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The Member of the Wedding

by

Carson McCullers
1946



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes Staff

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

A small southern town (unnamed) in the early 1940s.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Frances "Frankie" Addams - Renames herself "F. Jasmine Addams," the protagonist of the novel, a young girl who begins the novel at twelve years old.

Berenice Sadie Brown - The African-American housekeeper of the Addams household, she is Frankie's only mother figure.

John Henry West - Frankie's young cousin, who spends time with Frankie and Berenice in the Addams' kitchen. He dies of meningitis.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Helen Fletcher - A girl a year older than Frankie who asked her why she smelled funny when she had used a bitter-smelling ointment for boils. Frankie suspects that Helen has spread the news that she smells bad.

Jarvis Addams - Frankie's brother who has been living in Alaska and is returning to marry a woman from Winter Hill.

Janice Evans - Jarvis's fiancée.

Aunt Pet - John Henry West's mother and Frankie's aunt.

Uncle Ustace - Married to Aunt Pet, John Henry's father.

John - Berenice's foster brother.

Clorina - John's wife. Berenice was initially jealous of her, but came to love her.....

Many additional characters are identified in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - Frances "Frankie," "F Jasmine" Addams, a twelve year old girl who is going through the rites of passage which will take her from girlhood to womanhood.

Antagonist - The in-between time of adolescence. Frankie is neither a child nor a woman at.....

Climax - Frankie encounters adult sexuality when she has her date with the.....

Outcome - Frankie grows up as a result of her humiliating experience at the wedding and.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Part 1 begins with Frankie Addams in the kitchen in the dog days of summer with Berenice Sadie Brown and John Henry West. Her brother, Jarvis, has just been home on a brief visit to introduce the family to his fiancée, Janice. They will get married the next week in the town of Winter Hill, Janice's home town. Frankie's brother has been living in Alaska and is home only briefly to get married and then will join the army to fight in World War II. Janice and Jarvis's visit has interrupted the longest and most unbearable summer of Frankie's life. Frankie's best friend left town before the summer began and all the other girls seem to be thirteen already. They won't allow Frankie to be a member of their girls' club because she's too loud and rude. Frankie has spent the summer playing cards and talking to Berenice and John Henry in the kitchen of her house. Her father is gone all

day at the jewelry store and has become something of an opposing force in Frankie's life ever since he told her she had to begin to sleep in her own bed instead of sleeping with him now that she is twelve. Frankie realizes she belongs no where and when she sees her brother and his fiancée, she decides to become a member of the wedding. She tells Berenice Janice and Jarvis are "the we of me."

Part 2 begins with Frankie's walk around town under the new name of F. Jasmine Addams. Her task is to buy a wedding dress, but she encounters many people along the way. When she hears the organ grinder playing for his monkey, she searches for him until she finds him standing on the street arguing with a red-haired soldier who his holding a wad of dollar bills. The monkey runs up F. Jasmine's body and sits on.....

THEMES

MAIN THEME

The main theme of *The Member of the Wedding* is the discomforts of adolescence, especially the uncomfortable state of "becoming." Frankie Addams doesn't yet know what she will become. When she hears of her brother's upcoming wedding, she latches onto the idea of becoming part of the wedding, a.....

MINOR THEME

The minor theme of the novel is the idea of belonging. At twelve years old, Frankie doesn't belong to childhood anymore and she doesn't yet belong to adulthood. She spends her time with.....

MOOD

The mood of the novel is a heavy mood of boredom and frustration as Frankie lives through the dreaded dog days of summer. The scene is fairly constant--the Addams' kitchen--creating

AUTHOR INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Carson McCullers was born in 1917. The novel *The Member of the Wedding* is largely autobiographical. Carson McCullers was raised in a small Southern town much like the one depicted in the novel. She was raised by the family's African-American housekeeper more than by her father. This housekeeper is depicted with great subtlety in this novel--the character of Berenice Sadie Brown. Her other novels include.....

