

# Bastard Out of Carolina



by Dorothy Allison

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## eNotes: Table of Contents

1. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Introduction](#)
2. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Dorothy Allison Biography](#)
3. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Summary](#)
4. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Summary and Analysis](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 1-6: Summary and Analysis](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 7-11: Summary and Analysis](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 12-16: Summary and Analysis](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 17-22: Summary and Analysis](#)
5. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Quizzes](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 1-6: Questions and Answers](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 7-11: Questions and Answers](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 12-16: Questions and Answers](#)
  - ◆ [Chapters 17-22: Questions and Answers](#)
6. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Themes](#)
7. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Style](#)
8. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Historical Context](#)
9. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Critical Overview](#)
10. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Character Analysis](#)
11. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Essays and Criticism](#)
  - ◆ [Overview of Bastard Out of Carolina](#)
  - ◆ [Sorrow's Child](#)
  - ◆ [Review of Bastard Out of Carolina](#)
12. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Suggested Essay Topics](#)

13. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Sample Essay Outlines](#)
14. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Compare and Contrast](#)
15. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Topics for Further Study](#)
16. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Media Adaptations](#)
17. [Bastard Out of Carolina: What Do I Read Next?](#)
18. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Bibliography and Further Reading](#)
19. [Bastard Out of Carolina: Pictures](#)
20. [Copyright](#)

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Introduction**

In her discussion of Dorothy Allison's literary career in *Feminist Writers*, Deborah T. Meem writes, "For Allison, writing is a dramatic, life-affirming act in a world which consistently threatens death. A storyteller since childhood, Allison chronicles her discovery how ... writing them [her most terrible stories] down gives her power of the experiences." Dorothy Allison has never been shy about the autobiographical background of her powerful first novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Allison was born to a poor, "white trash" Southern family. Her stepfather sexually abused her for six years, starting when she was only five years old, and her mother, whom Allison deeply loved, was unable or unwilling to deal with this issue. *Bastard Out of Carolina* is not Allison's first important piece of writing, but for many readers, it remains her truest.

Allison recounts the story of Ruth Anne "Bone" Boatwright, the illegitimate daughter of a fifteen-year-old unmarried, uneducated waitress. Bone's mother, a child herself, desperately seeks love and familial stability, which she has never experienced in her own large, unorthodox brood of kin. Anney's need for love is so strong that she turns a blind eye to the abuse—physical, emotional, and sexual—that her second husband, Daddy Glen, heaps upon her young daughter. Before even reaching the age of thirteen, Bone has experienced a life's supply of disappointment, bitterness, self-hatred, and even hatred for her mother. If *Bastard Out of Carolina* sharply affects many readers because of the swell of truth behind the characters and their actions, that is partially Allison's intention. For Allison once explained what storytelling meant to her in an interview she gave to Alexis Jetter of the *New York Times Magazine*: "I believe that story-telling can be a strategy to help you make sense of your life. It's what I've done."

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Dorothy Allison Biography**

Dorothy Allison was born on April 11, 1949, in Greenville, South Carolina, to a poor, unmarried fifteen-year-old girl. Her mother soon married, and when Allison was five, her stepfather began sexually abusing her. This situation lasted until Allison was eleven, at which time she finally brought herself to tell a relative. Allison's mother learned of the situation and put a stop to it, but the family still stayed together.

### *Dorothy Allison*

At the age of eighteen, Allison left home to attend college in Florida. At school she learned about and came to embrace feminism, finding that it gave her a completely different vision of the world. She lived in a lesbian-feminist commune for a period of time. She later attended graduate school in New York.

Allison began writing seriously in the early 1980s. She published poetry and short stories, many of which dealt with sexuality and sometimes shocking issues of abuse. Her 1983 poetry collection, *The Women Who Hate Me*, angered mainstream feminists in its praise of sexual promiscuity and sado-masochism. Despite the controversy her work generated, she established a name for herself among writers of gay fiction. Her success was solidified when her 1989 short story collection, *Trash*, won the Lambda literary awards for best small press book and best lesbian book.

Allison also began work on *Bastard Out of Carolina*, which has a strong and public autobiographical element. The novel, which was published in 1992, was an immediate success. It was a National Book Award finalist, received much positive criticism, and became a national bestseller. It was also made into a movie by Angelica Houston.

Allison followed up *Bastard Out of Carolina* with a collection of essays entitled *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class and Literature* (1994); *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1995), a memoir of her family that included photographs; and a second novel, [Cavedweller](#) (1998). Allison currently lives with her partner and their adopted son in California.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Summary**

At fifteen years old, Anney Boatwright gives birth to her first baby out of wedlock. The child comes to be called Bone. Anney stubbornly tries to legitimize her child. She tries several years in a row to get a birth certificate that is not marked with the word "illegitimate." When Anney is seventeen, she marries a man who wants to be a good father to her child. Her first husband dies shortly thereafter, however, leaving her with yet another daughter, Reese, to care for. Anney comes from a large family, most of whom live in Greenville, South Carolina, and the family relies on each other for money, help, and comfort.

Through her brother Earle, Anney meets Glen Waddell. Glen promises to love and take care of her girls, which wins him Anney's love. Two years later, they marry. Glen, however, is a failure. He comes from a middle-class family but cannot hold a job. He is filled with rage against his own family, who make their dislike of him apparent, and he takes out his frustrations and anger on Bone. He first sexually abuses her less than a year after the marriage, masturbating against her while his wife gives birth to their stillborn baby.

As Glen finds it increasingly impossible to hold a job, the family moves constantly, and Bone and Reese are always hungry. One night Anney prostitutes herself to get money to buy her children food. When Bone is ten, Daddy Glen starts viciously and methodically beating her. He puts aside several belts, which he keeps well-oiled, for this purpose. The family witnesses the first of his savage beatings. Anney gets angry at Glen but forgives him. Bone quickly realizes that she must be careful around Glen to not invoke his rage. At times, however, she cannot keep herself from "sassing back." In reality, there is nothing Bone can do to prevent the beatings. Anney insists on deluding herself that Bone is simply "prone to accident," and gets furious when an intern at the hospital raises the specter of child abuse. She begs Bone to "be more careful" around Glen.

Around this time or perhaps even earlier, Glen's sexual abuse of Bone becomes a more regular practice. Bone tells no one what he is doing to her because she is ashamed and afraid of making him angry. She also has begun to masturbate, and her sexual fantasies center on violent scenarios. She imagines that a crowd of people watch as Glen beats her, but that she is defiant and unyielding. She feels great shame over these fantasies but does not stop them.

After a bad beating, Anney takes her children to Alma's, but two weeks later, they return home. Glen promises never to hurt Bone again, but she knows that he won't really change. Bone and Reese go over to Alma's after school, and Anney comes there to pick them up on her way home from work. Bone tells violent stories to her cousins, filled with rapes and murders. The family notices that she has changed, that her face is "scary," and that she is "almost mean-hearted." Bone starts going to the diner with Anney. She earns money washing dishes and spends most of it buying used books.

That summer, Bone goes to stay with and help out Aunt Ruth and Uncle Travis. Aunt Ruth has a debilitating illness, and she has grown weaker. Bone realizes that Ruth is dying. Bone tells Ruth that Daddy Glen hates her, and Ruth agrees, noting that Glen is jealous of her and wants Anney all to himself. She asks Bone if Glen has ever sexually abused her, but Bone lies and says no. She does admit that he scares her, however. While Bone is at Ruth's, Glen gets a new job, and according to Anney, is "good as gold with Reese," but he never mentions Bone; it's as if she no longer exists. Ruth tells Anney that Bone will never be safe around Glen, but Anney insists that he does love her. Bone overhears this conversation and decides to spend the rest of the summer with Ruth.

Bone becomes interested in gospel music and religion. She starts reading the Bible, going to Christian youth groups, and trying to save her family, particularly her uncles. She becomes friends with Shannon Pearl, an albino who starts attending her school. Bone recognizes Shannon from the revivals that Shannon also attends with her family—her father books singers for the circuit, and her mother sews costumes for the singers. Bone goes with the Pearls to gospel revivals and when Mr. Pearl is searching for new talent in the small country churches. One day, while Bone and Shannon are walking around, Bone hears a beautiful voice singing gospel music, but it comes from a "colored" church. Bone and Shannon get into a fight when Shannon calls them "niggers." Abruptly, Bone loses her religious bent along with her friendship with Shannon. She starts to spend a lot of time at Aunt Raylene's, helping to pick vegetables and fish garbage out of the river for Raylene to clean up and sell. When Shannon invites Bone to a barbecue right before Thanksgiving, however, Bone goes. She sees Shannon burn to death when a can of lighter fluid explodes in her hand.

