

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHING

Pre-teaching instruction: As students read, they should underline or highlight two things in the text. First, the instances of racially charged or inflammatory language, and second, references to “hot” or “heat.”

1. The opening two lines of the story accomplish two literary purposes: first, they characterize the narrator, and secondly, they set the tone of the story. Explain how these brief lines achieve both.
2. Why is the narrator nameless? Give him a name and explain your choice with references to the text. What is the significance of Roland Summers’s name?
3. As we discussed before we read, this story contains inflammatory language. How many instances did you underline? Why is this language used in the story?
4. Throughout the story, the criticisms leveled at Roland Summers by the narrator reveal a deeper emotion. Look at passages like:
 - “And his street’s paved.”
 - “There on his paved driveway, yes sir.”
 - “It was mighty green where I skint over the yard getting back. That nigger wife of his, she wanted nice grass! I bet my wife would hate to pay her water bill.”What do all of these statements tell us about what Roland Summers has and the narrator does not? What emotion does this create within the narrator?
5. When you read, you highlighted the story for references to “hot” or “heat.” What effect does Welty’s use of this motif create in the story? What is the literary term for this technique?
6. The story’s narrator mentions a mockingbird. When does he do so? Where is the bird? When does it stop singing? What does the narrator mean by saying, “I was like him. I was on top of the world myself. For once.” How else is the narrator like the mockingbird? How do his references to the mockingbird contribute to the characterization of the narrator?
7. What is the name of this town? What is the historical allusion? What does this suggest about the political and social climate in the town? In the narrator’s mind, how is this name appropriate to his situation? The story also alludes to important events in the history of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. Do Summers’s television appearance and the demonstration the narrator describes downtown refer to actual events? If so, what were they?
8. What is the relationship between the narrator and his wife? How does her criticism add to his characterization?
9. By the end of the story, how does the narrator feel? What is his plan? Why do you think Welty chose this conclusion?
10. What is the significance of the title of the story? Other titles that Welty considered were “It Ain’t Even July Yet”; “Voice from an Unknown Interior”; “From the Unknown” and “A Voice from the Jackson Interior.” Was the one she selected the best choice? Can you answer the question in the title? Where is this “voice” coming from?