LITERARY/HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The primary literary influences of Carson McCullers' novel are southern writers such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner. Her evocation of the Southern scene is as vivid as these predecessors ever created. The sense of the stifling quality of small town life is balanced in McCullers with an underlying appreciation of its cohesiveness, its sense of rootedness, and its unexpected moments of beauty and love. However, McCullers also recognizes the treacheries of mid-century Southern life, especially in.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

PART 1

Summary

When Frankie is twelve years old, she has an unusual summer. She realizes at some point in the summer that she is not a member of anything. This state of being scares Frankie. Frankie walks around her neighborhood doing nothing. She feels like she's in "so much secret trouble" with these negative thoughts that she had better stay at home. At home, she spends time with Berenice, the housekeeper, and her cousin John Henry West. These three spend so much time together that they repeat their stories over and over until "the words began to rhyme with each other and sound strange." On the last Friday of August, everything changes.

She tells Berenice that it's funny how everything has changed. Her brother had come home with his fiancée and they plan to get married in the town of Winter Hill this coming Sunday. Berenice wonders if Frankie is jealous. She tells Frankie to go look at herself in the mirror to see how jealous she looks. Frankie sees a tall, gangly girl,

now five foot, five inches, with too-narrow shoulders and too-long arms. She has cut her hair like a boy's and it has grown out shaggily. She thinks she looks like a freak. She tells the others that her brother and his fiancée were the most beautiful people she had ever seen. Frankie thinks they must have a good time every minute of every day. John Henry suggests playing cards so they can have a good time too. They sit down at the kitchen table and play three-handed bridge.

Frankie examines Berenice. She has been saying she is thirty-five years old for the past three years. She only has one thing wrong with her, a blue glass eye. No one understands why she chose the color blue. Her other eye is dark and sad. John Henry watches as Berenice deals the sweaty cards. He is shirtless and has a tiny lead donkey on a string around his neck. He is six years old, but looks too small for his age. He watches the cards so closely because he is in debt to Berenice more than five million dollars. John Henry and Frankie argue over who can deal the spade. Frankie says she doesn't care and she means it. She plays cards without paying attention to what she's doing. She hates the walls of the kitchen. John Henry had drawn on them all summer long. The walls are covered to the height he could reach with "queer, child drawings." Frankie's father had gotten angry and then decided to paint the kitchen when summer was over, so the drawings had stayed on the walls all summer.

Frankie remarks that the world is a small place and that it is certainly a "sudden place." Berenice thinks it's sometimes sudden and sometimes slow. Before yesterday, Frankie hadn't ever thought about a wedding before. Her brother Jarvis had become engaged to a girl from Winter Hill before he went to Alaska. He had lived in Alaska for what seemed like a very long time. Frankie had been dreaming about Alaska the whole time. She had sent her brother fudge once and had loved the idea of her fudge being eaten in Alaska. Jarvis's letters home sometimes disturbed Frankie because they contained incongruous information. He had mentioned being plagued with mosquitoes, for instance. Jarvis's fiancée's name is Janice Evans. Frankie has already packed her suitcase for the one hundred-mile trip to Winter Hill.

Frankie can't wait for Sunday to come, the day she and her father will go to Winter Hill to the wedding. She has been wanting to leave town for so long it seems. She says, "I wish I had a hundred dollars and could just light out and never see this town again." Frankie also wishes she were someone else besides herself.

Frankie spent that afternoon like she had spent all her other Friday afternoons in August. She hung around the kitchen and then went outside to the yard after it became dark. The scuppernong arbor is full of purple blooms. Frankie is too big to get inside it any more. John Henry West sits under it in a wicker chair. She asks him what he's doing, but he will only reply that he is thinking. Frankie is afraid and can't say what is making her feel so. She asks John Henry to eat supper with her and then spend the night. She urges him to go home and ask his mother, Aunt Pet, and then meet her in the kitchen. Frankie goes inside and tells Berenice she has invited John Henry to dinner. Berenice wonders at Frankie's invitation since she has been saying she is "sick and tired" of him. Frankie agrees that is so, but adds that John Henry looked a little scared to her. Then she says maybe he looks more lonesome than scared.