Bone comes up with a plan to break into the Woolworth store. Several years ago, the manager had forbidden her to come into the store after she had confessed to stealing Tootsie Rolls. Now, she and her cousin Grey sneak into the store via an air duct. While Grey runs around the store, gathering goods to steal, Bone waits for him, for suddenly everything the store offers seems cheap and useless. As the two children run up the main street, Bone yells that the Woolworth is open, knowing it will be looted.

The next morning when Bone wakes up, Anney tells her that Ruth has died. The day before the funeral, when Glen picks on her, Bone snaps and yells back at him. He takes her into the bathroom and beats her bloody, but

for the first time, Bone does not scream. While Anney is washing her wounds, she asks why Bone started yelling at Glen. Bone spends that night with Aunt Raylene at Ruth's house, helping her clean up and cook some food. The family returns to Ruth's house afterwards. Bone's cousin gives her some liquor, and she gets drunk. She goes to the bathroom, and Raylene finds her in there. While helping her get up, Raylene sees that Bone's underpants are bloodstained. She pulls Bone's skirt up and sees the marks of Glen's beating. Raylene calls the uncles, who take one look at their niece and go find Glen to beat him up. Anney comes to the bathroom, and Bone apologizes, claiming it was all her fault because she made Glen mad. Later, one of the aunts takes Glen to the hospital. Meanwhile, Anney moves herself and the girls to an apartment. Everyone is miserable; Anney hardly speaks and won't even let the aunts in for a visit. Upset because Anney seems completely unfeeling, Bone runs away to Raylene's and stays there for a few days but finally returns home.

A few days after Bone returns home, Alma's youngest daughter dies. Soon afterwards, Alma goes crazy. When Anney and Bone arrive at her house, they see that Alma has destroyed and tossed most of her belongings out on the lawn. Alma has cuts on her forearms and on her face from broken glass. She tells Anney that she is waiting for Wade to come back so she can cut his throat with the razor she has in her pocket. Alma explains that she wanted another baby, but Wade refused to sleep with her because she was "old and ugly and fat."

Bone and Anney stay at Ruth's. That night, Bone tells Anney that she is waiting for her to go back to Daddy Glen. Anney tells Bone that she won't do that if Bone will hate her and that she won't go back until she knows Bone will be safe. Bone, however, says she will never live with Glen, no matter when her mother goes back. She will stay with one of the aunts instead. Bone stays at Alma's house. She hears from Reese that Anney is talking with Glen again. Then one afternoon he comes over to the house. Alma is out in the garden, and Glen finds Bone alone in the kitchen. He says that Bone must tell Anney that she wants them all to live together again. Bone refuses, saying Anney can return to him if she wants, and she tells Glen to leave. Glen shakes her with rage, lifting her off the floor. Glen tells Bone that everything is her fault: that she makes him crazy and makes him act the way he does, that she makes Anney ashamed of loving him, that Anney is only leaving Glen because of her. He looks at Bone with eyes filled with hate. He tells Bone that Anney has said she will come back, that she needs a little more time, but if she wasn't going to come back, he would kill Bone. Glen kisses Bone, and she tries to stab him with a butter knife. Glen throws her on the floor and kicks her. Then he jerks her arm and drops her back down, dislocating her shoulder. He curses at her, and Bone tells him that she hates him and won't let Anney go back to him. He tears her clothes off, all the while saying that he should have done this a long time ago, that Bone always wanted it. He rapes her. Bone wishes only to kill him and die herself.

When Glen is finished, both he and Bone see Anney coming through the doorway. Anney starts to throw things at Glen, who swears that it isn't what it looks like. Bone wonders if Anney will think that she wanted him to do it. Anney helps Bone get up and takes her out to the car. All the while, Glen is begging Anney not to leave and saying that he doesn't know what happened and that he had only meant to talk to Bone. Anney puts Bone in the car. She hits Glen several times, and he drops to his knees in front of her telling her to kill him because he can't live without her. He begins to hit his head against the metal of the car door. Anney starts to cry and places her hands against his forehead to protect him. She holds his head against her belly. Watching them, Bone, for the first time, hates her mother.

When Bone comes back to consciousness, she is at the hospital with Anney, but her mother disappears. The sheriff comes to get her story. Suddenly the door swings open. Bone hopes it is Anney, but it is Raylene. She kicks the sheriff out and spends the night in the hospital with Bone. The next day they return to Raylene's house. Raylene tries to explain that it is impossible for a woman to choose between her child and her lover; she made the woman she loved choose, and the woman chose the child, which just about killed them both. She tells Bone that no one knows where Anney has gone but that she loves her and that she will never forgive herself for what she let happen.

When Anney comes several days later, Bone is sitting alone on the porch. She tells Bone that she never thought Glen could do anything like that but that she loves Bone. Bone starts to cry, and Anney holds her. Anney draws away from the embrace, dropping an envelope in her lap. Then she leaves. Bone opens the envelope to find a copy of her birth certificate without the word "illegitimate" stamped on it. Bone thinks that at the age of only twelve, she has already developed into the person she is going to be: a Boatwright woman.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Summary and Analysis**

### **Chapters 1-6: Summary and Analysis**

#### **New Characters**

“Bone” Ruth Anne Boatwright: The book’s narrator and the illegitimate child of a fifteen-year-old mother.

Mama (Anney) Boatwright: Ruth Anne's mother who has two children very early on.

Granny: Ruth Anne's grandmother whose eight children are Bone's aunts and uncles.

Aunt Alma: Mama’s older sister who has three children—Little Earle, Grey, and Garvey—and often takes care of Bone.

Uncle Earle (“Black Earle”): The charmer of the family who, despite being a divorced womanizer with a reputation for being dangerous, has a good heart and helps his sisters.

Uncle Beau: Black Earle’s brother with many of the same characteristics as Black Earle but is not as dominant.

Uncle Nevil: Black Earle’s other brother, also similar in personality.

Reese: Ruth Anne’s half-sister by the same mother but fathered by Lyle Parsons.

Lyle Parsons: Mama’s first husband, and Ruth Anne’s first stepfather, who was killed in a car accident and never saw his daughter, Reese.

Glen Waddell (Daddy Glen): A friend of Black Earle’s who is from a good family and flirts with Anney (Mama) at the diner where she works, courts her, and eventually marries into the Boatwright family.

Grandma Parsons: Reese’s paternal grandmother who does not have much to do with the family but offers Anney money that Lyle had been due from the army.

Tadpole: Aunt Alma and Wade’s baby, a sickly child.

Wade: Aunt Alma’s husband, although also a womanizer.

#### **Summary**

**Chapter 1:** *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison’s intimate portrayal of a poor “white trash” family in South Carolina in the late 1950s, begins with the narrator, “Bone” Ruth Anne, relating the harrowing tale of her birth. Her pregnant mother and aunts were riding in Uncle Travis’s truck when, most likely drunk, Uncle Earle caused an accident. Bone’s mother, Anney, flew through the windshield. Miraculously, fifteen-year-old Anney was relatively unhurt. However, the child, Ruth Anne, was born while her mother was still unconscious.

At the hospital, the aunts could not name the father, who had already deserted Anney. Ruth Anne was certified a “bastard” by the state. Each year thereafter, the mother petitioned the state to change the status of Ruth Anne, but to no avail.

One year later, Mama, then seventeen, married Lyle Parsons, who is a loving husband. However, shortly after impregnating Mama, he is killed in a freak car accident. Mama, who is not yet twenty, is left to raise two children: Ruth Anne and Reese. She takes a job at a mill in order to make ends meet, but she can only stand it for a year. Then she begins working at a diner.

While working in a diner, Mama is introduced to a friend of her brother, Glen Waddell. The Waddells own a dairy in Greenville, and the brothers are not working class like the Boatwright men. One is running for district attorney. Glen is in awe of Earle Boatwright and his “bad” reputation, and part of his attraction to Mama is to shock his own family with his acquaintances. He flirts with Anney often.

The chapter ends with the burning down of the courthouse and hall of records. Although not stated outright, the implication is that Anney is happy that the “proof” that Bone is a bastard has been destroyed in the blaze.

