary of the author, the readers are given a short but sharp character sketch of the author. The readers learn about his deep concern and sensitivity towards the Negroes at a time of rabid white racism. He wishes to reach out to the Negroes, communicate with them, understand their problems and then reveal it to the white world. He is humble enough to recognize that he knows little of the Negro's situation, even though he is a specialist in racial issues. Griffin knows that a white man cannot understand the problems that the blacks are facing. This is mainly because of the hostility and the mistrust that exists between both sides. He therefore decides to go ahead with the idea that had been in his mind for a long time, that is, change the color of his skin into black and see, first hand, the kind of lives that the blacks are living. He admits to himself that the idea, though effective, is quite frightening. Nevertheless he decides to go ahead.

### **OCTOBER 29, 1959**

#### **Summary**

The author discusses his plan with an old friend, the owner of a Negro magazine, Sepia, who is a unique

person. Griffin asks him to finance this experiment and in return he will give him some articles or some chapters from the book he will write. He also discusses his plan with the lady editor of the magazine. Both warn him against the dangers of the project, but Griffin is not deterred. Finally he discusses his idea with his wife who though shocked and startled at first, later readily agrees to cooperate. He later goes back to his barn office and as he sits there alone, he suddenly experiences an acute feeling of dread.

### **Notes**

In this part of the diary, the reader meets George Levitan, the owner of Sepia, an international Negro magazine, who is also a unique character for that time and age, as he offers equal job opportunities to whites or Negroes, choosing only according to their qualifications and capabilities. George finds the author's plan a crazy idea and tells him that he'll get himself killed. But later his sense of justice gets the better of him and he enthusiastically agrees to fund the author's idea. He then suggests that the author also meet the editor of Sepia, Mrs. Adele Jackson, before embarking on his.....

## **OVERALL ANALYSES**

### **Character Analyses**

#### **Major**

The major character in the book is the author himself. He is a sincere and sensitive white journalist from Texas. A specialist in race issues, he is persistently haunted by the idea of what it is like to be a Negro in a land where the Negro is shoved down. He begins a scientific research, carefully compiling data for analysis on the racial question, yet he admits that this process does not really probe the changes wrought to the heart and body and mind of the Negro as a result of the crude and cruel white racism practiced on him. He decides to reveal racism in all its rawness, how men not only destroy other men but in the process destroy themselves as well.

Griffin is not just sensitive and sincere. He is also very brave and courageous. This is seen from the fact that he decides to change the color of his skin to black so that he can experience, first hand, what it is like to be a Negro. This is mysterious and frightening, full of terrible dread for.....

#### **Minor**

The minor characters are many, both black and white, friend and foe, who the author encounters before his transformation from white to Negro, during his six weeks as.....

### **PLOT (Structure)**

The entire novel is in the form of a diary – the author's experiences during the period when he had temporarily transformed himself into a Negro. The autobiography can be divided into five sections structurally.

As the book begins, Griffin decides to.....

### **THEME (S)**

#### **Major**

Theme of White Racism-The book traces, with dark horror and stark brutality, the theme of white racism

as it is practiced on the Southern Negroes. It describes, through the eyes of a white journalist, who temporarily transforms himself into a Negro, the blood, sweat .....

### **Theme of Negro Solidarity**

A minor theme of the book is the theme of.....

### **Theme of White Sensitivity**

Another minor theme in the book is the theme of white sensitivity. The author meets quite a few whites, who are not rabid racists but are in fact very opposed to them. Some, like the journalist East, are even paying a heavy price for this. East and his family are ostracized from society and have to lead a lonely existence. The author's wife and parents.....

## **OTHER ELEMENTS**

### **Style**

The book is an autobiographical diary. It is written in the

### **Symbolism**

The book begins with symbolism, as the.....

### **Imagery**

The book is rich in imagery. The reader can almost hear the .....

### **Contrast**

The book is filled with innumerable contrasts the author encounters and experiences, especially as he zigzags between .....

### **Humor**

There is quite some humor in the book, even though .....

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Why has the author titled his book, *Black Like me*?"
2. Do you think the Book deserved the 1962 Saturday Review Award?.....

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