Later on John Henry comes over. Frankie takes his bag and lets him begin to make his biscuit man. John Henry works on the biscuit man very seriously. He spends a good deal of time breaking the raisins apart to make eyes, a nose, and a mouth. The biscuit man reminds Frankie of John Henry himself. They eat supper with Berenice because Frankie's father has telephoned that he will work late at the jewelry store. The cooked biscuit man looks like any other biscuit man made by a child. It had swelled all out of proportion. They can hear the radio that is playing in the other room. It is a mix of stations, a war voice, an advertiser, and the "sleazy music of a sweet band." The radio had stayed on non-stop all summer. They had stopped noticing the sound long since.

Frankie asks John Henry what he would like to do for entertainment. He wants to play outside, but she doesn't. John Henry thinks he would rather go home. Frankie convinces him that it would be too rude to eat dinner and then leave right away to go home. They go upstairs to Frankie's room. Frankie sits at her typewriter trying to think of letters she could write, but she has no one to write to. John Henry wants to go home, but Frankie tells

him to sit in the corner and play with her motor, used for filing finger nails and sharpening knives. Frankie looks at her lavender seashell and glass, snow-filled globe. She likes to hold the shell to her ear and think of the Gulf of Mexico and she likes to make the snow fall and think of Alaska.

John Henry points out the window at some older girls who are having a party at their club house. Frankie doesn't want to hear about them. Frankie isn't a member of their clubhouse. The members are thirteen and fourteen year olds. Before this summer, Frankie had been a younger member of their group, but now they told her she was too young and too mean to be a member. Sometimes during the summer, Frankie has watched them from a distance. Frankie cries a little thinking about it. She says she thinks these girls have been spreading the gossip that she doesn't smell good. She had boils at one point and had to use a bitter smelling ointment. Helen Fletcher had asked her what her funny smell was. She calls the girls "son-of-a-bitches." John Henry assures her that she smells sweet. Frankie ignores him. She tells him the girls were spreading false rumors about married couples, saying she can't help but think of Aunt Pet and Uncle Ustace, not to mention her father.

Frankie gets the bottle of Sweet Serenade out of her suitcase and pours it on herself. She also pours some on John Henry. They watch moths trying to get in the window screen, attracted by Frankie's desk lamp. Frankie thinks it's an "irony of fate" that the moths come to her window when they could go anywhere. She notices John Henry's glasses and tells him to take them off. She tests his vision. Since he can distinguish large objects in the room, she tells him he shouldn't wear his glasses any more.

They go to bed, changing into their night clothes with their backs turned to each other. Frankie muses on the strangeness of the fact that the world spins so fast that it seems impossible that people land in one place when they jump up into the air. John Henry falls asleep. Frankie watches him, then lies close to him and licks the back of his ear. She relaxes now that she has "someone sleeping in the dark with her."

The next morning, John Henry refuses to leave because Berenice is cooking a ham. Frankie's father reads the paper, then goes downtown to wind the clocks at the store. On the day when Frankie's brother and his fiancée came to visit, Frankie and John Henry had been sitting in the arbor shade talking about Christmas. Frankie, John Henry and Berenice play cards. Frankie comments on how the world is "a sudden place." She accuses John Henry of cheating because he refuses to play his spade. Frankie gets very agitated about his lack of respect for "The first beginning laws." Then she exclaims that she is "sick unto death." They had been playing cards every day after dinner. The cards are layered with all the dinners of that August along with the sweat from their hands. Berenice tells Frankie she's jealous. She admits that she was jealous when her foster brother married, but now she loves her sister-in-law Clorina.

Frankie ignores Berenice's words and begins to muse on the letters of their names. Janice and Jarvis have names that begin with J A, so Frankie decides to rename herself Jane or Jasmine. Berenice doesn't understand Frankie's line of thought. She mentions the news she heard that the French chased the Germans out of Paris. Frankie decides to name herself F. Jasmine Addams, despite Berenice's claim that it is against the law to change one's name. John Henry brings out a doll that Frankie has given him. Jarvis had brought it as Frankie's gift when he visited earlier in the week. Frankie is unhappy that he thought she was child enough to want a doll. John Henry loves the doll and names it Lily Belle because it's so beautiful. Frankie tells him to take it out of her sight. The clock ticks very slowly.