**Chapter 2:** It is the summer of 1955, and Bone is a very young girl in Greenville, South Carolina. She spends a good deal of time with Granny at Alma’s house, where Granny is watching both Alma and Anney’s children. During this idyllic time, Bone plays with many of the Boatwright children.

Bone also listens to Granny talk about life and being a Boatwright. Granny talks about ugliness—Little Earle, Alma’s youngest child, is teased for his ugliness. Aunt Alma tells Bone about her father, who made a brief appearance eight days after Bone was born. He left without even talking to Mama and, later, married another woman. This is virtually the only mention of Bone’s birth father in the novel.

**Chapter 3:** Glen Waddell gradually ingratiates himself into the Boatwright family by visiting Anney constantly and smoking cigarettes with her on her porch. He also comes by the diner to flirt while Anney works.

Anney and Glen date for two years because she needs time to get over Lyle Parsons’ death. In a rather awkward manner, Glen proposes and Anney accepts because she has begun to love him. Granny does not like Glen. Granny says, “That boy’s got something wrong with him.” Bone’s descriptions of Glen, though at this point largely descriptive and neutral, do mention his violent temper, his strength, and his big hands.

Gradually, Glen’s ingratiating ways win the family over. The chapter ends with Aunt Alma taking a photo of Glen with his new family.

**Chapter 4:** Although the Boatwrights are poor and struggling, the descriptions up until this chapter have been largely happy. The drinking and escapades of the uncles are described in passing without value judgments. The tone is positive because Bone’s memories are positive.

Chapter four marks the turning point because the narrator—still only a young girl—must cope with sexual abuse. Her perceptions become tainted by this horrible reality. Although Bone recounts the events in a matter-of-fact manner, the positive tone of the novel is gradually replaced by the recognition of everyday, damaging situations.

Although family members still have doubts about Glen’s character, Anney and Glen marry in the spring. This occurs amidst terrible thunderstorms, a bad portent. The economic and class differences between the families are revealed when Glen’s brother turns down best man honors. The Waddells do not think much of the Boatwrights, and the Boatwrights are very suspicious of Glen.

Bone reveals that Mama was pregnant before the wedding: “I heard Alma tease Mama the day before the wedding that she better hurry up and get married before she started showing.” Glen is obsessed with having a boy. He talks about it constantly and won’t face the reality that the child could be a girl.

While Anney is in labor, Bone and Reese are in the hospital parking lot in the Pontiac. Between bouts of pacing the halls, Glen returns to the car now and again. At one point in the evening, Glen pulls Bone in the front seat with him while Reese sleeps in the back. He puts Bone on his lap and masturbates by pushing himself against her. This traumatizes Bone.

Bone gradually falls asleep and wakes up in the early morning. She is alone in the car with Reese. Glen storms back to the car in a violent rage. The newborn baby boy is dead, and Anney cannot have any more children.

The Boatwright women band together to help Anney recover. Stillborns are common among the Boatwrights, and the women know just how to behave. Glen’s mood shifts from him being despondent to becoming enraged. He is financially pressed and very bitter. He moves his family away from the rest of the Boatwrights.

**Chapter 5:** Daddy Glen tries to distance his family—Anney, Bone and Reese—from the other Boatwrights. He does not like Granny and prefers to keep “his” children away from her. He describes Granny’s stories as “lies.” Nevertheless, Bone still spends time with the rest of the family and hears stories of how the Boatwright family may have black or Cherokee blood.

Bone relates that Grandma Parsons, Reese’s grandma, gives the family some money that was due from Lyle’s army days. Glen treats her badly and is suspicious. The entire transaction is conducted under tense circumstances because Daddy Glen butts in with needless suspicion. Like the estrangement between Daddy Glen’s family and the Boatwrights, he also causes a rift between his family and the Parson family after this incident. Glen’s behavior causes other people to avoid Anney, Reese, and Bone. There is always the threat of a confrontation if Glen is near.

Bone continues to describe Daddy Glen in a manner that hints at violence and repressed sexuality. Bone says that “it wasn’t Daddy Glen’s sex that made me nervous. It was those hands, the restless way the fingers would flex and curl while he watched me lean close to Mama.”

Soon Glen is laid off, an event that occurs more and more frequently as the novel progresses. The family is forced to relocate. They are never at one place very long. They are often not able to make rent; soon Anney does not bother unpacking after a move, sensing that they will move again very soon.

Bone is only eight years old. She must deal with the increasingly rootless nature of the family because of Glen’s inability to hold a job or maintain relationships. Further, the threat of displaced aggression directed at Bone becomes more and more inevitable. Glen’s hands become symbols of fear and violence that pervade Bone’s thoughts: “My dreams were full of long fingers,” she narrates, “hands that reached around doorframes and crept over the edge of the mattress, fear in me like a river, like the ice-dark blue of his eyes.”

**Chapter 6:** Bone is now nine years old. Things are pretty much the same, but only worse. The family continues to relocate from insufficient dwelling to insufficient dwelling. Hunger becomes a part of the equation, as the family no longer has enough to eat. Anney and Glen argue. Anney ends up dressing in a provocative manner—like a whore—and drives off. Reese and Bone hitchhike to Aunt Alma’s. Later, Anney appears with lots of food; although Bone never says so outright, it is clear that her mother has prostituted herself to feed the family.

As the financial difficulties continue, creditors begin appearing regularly. Anney does her best to shield her children. Nevertheless, Bone realizes the truth of her family’s low social status: “We knew what the



neighbors called us, what Mama wanted to protect us from," she says. "We knew who we were."

Around this time, Aunt Alma leaves her husband, Wade, because of his womanizing, something she's done quite often. She moves the family, including Tadpole, the new baby who is in poor health, into an apartment that also houses a black family. In the 1950s setting of the novel, this indicates a dramatic drop in social status for a white family. Blacks were considered of extremely low social status, and by living with them, the Boatwrights are barely better than the blacks. Eventually Alma goes back to Wade.

### **Analysis**

Ruth Anne's story is told entirely in the first person, from a distance of time and emotional maturity. The reader learns this almost immediately when Bone writes that "the first time I ever saw Uncle Travis sober was when I was seventeen and they had just removed half his stomach along with his liver." Despite the fact that the narrator is older and more mature, Allison writes so that it seems the events taking place are seen through the eyes of a very young child. Bone's developing attitudes towards herself and her family while coping with a criminally abusive situation become the major themes in the novel. The psychological development is gradual, and it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Bone is only six years old by chapter six (and she is just under thirteen when the novel concludes). Furthermore, Bone's mother is little more than a teenager herself.

Dorothy Allison became known as one of the few writers of her generation to give a voice to the socio-economic group in American society that has been negatively dismissed as "white trash"—the poor, working-class whites who were just slightly better off than the blacks (the term African American was not yet then in use). The novel contains poignant moments that allow the descriptions of the Boatwrights to transcend mere stereotype; the women are more complex than just chain-smoking baby machines. The men—particularly Uncle Earle—although largely described as uncouth, beer guzzling louts, also have a sense of complexity that goes beyond the "white trash" stereotype. Allison's tale and her descriptions are compassionate. The description of Bone's hair being brushed by her mother is quite touching and conveys a trusting bond that is soon to be tragically shattered. Allison describes the family as it is. Love, bonding, and betrayal play a part in this family's life, just like any other, and social status (or lack thereof) does not hinder these themes from developing with all the complexity with which they occur in middle- or upper-class families.

As indicated by the title, an examination of illegitimacy runs throughout this novel. Bone is a bastard because her mother was unwed at the time of her birth. This classification causes Anney a lot of shame because it implies that she and her child are outside of the system ("illegitimate" means outside legal authority). Not only is this stigma literally true in the case of Bone's birth, it also applies to the social class of the Boatwrights as a whole; they are outsiders who are looked down on by more "legitimate" families like the Waddells, who are landowners and have sons who are not common laborers.

Bone's gradual realization of her own low status and her reaction against it is a major theme that is developed throughout the novel. Very early on, Bone sees that there is a difference in the way men and women age: "They [the uncles] looked young, even Nevil, who'd had his teeth knocked out, while the aunts ... seemed old, worn-down, and slow, born to mother, nurse, and clean up after the men." This difference also extends to acceptable behavior; Bone writes, for instance, that "men could do anything, and everything they did, no matter how violent or mistaken, was viewed with humor and understanding." These realizations lead Bone to become envious of men and boys. Early on, she senses powerlessness in being a woman. However, she is a bit different from other women in that she is tough in a "man-like" way. As her cousin remarks, this is because Bone's "got a man-type part of [her]. Rock-hard and nasty and immune to harm." Bone's realization of her second-class status as a female will be exacerbated by her perceived second-class status as "trash."