Frankie goes to the kitchen window to stare at her face. She thinks of her age, twelve and five-sixths years old. The children had begun to make fun of her height. She worries that she will continue to grow at the same rate until she's eighteen, ending up being over nine feet tall. She remembers the annual Cattanoochee fair which features a freak show. Frankie has seen all of them, from the Giant to the Half-Man Half-Woman. The freaks include one called "the Wild Nigger," who eats live rats which customers bring him. People say he's not from a "savage island" but from Selma. John Henry had fallen in love with the Pin Head girl whose head was the size of an orange. Frankie has always been bothered by the Freaks because she thinks they give her a secret look as

if she's one of them. Berenice says all the people at the fair give her the creeps. Frankie asks if she ever gives Berenice the creeps. Then she asks if Berenice thinks she will ever grow into a freak. Berenice exclaims "certainly not" and Frankie feels better. Frankie wonders if Berenice thinks she'll be pretty. Berenice tells her she might if she learns to behave properly. Frankie wants to become pretty before the wedding on Sunday. Berenice advises that she clean herself thoroughly.

Frankie feels a tightness inside herself and says she wishes she could die. Berenice tells her "die then!" and John Henry repeats "Die!" Frankie tells him to go home. She makes a mean face and rushes him out the door. Berenice scolds her on being "too mean to live." Frankie sits on the lower steps of the stairway looking into the kitchen which looks "silent and crazy and sad." She decides to sit by herself and think over everything.

Frankie is tired of being Frankie. She hates being herself because she has become a "big no-good who hung around the summer kitchen: dirty and greedy and mean and sad." Before April, Frankie had been like all other people. She had belonged to a club and was in the seventh grade of school. She was active and she wasn't afraid. She slept with her father, but not because she was scared of the dark. Then around April, things began to change. Something about the green trees and flowers of April made Frankie sad. She decided then that she should leave town. She had packed her suitcase, but didn't know where to go.

That year Frankie had thought about the world. She had been used to seeing it like the round school globe, "with the countries neat and different-colored." Now she thought of the world as "huge and cracked and loose and turning a thousand miles an hour." The geography book at school was out of date. Frankie reads the newspaper, but often doesn't understand what she reads because so many things are happening in so many foreign countries. It is the summer Patton is chasing the Germans across France and fighting is also happening in Russia and Spain. She can't see it all at once in her mind. Instead, she sees one Russian soldier, frozen to death with his gun. She sees a single Japanese soldier, "a Jap with slanted eyes on a jungle island gliding among green vines." She used to think it would take two months to end the war. Now she doesn't know. She wishes she were a boy so she could fight as a Marine. She wishes she could win gold medals for bravery. Then she realizes she can't do that; she tried to give blood to the Red Cross, imagining getting letters from wounded soldiers thanking her for her sacrifice. The Red Cross won't take her blood, though, because she's too young. She feels "left out of everything." Her solution is to leave town.

This was the first time things bothered Frankie enough to make her cry. Sometimes she gets up early in the morning and go outside into the yard looking at the sunrise sky. She asks questions, but the sky doesn't answer. When she sees into houses in the evenings when she walks along the sidewalks, she often feels like crying. She begins to be afraid. She wonders who she is and what she will do in the world. One night in April, she was going to bed and her father looked at her and asked what such an old girl was doing still sleeping with her father. He made her start sleeping in her own room. She began then to have a grudge against her father. She began to go around town. She would also call her best friend Evelyn Owen who owned a football suit and a Spanish shawl. They would dress up and go out. Even that began to lose its charm for Frankie. She walked around town alone feeling sad. She often tried to break the sad mood by doing sudden things, like going home and putting the coal shuttle on her head and walking around the kitchen. She did anything that suddenly occurred to her and what she does is always the wrong thing to do. She tells Berenice one day, "I just wish I could tear down this whole town." Berenice urges her to tear it down, or do anything as opposed to standing around with a gloomy face.

Frankie had begun to get herself into trouble. She broke the law repeatedly. She takes her father's pistol and shoots it in a vacant lot. She steals a knife from Sears. She commits "a secret and unknown sin" with Barney MacKean in the Mackean's garage. She felt a "shriveling sickness in her stomach" when she thought of this sin. She hates and wants to kill Barney. She plans the murder, imagining that she'll use a gun or a knife.

Her best friend Evelyn Owen moves away from town and now Frankie has no one to play with. She thinks

every day of "lighting out for" South America or Hollywood or New York city. She can't decide which place she should choose and how she'll get there alone. By the end of the summer, Frankie had settled into this horrible routine of doing nothing but feeling afraid. She had lost her fear of Barney, her father, and the Law. She began even to forget the sin she committed in the MacKean's garage. She stops paying attention to the summer noises and she stops standing in the yard at night to look at the summer stars. Each day is the same, except it is longer, and "nothing hurt her any more."

On that Sunday when her brother brought his fiancée home, Frankie realized everything had changed. She tells Berenice that it gives her a kind of pain to think of the couple. Berenice offers the advice that Frankie should just refrain from thinking about them. Frankie sits on the bottom of the staircase staring into the kitchen. She remembers that on the day her brother came, a curious silence had entered the house. The radio had been on all day every day that summer. When he came, he turned it off. She had come into the room and the first sight of her brother and Janice had "shocked her heart." She felt feelings "like the spring."

She asks Berenice how old she was when she married for the first time. Berenice had already changed into her Sunday clothes and sat in the kitchen waiting for Honey and T. T. Williams to come and get her. The three of them will eat supper at the New Metropolitan Tea Room and then "sashay around town." She tells Frankie she was thirteen years old and she married just because she wanted to. She says she hasn't grown an inch since then. Frankie is amazed to hear that marrying stops a woman's growth. Berenice affirms that it does.

Frankie remembers Berenice's stories of her four marriages. The first had been Ludie Freeman, a brickmason and Berenice's favorite. He died after nine years of marriage. The other three of Berenice's husbands were "all bad, each one worse than the one before." The stories of them make Frankie sad. The first of these was a liquor-drinker. The next one went crazy and Berenice finally left him. The last one gouged out Berenice's eye and stole her furniture.

Frankie paces the kitchen floor even though she has a splinter in her foot. Finally she gets a butcher knife out of the drawer and sits down to extricate it. Frankie's foot is scarred from going barefoot so many summers. Her feet are so tough she can cut off the calluses without hurting herself. Frankie looks up and insists that Berenice tell her one more time how it was when Jarvis came with Janice. Berenice says the two came late in the morning when Frankie and John Henry were playing in the back yard. Frankie had run upstairs and came down later wearing an organdy dress and lipstick an inch thick from one ear to the next. The family had sat around the living room and then Jarvis and Janice took the train back to Winter Hill that afternoon.

Frankie is disappointed that Jarvis hadn't spent the night, but understands why he and Janice want to be together so much because he will soon be leaving for the war. Frankie asks Berenice to describe what they looked like. Berenice does so and then calls Frankie foolish for making her describe people that she had already seen. Frankie closes her eyes to imagine them and feels as if they are already going away from her. She feels like "the kitchen Frankie was an old hull left there at the table." She works on the splinter and tells Berenice that she thinks of Janice and Jarvis more as a picture than anything else. She thinks they are two of the prettiest people she has ever seen. Berenice worries that Frankie is hurting herself with the knife, but Frankie insists that she feels nothing.