Although Bone's earliest descriptions of Glen are rather neutral, there are ominous hints as to his true nature. Bone mentions his bad temper and fixates on his hands when describing him throughout the novel, and with

good reason. Glen will soon look for all sorts of excuses to lose his temper and beat Bone with those hands. Psychologically, Glen is not confident or strong as an individual. He is the black sheep of his own family and suffers from an inferiority complex. There is something strange about him, which causes many of the Boatwrights to regard him with suspicion. With this in mind, the sexual abuse that occurs in the hospital parking lot confirms Glen's base character. If such a harrowing incident could occur, especially at such a critical time—with his wife in labor—what will happen after the baby is stillborn?

The sexual abuse scene is quite powerful, more so because it is described through the eyes of the child being abused. There is no adult value judgment or voice to intercede and clearly define what is occurring as the criminal act that it clearly is. Rather, there are just the confused emotions of a child. As the novel progresses, the episode is complicated by the child's inability to correctly understand what occurred and feel free of blame. From this point on, the narrative tone shifts out of idyllic childhood recollection. The narrator is now a victim trying to find a way to cope. Her childhood development is marred by her relationship with her father. Anney's inability to comprehend what is occurring to her daughter becomes a major theme later on.

The sexual abuse of Bone also marks the end of any possible good fortune for her family. The child is stillborn, an event that further unhinges her stepfather and leads to the family's isolation. Unable to cope with the realization that he won't have children with Anney, Glen becomes a burden, unable to hold a job. The resulting poverty, which forces Anney to prostitute herself, further reinforces that the Boatwrights are different from others.

## Chapters 7-11: Summary and Analysis

### New Characters

Aunt Ruth: Anney's oldest sister who Bone is sent to help out and live with because Aunt Ruth has cancer.

Tommy Lee: Aunt Ruth's son, a thief who is not present but is mentioned to Bone as a bad example.

Deedee: Ruth's oldest daughter, a complainer who comes home to take care of Ruth when Bone has to go back to school but does not seem to love her mother.

Shannon Pearl: An exceptionally ugly schoolmate and friend of Bone's whose parents book gospel and country music singers and run a Christian bookstore.

### Summary

**Chapter 7:** Anney tries to scare Bone with stories of Tommy Lee, Aunt Ruth's oldest son, a petty thief who is constantly in trouble. However, Bone becomes a petty thief herself and steals candy from the Greenville Woolworth's. Anney discovers the theft and accompanies Bone back to the Woolworth's, forcing her to return all the articles. During the confrontation in Woolworth's, rage develops in Bone. Her fury is directed at the store's manager and those who treat her and her family with condescension because they are working class. Bone is barred from Woolworth's as punishment for her offense.

Glen is increasingly in trouble for his bad temper and fistfights. He gets fired often. The class difference between the Waddells (the "haves") and the Boatwrights (the "have nots") is further illustrated at a double birthday celebration at the Waddells. Anney's family is clearly out of place and made to feel inferior. For instance, two of the Waddells refer to Boatwright's transportation as "nigger trash."

**Chapter 8:** At ten years old, Bone has more responsibility around the home than ever. With Bone's increase in age and responsibility comes an increase in blame for one offense or another directed at her by Daddy Glen. He starts beating her, and this physical abuse becomes a regular occurrence. During the confrontation after the

first beating, Glen lies and apologizes to Anney. Anney forgives Glen and they end up having sex. A regular pattern develops: Anney turns a blind eye to the abuse and then forgives Glen for his transgression.

Although Bone tries to avoid Glen, his hours are too irregular and the home too secluded for successful evasion. Glen often finds Bone alone. He derives sexual gratification from the beatings he doles out, and he molests her as well. "And he did love me. He told me so over and over again, holding my body tight to his, his hands shaking and moving restlessly, endlessly, over my belly, ass, and thighs," Bone says.

The regular beatings cause Bone to feel guilty and helpless: "I knew that it was nothing I had done that made him beat me," she says, "It was just me, the fact of my life, who I was in his eyes and mine. I was evil." Bone begins having masochistic and erotic fantasies.

Eventually, the beatings become so severe that Bone must be taken to the hospital. The doctor immediately suspects abuse. Neither Anney nor Bone admits this. The doctor is an outsider, and Bone, possibly as a result of fear or love of her mother, will not confide in him. However, his accusations serve to wake Anney up a bit. Anney has a confrontation with Glen in the hospital parking lot, takes the children, and leaves him.

**Chapter 9:** The separation from Daddy Glen is very short-lived. Anney moves back to him with the children two weeks later. The pattern of abuse continues. It is only a matter of time before Glen begins beating Bone again.

Bone becomes a storyteller and begins relating very morbid tales to Reese and her cousins. The abuse is having a psychological effect. Anney tries to keep Bone away from Daddy Glen and takes Bone to work with her. Bone also hides in the woods, reading books, when school lets out.

During the summer, Anney sends Bone to Aunt Ruth's. Ruth has cancer and can use Bone's help around the house. During this time, Bone bonds with her dying aunt. Ruth tells her stories—along with Black Earle, who visits often—from the family history. Ruth also tries to understand the severity of Bone's situation with Daddy Glen. Ruth has her suspicions. "Bone, has Daddy Glen ever ... well ... touched you?" Ruth asks Bone. Although Bone trusts her aunt, she doesn't tell the truth. However, Ruth figures it out from Bone's body language. Anney continues to deny that the abuse will continue, although she is taking steps to minimize it. Glen will not change, despite now being employed at his father's dairy.

A gospel revival tent goes up close to Ruth's house. Bone, amidst all sorts of thoughts on beauty and on her own perceived ugliness, becomes very attracted to the music that emanates from the tent.

**Chapter 10:** Bone starts listening to the "Sunrise Gospel Hour" on the radio. She has a deep attraction to gospel and country music and wants to sing, although she doesn't have a very good voice.

When Bone has to go back to Mama's in order to return to school, Deedee, Aunt Ruth's callous and complaining daughter, comes to take care of Ruth. She is mean and bitter and complains about her mother incessantly. Bone cannot understand Deedee's hatred and tries to comfort herself with gospel music.

Bone wants more than anything else to sing, but she has a poor voice. Back at home, Bone must be very careful around Daddy Glen. More and more she escapes into a personal world of gospel music. The family—including Granny and Alma—is tolerant of Bone's gospel, Christian phase. Bone even tries to convert her family, particularly Earle, but she stands no chance. "Sometimes in his arguments," Bone says, "Uncle Earle would get Teresa, the Catholic Church, and the county marshals a little confused. Given enough whiskey, he'd start talking about the way they had all united to blight his life."

Bone becomes more and more religious. Eventually, Anney takes her to a church for baptism. Bone catches a cold from the submersion and recovers while reading the Book of Revelation. The damage from her childhood now manifests itself in religion. "I liked Revelations, loved the Whore of Babylon and promised rivers of blood and fire," she says, "It struck me like gospel music, it promised vindication."

**Chapter 11:** Bone befriends the exceptionally ugly Shannon Pearl when other children are making fun of her on the school bus. As one churchgoer later comments, "The Lord didn't intend me to get nauseous in the middle of Sunday services. That child is a shock to the digestion." Only Shannon's mother and Bone seem to be able to stand this child. Shannon isn't nice and often tells morbid stories. She is vindictive and hates those who hate her.

Through Shannon's parents who book and seek out local talent, Bone gets to meet various country and western and gospel singers. Bone also gets to accompany Shannon on tours of local halls and churches where there are performances. Bone realizes that the Pearls are rather strange, and she doesn't really like them or their daughter but hangs around because of the connection with musical personalities. Bone does sense that the Pearls, much like the Waddells, have contempt for the Boatwrights. Again, Bone is made to feel her low social class.

The deeply religious parents of Shannon turn a blind eye to all the "sin" perpetrated by the performers on the gospel and country and western circuit. Unlike Bone and Shannon, they don't notice all the drinking and carousing.