It is the dog days of autumn when a strange phenomenon occurs: if something changes, it can't change back until the dog days are over. Frankie's cat, Charles, had disappeared. Despite the fact that she called and called for it, she knew it wouldn't come back until the end of the dog days. "Things that are done are not undone and a mistake once made is not corrected." Every day Frankie says exactly the same things to Berenice and Berenice always makes the same replies. Their words had become "an ugly little tune they sang by heart." Frankie worries over her cat. She calls it a Persian even though it has short hair. Berenice tells Frankie the cat has gone to look for a friend and that Frankie won't see the cat again.

Frankie changes things on this particular afternoon. She gets up and tells Berenice she knows what she will do. She will notify the police about Charles, the cat. She calls the police and tells them she is missing a Persian cat with short hair who goes by Charles and also, sometimes, by Charlina. When she returns to the kitchen, Berenice is giggling about her silliness in thinking the police will take her seriously. Berenice teases her about the possibility that the police now know her name and house number and will come and get her. Frankie takes it seriously and says she doesn't care anyway. She decides she would be better off in jail anyway.

She thinks of Janice and Jarvis's progress on the train to Winter Hill. Frankie laughs suddenly about Jarvis's joke about the local election. He said he wouldn't vote for the scoundrel C. P. MacDonald even if he were running for dog catcher. She remembers that Janice had assured her that she had gotten in the major portion of her growth by the time she was thirteen, so Frankie needn't worry about her height. Frankie goes on about what Janice said until Berenice interrupts her and tells her she is lying. She scolds Frankie for her habit of exaggerating conversations. She admits "a little" that Berenice is right, then she wants to know if she makes a good impression on people. Berenice tells her she did nothing when Janice and Jarvis came over but watch them silently. Frankie finally extricates the splinter and feels satisfied that anyone but her would have felt pain in the operation.

Berenice wishes Honey and T. T. would hurry and come because Frankie is making her so nervous. Frankie bunches up her shoulders and then bangs her head down on the table. She says the couple was so pretty and then they went away and left her. Berenice sings a song "Frankie got a crush . . . on the Wedd-ing." Frankie picks up the knife and threatens Berenice with it. Berenice tells her to lay down the knife. When Frankie won't, Berenice calls her a devil. Frankie threatens to throw it. Berenice goads her to do it and Frankie throws it at the stairway door where it lodges. Berenice doesn't say anything, then she reminds Frankie what her father has said about knife-throwing in the house. Frankie threatens once again to run away. Berenice wants to know when she'll do it and where she'll go. Frankie says she's going to Winter Hill to the wedding and then never coming back. Berenice pushes Frankie's bangs back and asks her kindly if she is serious. Berenice tells her she wonders how Frankie plans to do it when she doesn't know where she'll go. Frankie looks around at the kitchen again feeling "the world" is "fast and loose and turning, faster and looser and bigger than ever it had been before." She thinks of the pictures of the war. She tells Berenice it feels like she's been skinned and wishes she had some chocolate ice cream.

Honey and T. T. knock on the door. Honey is Berenice's foster brother. T. T. Williams is a big, gray-haired man who is older than Berenice. He is Berenice's beau. Honey is a "sick-loose" man who hurt himself while working in the gravel pit and has since been unable to do heavy work. Before they leave, Berenice serves them a round of gin out of a hair-straightening bottle. Frankie "has the extra feeling like they were waiting for her to leave." She stands in the door watching them, not wanting to go away. Frankie finally says good-bye to them. Berenice calls after her to forget all the foolishness they were discussing. She tells Frankie to go to the Wests if her father doesn't come home soon. Frankie stands on the outside of the door listening to them. Honey asks Berenice what they had been talking about. Berenice says it was nothing but foolishness.

Frankie is alone in the house. At one time after her grandmother died, they had rented the downstairs room out to a Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe. One day Frankie had gone into their room and found them together on the bed. She had run out telling Berenice that Mrs. Marlowe was having a fit. Berenice ran in, saw them, and then came out quickly, telling Frankie the Marlowes were common people. She never told Frankie what kind of fit Mrs. Marlowe was having. When Frankie's father heard about it, he told the Marlowes to leave. Frankie has since been curious about what the adults were not telling her.

Frankie puts on one of her father's hats and stares at herself in the mirror. She feels like the conversation about the wedding had been wrong and that she had asked all the wrong questions. Berenice had not taken her seriously. She stands in front of the mirror until the dark shadows seem like ghosts. She goes out to the street and looks at the sky. She used to go out always at this time of evening because the kitchen would get too hot.

She would practice knife-throwing or write shows. This summer she had written "very cold shows," about snow-bound places. She would always go back into the house after she finished with her shows. Tonight, though, she didn't want to write shows or throw knives. She begins to feel afraid like she had been in the beginning of spring. She feels the need to think of something ugly, so she looks at her house. It's the ugliest house in town, "empty and dark." She goes to John Henry's house. He's on the front porch with the lighted window behind him. She wonders when her father will come home and says she doesn't want to go home and be alone. She remembers Jarvis's smart political remark about the politician C. P. MacDonald. John Henry doesn't respond at all.

The town is dark and quiet. She realizes Jarvis and Janice have been in Winter Hill for quite a while now. She thinks of herself being all alone in contrast to them being together a hundred miles away. She thinks to herself "They are the we of me." In the twelve years of her life before yesterday, she had been "an *I* person," a mere individual. All the other people she knew had a "*we* to claim." She doesn't want to claim the "*we*" of herself, John Henry and Berenice because she thinks that group is the "last *we* in the world she wanted."

John Henry interrupts her thoughts when he asks her why she's so bent over. She tells him she has a kind of pain. She asks him to come spend the night with her, but he says he can't, because he doesn't want to. She yells at him, calling him a fool and telling him she only asked him because he looked so "ugly and so lonesome." He tells her he's not a bit lonesome. She tells herself to turn around and go home, but she can't make herself go. She tells him she thinks something is wrong, that maybe a storm is coming.

While Frankie stands there, a horn begins to play somewhere a blues tune. "It was like the telling of that long season of trouble." The horn stops mid-song and Frankie is stunned. It never resumes, making Frankie feel desperate like she needs to do something wild. She hits her head with her fist, but that doesn't help relieve her tension. She tells John Henry her plans for leaving town. She says Berenice is a big fool for not believing her. John Henry finally asks her if she wants him to come home with her, eat supper, and then sleep outside in the teepee. She says she doesn't.

She has a sudden revelation that she knows where she's going. She will go to Winter Hill. She says she will go with the couple after the wedding wherever they go. She says she loves the two of them so much she will go anywhere with them. It feels like her heart has divided like two wings and the night is the most beautiful she's ever seen. Now, when the old question came to her who she was and where she was going, she doesn't feel hurt by it. She is a member of the wedding.

Notes

The first book of *The Member of the Wedding* sets the mood of the book. Frankie Addams is living the dog days of the summer of her life. She is stuck in the discomfort that exists between childhood and adulthood. She doesn't fit anywhere and when she realizes this, she begins to long for something unnamable. When her brother comes home with his fiancée to announce their wedding the next Sunday, Frankie finds an answer to her dilemma. A wedding is the most startling symbol of belonging, of two people joining their lives together to make one life, to belong to each other for life. Frankie falls in love with the wedding and wants to be a member of it as if it were a club in which she can fit. In this childlike impulse, clearly futile to everyone but Frankie, McCullers locates all of Frankie's tortured imagination and longing. In this section of the novel, McCullers seeps the reader in the world of adolescence, a world in which Frankie is curious but gets only hints at answers, a world in which Frankie longs to do and be, but can only long. A world in which no one takes Frankie seriously for any length of time because she alienates them as quickly as she attracts them.

Two times Frankie mentions "lighting out" for some place distant from her home town. The reader should note that at the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck Finn "lights out for the territories" never to be bothered again with what he calls civilization. With her girl's story, Carson McCullers is certainly commenting on Twain's boy's story. Frankie, too, wants to light out, but she immediately considers the problems of where

she will go, how she will get there, and where she will stay once she's there. Instead of getting to light out, Frankie has to stay put and live with the angst of adolescent powerlessness.