Once again, Bone is very introspective about her own lack of singing talent. She recognizes a good musical voice and is disappointed that she doesn't possess one. However, she enjoys accompanying the Pearls as they search rural areas for new singing talent. During one excursion, Bone and Shannon stumble across a church with beautiful singing, but it is a "colored" church. Bone and Shannon have a disagreement over Shannon's use of the word "nigger." It strikes Bone the same way her Aunt Madeline uses the word "trash" as derogatory and rude. In reply, Shannon calls the Boatwrights "a bunch of drunks, thieves and bastards." Bone retorts by emphasizing how ugly Shannon is. This quarrel—over class and racial differences—effectively ends the friendship.

### **Analysis**

The themes of low self-worth and the realization of low socio-economic status become more prominent as the novel progresses. Bone's low self-esteem and feelings of guilt are intricately associated with Daddy Glen's abuse. As the abuse continues, she begins to actually feel as if she is to blame. As she writes, "I knew that it was nothing I had done that made him beat me. It was just me, the fact of my life, who I was in his eyes and mine. I was evil."

Anney's utter inability to confront Glen and the situation in any lasting manner only exacerbates the problem. Anney's forgiveness of her husband indicates that Anney—still a young woman herself—is incapable of protecting her child. The result is Bone's gradual loss of trust in her mother and a magnified sense of her own inferiority. Bone thinks she is evil, stupid, and deserving of the beatings. These are classic symptoms of this type of victimization. Bone's perceptions and development are now affected by her sense of low self-worth and guilt. She remains acutely aware that her fate would be better if she were a boy. As she remarks, "I wished I was a boy so I could run faster, stay away more, or even hit him back."

Additionally, as Bone grows up, she becomes increasingly aware of the low status of the Boatwrights within society. The difference between the Boatwrights and Waddells is evidenced by the contempt with which the Waddells treat the Boatwrights at a family gathering. "I pushed my black hair out of my eyes and looked in at one of my wide-mouthed cousins in a white dress with eyelet sleeves looking back at me, scratching her nose and staring like I was some elephant in a zoo—something dumb and ugly and impervious to hurt." Of course,

by this time, Bone does feel dumb and ugly.

The rage which Bone harbors as a result of the abuse and the realization of her own “white trash” status becomes sharper as a result of the confrontation in Woolworth’s. The situation is typical enough: a parent (Anney, in this case) makes a child return stolen merchandise in an attempt to cause the child to be ashamed of her actions. However, in this case, it backfires. Bone is instead outraged at what she perceives as the haughty superiority of the clerk. While the confrontation is a normal part of childhood, Bone’s reaction indicates that something is awry.

Although Anney ultimately cannot face the damage being done to her daughter, she does find ways to get Bone out of the house. She sends Bone to stay with Aunt Ruth, who is dying of cancer. The scenes at Ruth’s are quite touching; they show how the bond that should naturally develop between mother and child is shifted to Ruth. Subconsciously, Bone does not trust her mother, and the time at Ruth’s is reminiscent of the closeness that Bone should have with her own mother. However, Bone remains obsessed with her own perceived ugliness. “If I kept worrying about not being a beauty,” she says, “I’d probably ruin myself.” And despite the closeness between her and Ruth, Bone is unable to admit the extent of the abuse that she suffers.

Bone’s friendship with Shannon Pearl is very telling at a psychological level. Although Bone senses that she is ugly, she can comfort herself because she is not as ugly as Shannon Pearl. In this sense, Bone receives some positive confirmation through her relationship with Shannon. However, before long the question of class again rears its ugly head. Shannon’s use of the word “niggers” reminds Bone of the way a Waddell Aunt calls others, like Boatwrights, “trash”—the two terms are synonymous in both meaning and in the pitch in which they are uttered. Ultimately, the fight between Shannon and Bone is a result of the similarity between racial and class slurs. In this instance, Bone is no longer hiding her rage at those who would call her trash, as in the case at Woolworth’s. Rather, she freely lashes back.

## Chapters 12-16: Summary and Analysis

### New Characters

Aunt Raylene: The Boatwright's unmarried, childless aunt who befriends Bone.

Cousin Grey: One of Alma’s boys who burglarizes the Woolworth’s with Bone.

Garvey: Another of Alma’s boys who is caught stealing with his brother Grey.

Tyler Highgarden: The manager of Woolworth’s who banned Bone for stealing.

### Summary

**Chapter 12:** Bone and her sister, Reese, have reached an age when they often quarrel and want privacy. Both sisters have begun to masturbate, but they can’t find any privacy from one another. Bone observes Reese acting out rape fantasies in the woods behind the house; the sexual development of both girls is imbued with masochistic fantasies.

Meanwhile, Daddy Glen is always in a bad mood. He constantly argues with his father while working at the dairy. His temper is short, and Bone and Reese try to avoid him as much as possible. Anney sends Bone to spend time with Aunt Raylene down at her house by the river. Aunt Raylene lives alone, and from Mama’s questions (“Did somebody say something about Aunt Raylene?”), one might infer that she is a lesbian. Raylene lives alone and has no children, an oddity for Boatwright women. Bone becomes fascinated with this “reclusive old aunt” and bonds with her.

Aunt Raylene's house is by a bend in the river. Bone begins picking trash from the river—ragged clothes, a tricycle wheel, etc.—and she and Aunt Raylene sell it by the side of the road. One day Bone retrieves two trawling hooks attached to a chain from the river. The hooks are very sharp. Bone forms a sexual attachment to these hooks, which can also be used to climb a tree or house. Eventually Bone confesses to her cousin, Grey, that she has a plan for the hooks: she wants to break into the Woolworth's. Bone continues to stay at Aunt Raylene's as often as possible.

**Chapter 13:** Bone brings the hooks back home with her to Mama's. Anney notices that Bone has grown over the summer. In other Boatwright news, Uncle Earle is in jail for “busting a man's jaw and breaking a window down at the Cracker Blue Café.”

Anney also mentions that Shannon Pearl has called. Bone is adamant about not apologizing. Shannon persists, and eventually Bone picks up the phone. Although Bone does not apologize, Shannon invites her to a barbeque. Bone is ambivalent but ends up dropping by unannounced.

Just after arriving and before even confronting Shannon, Bone witnesses a horrible accident. Immediately after her cousin has made fun of her, Shannon carelessly gets too close to the grill with lighter fluid. Shannon accidentally sets herself on fire and burns alive in front of everyone. Bone attends the funeral with Mama while Glen goes off drinking with Uncles Beau and Nevil. Glen has started drinking regularly. At the funeral, Mrs. Pearl praises Shannon Pearl, the child who was rather unworthy of praise up until her death. Bone wonders whether the Pearls would have attended her funeral if she, rather than Shannon, had died in such a gruesome manner. She is very sad, and her own feelings about Shannon change, with her "hardheaded anger" disappeared.

**Chapter 14:** Affected by Shannon's death, Bone tries to be good to everyone. She is especially nice to Reese. However, no matter how Bone behaves, it is a rather bleak period for the Boatwrights. Alma has been laid off, Uncle Earle is still in jail, and Aunt Ruth is very sick with cancer. Above all, for Bone personally, the threat of Daddy Glen remains. Daddy Glen stalks Bone both in real life and in her dreams. Bone is always wary of a potential beating, and the atmosphere around the house is dreary with a constant threat of violence directed at Bone.

Bone, once again, dwells on her own perceived ugliness. She loathes herself and is aware of her low class status as a Boatwright. Her inner rage becomes more and more focused on Daddy Glen.

Over Christmas, Bone spends time at Aunt Alma's, largely to get away from Daddy Glen. The children play games. Reese and Grey fight. Bone reads more and more. She has an active imagination and dreams up a game called "mean sisters" in which the girls get to be meaner than the boys. Relatively speaking, it is a happy time for Bone. Nevertheless, there is no solution to the Daddy Glen situation.

**Chapter 15:** The Boatwrights have more and more trouble with the law. Grey and Garvey are arrested for breaking into telephones. Nevertheless, Garvey has a certain pride at being arrested, which is typical in a Boatwright male.

The family visits Uncle Earle in jail. He looks rather haggard but is in a good mood. He has gifts for Raylene and Anney. Uncle Earle boasts to Bone that he has managed to steal a blade from the leather shop in jail. Bone is very impressed by Earle's ability to outsmart the guards. Bone's attitude towards the law is clearly revealed in this section by her pride in Earle and his escapades.

Bone's plan to break into Woolworth's becomes a reality. She meets Grey after midnight on a Friday near the Woolworth's, which she has not been back to since the candy stealing incident. She uses her cherished hook to climb onto the roof and breaks in through a duct in the exhaust fan. She then lets Grey in through the

main doors. The two go on a vandalism/theft spree, breaking display cases and stealing whatever they can fit in their pockets. The theft is largely motivated by Bone's desire to get back at Tyler Highgarden, the manager who made her feel so low-class after her petty theft years ago. After successfully ransacking the Woolworth's, the two flee, leaving the door open so that "a group of gray-faced men just down from the Texaco station, all of them looking so much like my uncles it made my throat hurt" could finish the burglary. Bone's long-harbored grudge towards Tyler Highgarden is eclipsed by the euphoria of the moment. Both Grey and Bone return home very happy. The narrative tone of the novel is never happier than when Bone perpetrates this deed of revenge.

**Chapter 16:** Bone returns to her bed at Aunt Alma's without causing any undue suspicion. This is easy enough because both Alma and Anney are staying at Aunt Ruth's. The next morning Anney returns, shaken. Aunt Ruth died during the night. Bone tries to comfort her mother. Anney reminisces how Ruth was "never pretty" and how Ruth, the elder sister, had practically raised her. Bone feels tremendous empathy for Ruth because, like her newly deceased aunt, she thinks that she is ugly. Anney and Bone are both very upset. The euphoria that Bone felt in robbing the Woolworth's is replaced by sadness at the death of a loved one.

### **Analysis**

Instead of harboring crushes on boys and thinking about a first kiss, Bone has masochistic rape fantasies. "I imagined I was tied to the branches above and below me," she says. "Someone had beaten me with dry sticks and put their hands in my clothes." These frank depictions of Bone's sexual development serve important functions. For one, the honesty with which Allison conveys these fantasies lends a sense of veracity to the entire text. The adult narrator candidly relates her sexual development, and Bone's fetish about the trawling hook lends a sense of realism to the work that makes it stronger than a mere retelling of events. Additionally, one can surmise that the content and themes of Bone's fantasies are a direct result of Daddy Glen's abuse. While this is never directly stated, it is difficult not to infer a cause and effect relationship between abuse and masochistic fantasies. This is further evidence of how her development is being adversely affected by her stepfather.

One can read *Bastard Out of Carolina* as a sociological case study chronicling abuse in a very poor, white southern family. As mentioned earlier, the reader needs to keep in mind how young the aunts are in this work. They are all tired and worn-out, yet they are (for the most part) only in their twenties. Additionally, the Boatwrights are rather clannish and keep to themselves. Anney, Bone, and Reese are intentionally isolated. There are few outside friends as important characters, save for the brief appearance of Shannon Pearl. School does not play an important part in the narration, and one might infer that school does not play an important part in the life of poor children in this era. Instead, it seems that the women are expected to get pregnant and marry while the men find jobs as laborers. However, Bone is different. She does attend school and becomes the exception to the uneducated Boatwrights. She becomes an inveterate reader and identifies with characters in the books. For instance, in [Gone with the Wind](#), she identifies not with Scarlet but with the poorer whites. Bone's innate intelligence and ability to see class distinctions allow her to better verbalize her situation for the reader.

The gruesome death of Shannon Pearl is quite a surprise. It happens without any omens or portents and is over before one can even process what is happening. In this sense, Allison's prose superbly mirrors the event that she is describing. The reader is every bit as surprised and horrified as Bone and the guests. And much like the guests, the reader is left with a sense of not knowing what actually happened. Just as in the scene of abuse in the Pontiac in the hospital parking lot, the reader has only a young girl's description of the event. There is no scientific explanation to adequately explain how Shannon burns alive, but just the perceptions of a horrified onlooker. Again, the power and beauty in *Bastard Out of Carolina* largely resides in the depiction of Bone's perception of events and the way they affect her. In this case, the death haunts Bone. The entire incident is too ambiguous to simplify. However, it does leave Bone with a lasting sense of the hypocrisy and unfairness of the world.

The incident at the barbeque is but a brief, gruesome interlude from Bone's dreary and ominous day-to-day reality. Nothing, other than Bone feeling haunted, has changed. There is still the constant threat of a beating by Daddy Glen. Bone continues her self-loathing ruminations: "All of me was ugly, pasty, and numb—nothing like Uncle James's girls in the white nylon crinolines and blue satin hair ribbons. They were the kinds of little girls people really wanted. No part of me was that worshipful, dreamy-eyed storybook girlchild, no part of me was beautiful."

Bone is clearly a troubled child. Not only is she being abused physically, the males with whom she identifies are uncles who are constantly in and out of jail. Although Earle looks rather haggard as a result of his latest incarceration, Bone is terribly impressed by him and his cunning in managing to steal a blade. In a very touching moment, she whispers, "I love you" to him. While the strength in *Bastard Out of Carolina* resides in Allison's ability to transcend the stereotypes of poor, Southern whites, particularly in the case of the charming, character-filled Uncle Earle, there is an ominous implication in a young girl admiring the man who breaks his best friend's jaw.

The Woolworth burglary is an example of the culmination of Bone's ideas of revenge against polite or upper-class society. She has been harboring a grudge for the Woolworth's manager since the candy incident. To her, the manager stands for all those men who look down on Boatwrights and "white trash." Whether rightly or wrongly, her rage at her own low social status is directed outwardly towards him. The successful looting of the store forces the reader to wonder and fear for Bone. Her rage cannot come to any good. However, by this point the reader identifies with Bone and feels her euphoria. It is to be short-lived, for the death of Ruth that night turns the novel towards its brutal climax.

## Chapters 17-22: Summary and Analysis

### New Characters

Dwight, D. W.: Ruth's son who is late for her funeral.

Tommy Lee: Ruth's son, a thief who is absent from her funeral.

Butch: Ruth's youngest child who is a year older than Bone and who Bone can relate to.

Sheriff Cole: Questions Bone at the hospital. Bone does not trust him because he reminds her of Daddy Glen.

### Summary

**Chapter 17:** Anney's family (Daddy Glen, Reese and Bone) prepares for the funeral. Bone poignantly remembers the conversation where she was too ashamed to admit to Aunt Ruth the extent of Daddy Glen's abuse. Although Anney tries to keep Bone away from Daddy Glen, Bone is home for the funeral preparations. Daddy Glen finds a reason to vent his rage on her, drags her into the bathroom, and beats her with a belt while Anney remains screaming outside. During the severe beating, Bone does not scream. As has become typical in the cycle of abuse, Anney remains in denial and takes her husband's side. "Why honey? Why did you have to act like that?" she asks Bone.

Bone spends the night at Aunt Ruth's place with Aunt Raylene. The family prepares for the funeral the next day. Deedee, Ruth's daughter, talks to Bone about music and, later, tells Aunt Raylene that she doesn't want to go to her mother's funeral. An argument ensues. Raylene slaps Deedee and orders her in the car.

Earle is released early for the funeral. He shows up drunk and with a "girl" (not a "woman") who is very, very young and dressed like a tramp. Earle and Uncle Beau drink in Earle's truck.



The funeral is temporarily delayed while Travis, Ruth's husband, waits in vain for their wayward son Tommy Lee to appear. While his brothers eventually do, Tommy Lee is absent from his own mother's funeral.

Later, after the funeral, the Boatwrights return to Aunt Ruth's. Outside the house, Bone starts drinking—she has never had alcohol before—with Butch, her cousin who is close to her in age. The two proceed to get drunk as Butch reminisces about his mama. Suddenly, Butch gives Bone a tongue kiss. Bone leaves to go back to the house. She does not realize how drunk she is, although she is staggering. She finds her way to the bathroom and collapses on the toilet. Aunt Raylene finds her there and discovers the fresh wounds from yesterday's beating by Daddy Glen.irate, Aunt Raylene shows Earle, Nevil, and Beau the wounds.

Bone's uncles then administer a savage beating to Daddy Glen—he will need to be taken to the hospital. As they beat him, Bone, Anney, and Raylene huddle together listening to the blows. The description chillingly illustrates the effects of abuse. Anney is in denial and Bone feels guilty. Anney directs rage at Raylene but then admits that she is ashamed. Bone says, “I made him mad.”

**Chapter 18:** The chapter begins with Bone's heartfelt statement, “Things come apart so easily when they have been held together by lies.” She then illustrates the dissolution of trust and family bonds caused by the discovery of the extent of Daddy Glen's abuse.