The novel takes place during the second World War. McCullers maintains her child's point of view as she includes this historical detail. Frankie thinks of the war in a handful of images she's gathered from the radio. At one point, Berenice mentions hearing on the radio that the French had chased the Germans from Paris. Frankie only responds by repeating the word "Paris" and then continuing with her monologue about changing her name to Jasmine so her name would match the first two letters of her brother and his fiancée's names. The war is something that Frankie experiences cosmically. It is an epic dislocation of her world. A world that once was neatly mapped on her school's globe in different colors is now loose and wild and changeable.

One of the events of Frankie's summer that throws her into her August funk is that in April, she commits "a queer sin" with Barney MacKean, which makes her hate him and want to kill him. McCullers represents this first sexual encounter as Frankie has experienced it. She has named it a huge and unfathomable sin and she has repressed it as much as possible. She has felt anger and rage about it, but these emotions by August have subsided and she has begun to forget about it. The reader should note that McCullers was breaking new ground in representing adolescent sexuality in non-condemnatory ways. The reader gets the impression that Frankie is being rather too hard on herself for a simple sexual exploration and that it is a shame she doesn't have anyone to discuss it with.

Frankie's twin insights in this chapter are first, that she doesn't belong to any club and second, that Janice and Jarvis are "the we of me." The rest of the novel is Frankie's attempt to achieve this dream. She changes her name to F. Jasmine Addams.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Frankie Addams - The protagonist of the novel is a girl suffering through the last summer of her twelfth year. She has been cut off from the friendship of other girls. Her best friend has left town and the other girls she used to play with have grown up one year beyond hers and won't let her be in their club. Her mother died when she was too young to remember her. Her mother figure is the housekeeper of her house.

She spends most of her time inside the kitchen with two others who with her make up a sort of constructed family. Berenice Sadie Brown acts as mother to the two children, attempting to teach them the values of life. She does what she can to provide love, comfort and discipline for Frankie, but Frankie is a handful. She acts out her frustrations with erratic behavior, deciding that doing something sudden like.....

Berenice Sadie Brown - Berenice Sadie Brown is one of the most interesting mother figures in literature. Like thousands of families in the south at the time the novel is set, the Mr. Addams has his African-American housekeeper raise their daughter. Berenice is responsible for running the house and for raising Frankie almost single-handedly all for six dollars a week, not even enough money to be able to

John Henry West - John Henry has a fairly small part to play in the novel. He is the embodiment of the sweet and innocent child. His fantasies for a new creation are fantasies of empowerment. He wants an arm that will reach miles distant to get what he wants or a tail like a kangaroo's that will enable him to.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

McCullers plots the novel according to place. The plot centers around the kitchen. It is a place of stasis during the first two books of the novel, a place of stuckness from which Frankie wants to escape, but from which she also gains all her knowledge of the world. The kitchen is the place from which Frankie ventures.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The Member of the Wedding is the first novel devoted exclusively to the discomforts of a girl's adolescence.

Carson McCullers maintains the girl's point of view throughout the novel, never leaving that point of view to take the adult perspective on the action and comment on Frankie's choices or experiences. With this technique, McCullers gives full voice to girls, a traditionally voiceless group. She structures the reader's perception of the actions of the plot from this point of view alone, forcing the reader to see the world from Frankie's uncomfortable point of view.

In choosing the age of twelve, the margins of childhood and teenage years, McCullers is able to focus on the uncomfortable state of "becoming." Frankie Addams doesn't yet know what she will become. When she, Berenice, and John Henry tell stories about what they would do if they were the creator of the world, Frankie's world is a mixed world. She likes Berenice's idea that the world be peaceful and that.....

STUDY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

- 1) Analyze McCullers' use of the child's point of view to narrate the novel. What does this point of view enable and what does it limit McCullers from doing in telling the story of Frankie Addams' last childhood summer?
- 2) Examine the issue of race in the novel. How does McCullers view the racial divide in the town and the racist institutions of the town such as the legal, civil, and employment institutions?.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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