Anney moves the children (Bone is not yet thirteen) away from Daddy Glen to a cheap, dumpy apartment in the city. The events after the funeral have caused severe discord. Anney is estranged from her family over the incident; she won't talk to Aunt Raylene. Bone continues to wallow in guilt, falling under the mistaken rationalization that she somehow deserved the beating. Daddy Glen appears one evening at dinner to talk to Anney, but she is not ready to speak with him. Anney and the children have now been away from Daddy Glen for over a week, and Bone realizes that this is a long time by Boatwright standards; she also realizes that her Mama will inevitably forgive Daddy Glen. Bone feels unloved. She can tell by her mother's behavior that Anney subconsciously blames her for the events that have passed. As a result, Bone continues to wallow in a state of self-loathing. She relives the beatings in her mind and realizes that they sexually gratified Daddy Glen. Although not stated openly, it is clear that Bone is damaged and needs help. She masturbates to images of fire.

The situation in the apartment is intolerable. One day Bone leaves and walks all day to Aunt Raylene's from the apartment in the city. Uncle Earle is staying with Aunt Raylene after experiencing problems with the woman he brought to the funeral. Raylene comments, disapprovingly, on Earle's penchant for young women. Bone is confused and ashamed to be a Boatwright. Raylene talks to her, and both are ready to cry.

Bone stays at Raylene's for three days but then returns to Anney's place in the city. A couple of days later, Alma's sickly child Tadpole dies. The event causes Bone to think about the love of a mother for her children. During these thoughts, Bone realizes that her mother will go back to Daddy Glen and wonders whether her mother will still love her then.

**Chapter 19:** Time passes. The following spring, Bone is in school and reading a lot. One Monday, when she returns to her apartment, Anney is in a frenzy because something is wrong with Alma. Little Earle has called. Anney and Bone drive over to Alma's because Alma has gone crazy.

Little Earle meets them up the road. He is afraid. Alma has torn her place up and strewn belongings all about. Everything is disheveled and broken. Alma is bloody and waiting for her husband, Wade, to reappear so that she can cut his throat. Wade had insulted Alma during an argument, saying that she was ugly and that he didn't want to give her another baby. Anney consoles Alma, who is under terrible strain, both from the death of her infant and from the callous behavior of her husband. As the sisters have a heart-to-heart talk, Uncle Earle comments to Grey and Garvey about how crazy women are.

Eventually Alma goes to sleep. Anney and Bone finally have a heart-to-heart talk, the first since Daddy Glen was beaten, and Bone confesses that she is waiting for Anney to go back to Daddy Glen. She also makes it clear that she will not join her mother when this eventuality occurs. Instead, she will live with one of her aunts. The conversation between mother and daughter is quite sad and illustrates the effects of the abuse. As Bone falls asleep, Anney cries.

**Chapter 20:** With the family's help, Aunt Alma's household gradually returns to normal. Although Uncle Wade has not reappeared, Bone and Uncle Earle help get things back in order. Bone stays at the household to help Alma recover. Although she misses school in order to do this, she is peaceful and content. One day, Daddy Glen shows up unannounced when Bone is inside alone. Aunt Alma is in the garden out back, unaware that Daddy Glen has arrived.

The situation is ominous and threatening; the resulting confrontation is the culminating moment in the novel. All of Daddy Glen's pent up rage and fury explodes. At first he just wants to talk with Bone. In his typically uncouth manner, he tells Bone what she has to do: "You're gonna have to tell her you want us all to be together again, he says. Bone refuses, and Glen becomes violent. Completely deranged, he beats Bone badly. Bone tries to stab him, and the violence escalates to a level that has only, until this point in the novel, been hinted at.

Daddy Glen's rage is overtly sexual. Not only does he severely beat a child who is not yet thirteen, he rapes her. The rape is described from Bone's perspective in graphic, sickening detail.

Anney appears and witnesses the end of the horrific incident. Chaos ensues. Anney pulls the confused, frightened, and badly wounded Bone from Glen as he makes up excuses. As she tries to drive away with Bone, Glen knocks himself senseless by battering his head repeatedly into the car door. Anney holds Glen back from hurting himself more. Even with this violent climax, Anney cannot renounce Glen. Bone is appalled that her Mama could console Glenn at such a moment.

**Chapter 21:** After the sheer, overt violence of the previous chapter, all that remains is an epilogue, in the form of the final two chapters. These serve to tie together the loose ends of the narrative. The beating and rape are so violent that there is no way to escape the scrutiny of the law. Anney drops Bone off at the hospital but disappears before even leaving her name. Bone has a dislocated shoulder and broken wrist, among other injuries. She has passed out and doesn't know what happened to her mother or Daddy Glen.

A deputy and Sheriff Cole soon appear in order to ask Bone some questions. Bone instinctively distrusts Sheriff Cole, whom she calls a "Daddy Glen in a uniform." "The world was full of Daddy Glens," she continues, "and I didn't want to be in the world anymore." Feeling completely abandoned and distrustful of the Sheriff, Bone refuses to say anything. Her inner rage is directed against Sheriff Cole. The "interrogation" is cut short by the arrival of Aunt Raylene, who yells at the sheriff for cornering the child in such a manner. Raylene protects Bone from the sheriff and promises to get Bone home.

**Chapter 22:** Raylene stays with Bone overnight and brings her back to her place the next day. The assault has made the local papers, and journalists photograph Bone as she leaves the hospital.

Later, back at Raylene's, Bone and Raylene talk. Raylene admits to having had a female lover in her younger days. She philosophizes on love, bracing Bone for the news that no one in the family knows where Anney is. The conversation makes clear that Raylene expects Anney to disappear with Glen: "Bone, no woman can stand to choose between her baby and her lover, between her child and her husband," Raylene tells Bone.

Bone remains full of hate. "I had seen my whole life in Sheriff Cole's eyes, contemptible, small, meaningless." Although Bone hates her Mama, Raylene assures her that one day Bone will forgive Anney.

Bone convalesces at Aunt Raylene's. Her uncles visit. However, no one knows where Anney and Daddy Glen are. One night, Anney finally appears. She looks haggard and aged. The two hug and cry. Nevertheless, there is a sense of estrangement and loss of trust. Anney tells Bone that she loves her, gives her an envelope, and leaves suddenly as Aunt Raylene appears. The implication is that Anney is leaving the state with Daddy Glen and that she had come to see her daughter one last time.

The envelope contains Bone's birth certificate, which she had always heard so much about, but never seen. Bone is left abandoned by her mother. At that moment, Bone is only a couple of years younger than her mother had been when she first became pregnant. She ponders the circular nature of human existence and wonders about her own future.

### **Analysis**

Until Ruth's funeral, much of the novel illustrates the abuse from which Bone suffers and the resulting lack of trust in her mother. The revelation of the extent of the abuse causes the novel to carom towards its violent and heartbreaking conclusion. Previously, the family, particularly the recently deceased Aunt Ruth, had an inkling of abuse. However, Aunt Raylene's discovery of Bone's wounds makes Anney's feeble denials and rationalizations ("Why honey? Why did you have to act like that?") even more pathetic.

*Bastard Out of Carolina* is a remarkably accurate chronicle of abuse, both of the child and the parent who is in denial. Anney is a very complex character, a very young mother who buried one husband and chose badly the next time around while yearning stability. While it is easy to condemn Anney, it is important to remember that one parent often doles out abuse while the other remains willingly blind to the situation. Anney's behavior is very sad, but ultimately realistic. Her rejection of Aunt Raylene—"Don't touch me. Don't" – is chilling. At some level, Anney blames her sister for spilling the beans. According to Anney's skewed values, Raylene has betrayed her rather than protected Bone.

The inescapability of the situation becomes clearer in the last few chapters. There is no adequate resolution or compromise. Even with the extended family aware of the situation, no beating short of murder will prevent Glen from abusing Bone if he has access to her. As a result, the emphasis, after Ruth's funeral, is the breaking of the mother-daughter bond, the renunciation of trust and love. Bone is very mature for her age. She realizes her mother's predicament and ultimately accepts that she will no longer live in the same household as Daddy Glen, even if that means leaving her mother. This decision is aided by the presence of the extended family around Greenville and the crisis at Alma's, which provides Bone with an excuse to leave home.

Though predictable based on the sexual gratification that Glen experienced during the earlier beatings, the violent confrontation between Daddy Glen and Bone is utterly shocking in its brutality and depravity. While previously the abuse had been due to Glen's pathological character—something which Bone finally realizes after the incident following Ruth's funeral ("It had nothing to do with me or anything I had done. It was an animal thing, just him using me," Bone says.)—the final confrontation is exacerbated by Glen's desire for revenge. The result is a rape and beating of such violence that everything that occurs after it appears as mere epilogue.

Ultimately, Anney cannot renounce her husband, even when she sees him atop her daughter. The image of Anney cradling and comforting Daddy Glen after he bashes his head against the car door is probably as disturbing to Bone as the rape itself. Although she is still in shock from the rape and her injuries, this is the moment that Bone realizes that she has lost her mother. She is an abandoned child. With this in mind, Anney's actual abandonment of Bone is just the literal confirmation of the psychological abandonment that occurred with each rationalization of a beating and, finally, with the comforting of Glen despite his horrendous crime.

Bone is left alone in the hospital. From her perspective, the law does not protect her. Rather, she feels that Sheriff Cole preys on her, much the way Daddy Glen would. He is yet another in a long succession of male characters, not simply “white trash” men, who treat Bone as an outsider. Bone has nowhere else to go but back with Aunt Raylene, the self-sufficient female Boatwright. Raylene’s subsequent admission to a lesbian affair comes as no surprise, based on the descriptions of her throughout the novel. Raylene becomes the wise protector, aiding Bone in her recovery and bracing her for the inevitable moment when Anney will choose Glen. The final meeting between mother and daughter confirms that Bone is on her own.

Although Dorothy Allison ties up most of the loose ends in the two post-rape chapters, the reader is left wondering as to the fate of at least one character, Reese. While it is implied that Anney and Glen leave the state, Reese is never mentioned. Is she with them?

One criticism of the book is that some of the characters are stereotypical. While Uncle Earle is described in great detail, Beau and Nevil are vague stereotypes of the “white trash” Southern male. Likewise, Reese is not described with much detail. We do learn something of her sexual development, but ultimately we do not know much about Reese. This is odd because the circular theme of the last chapter implies that she is also to become a victim of Daddy Glen.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Quizzes**

### **Chapters 1-6: Questions and Answers**

#### **Study Questions**

1. Why is Anney (Mama) upset about Ruth Anne’s birth certificate?
2. What is the difference between the Boatwrights and Waddells?
3. What happens in the Pontiac while Mama is giving birth to a stillborn child?
4. In chapter six, what does Anney do when her children do not have enough to eat?
5. How does Bone describe Daddy Glen’s hands?

#### **Answers**

1. Mama is upset because Ruth Anne is registered as an illegitimate child, a bastard. Anney regards this label as a stigma for her and her daughter, implying that that they are “no-good, lazy, shiftless.”
2. The Boatwrights are laborers of low social status. One might refer to them, in a derogatory manner, as “white trash.” The men are often in and out of jail, and the women have many children at a young age. None of the Boatwrights has a large income. The Waddells are more established, respectable, and wealthy. They own a dairy. The oldest son is running for district attorney.
3. Glen molests Bone by masturbating with her pressed against his lap. Reese is asleep in the back seat during the incident.
4. Anney dresses provocatively, like a prostitute. Later, she appears with food. The implication is that she has sold her body to feed her children.
5. Glen’s hands are very strong. Bone constantly refers to his hands throughout the novel in a very ominous and threatening tone. The descriptions hint at violence. Additionally, Bone’s attention to his hands indicates

her own premonitions that violence that will be directed at her.

## **Chapters 7-11: Questions and Answers**

### **Study Questions**

1. How does Bone feel when Anney makes her return the Tootsie Rolls to Woolworth's?
2. Why does Daddy Glen beat Bone?
3. What is Anney's reaction to the beatings?
4. What benefit does Bone get by being Shannon Pearl's friend?
5. What cause the fight between Bone and Shannon Pearl?

### **Answers**

1. Bone is supposed to feel ashamed for stealing. Instead, she feels outraged at the way the man interacts with her and develops a rage that she directed towards him.
2. Daddy Glen cannot control his temper. Bone does not do anything wrong. Nothing that a child naturally does warrants a beating. Daddy Glen is cruel and his beatings are criminal, particularly because he derives sexual pleasure from them. He is abusing the child.
3. Anney is in denial as to the abuse by her husband. She is quick to forgive him, and in her confusion, she can actually believe that Bone has done something "wrong." Anney is a very complex character. She loves her husband and cannot fathom what is occurring. She is incapable of taking the steps to protect her child because she is incapable of honestly confronting the situation and its severity.
4. Shannon Pearl's parents book gospel as well as country and western singers. By hanging around Shannon Pearl, she gets to meet these musical people. Bone is deeply touched by gospel music.
5. Bone takes her offense at Shannon's use of the word "nigger." It strikes her too much like the word "trash," which can be use to describe the Boatwright's. The disagreement escalates with Bone pointing out how ugly Shannon is.

## **Chapters 12-16: Questions and Answers**

### **Study Questions**

1. How is Aunt Raylene different from the other Boatwright women?
2. What happens at the barbeque to which Bone has been invited?
3. Describe Bone's relationship with the incarcerated Uncle Earle. How does she feel about his law-breaking behavior?
4. How does Bone get revenge on Tyler Highgarden and Woolworth's?
5. Was Aunt Ruth pretty? Why does Bone identify with her?

### **Answers**

1. Aunt Raylene has never married and has no children. She is self-sufficient. She neither relies on men nor is hurt by their indifference or promiscuous behavior. The other Boatwright women have their hands full with many children.
2. Shannon Pearl accidentally sets herself on fire and burns alive in front of everyone.
3. Bone remains close to Uncle Earle. The Boatwright men often go to the “county farm” for one minor offense or another. Bone is proud that Earle has managed to outsmart the guards and procure a blade.
4. Bone breaks into the Woolworth’s with her cousin Grey. The two ransack the store and then pass word to others that the front doors are open.
5. Aunt Ruth was not pretty. Bone believes that she, too, is ugly and so identifies with Aunt Ruth.

## **Chapters 17-22: Questions and Answers**

### **Study Questions**

1. What happens on the night of Aunt Ruth’s funeral?
2. Does Bone think that her Mama will be able to stay away from her husband, Glen, for long? Why or why not?
3. Why does Alma go crazy?
4. Why doesn’t Bone trust Sheriff Cole?
5. Why does Anney abandon Bone?

### **Answers**

1. Aunt Raylene discovers fresh wounds on Bone from a beating by Daddy Glen. She shows her brothers, and they beat Glen so badly that he needs to go to the hospital. The Boatwrights become fully aware of the extent of Daddy Glen’s abuse of Bone.
2. No. Bone realizes that her Mama is incapable of staying away from Glen for any length of time. Even one week seems very long. She realizes that Anney will inevitably return to Glen and decides that she will not return with her mother.
3. Alma is under a lot of stress. Her sickly child, nicknamed Tadpole, had died recently. Alma is sad and wants another child. However, her husband, Wade, is not sympathetic to her needs. He claims that she is too ugly for him to want to touch.
4. Bone had just been brutally beaten and raped. She is abandoned in the hospital by her mother. Sheriff Cole is an outsider who reminds her of people like Tyler Highgarden who look down on the Boatwrights. She doesn’t trust him. In fact, she thinks he is just like Daddy Glen.
5. Although it is not stated outright, it is implied that Anney abandons Bone because she has taken Glen back and is running away with him to a place where a man can find work.

# Bastard Out of Carolina: Themes

## Child Abuse

From almost the beginning of his relationship with Anney, Glen abuses Bone. His first sexual abuse of her takes place shortly after he marries her mother, but it occurs when he is looking forward to the future and the impending birth of their child. This action gains significance because it counters arguments raised by characters in the novel that Glen takes out his frustrations on Bone and shows that Glen has the proclivity, despite circumstances, to abuse the young girl, then only about eight or nine years old. The ensuing abuse all takes place while he is angry, but he still tells Bone "over and over again," often while he is beating her, how much he loves her.

At first, Anney knows that Glen is physically beating Bone. She hears, through the closed bathroom door, his first brutal attack on her. She cleans up Bone after this and subsequent beatings, all the while adamantly denying what her husband is doing: "I was always getting hurt, it seemed, in ways Mama could not understand and I could not explain. Mama worried about how careless I was, how prone to accident I had become." Yet, though Anney does leave him several times, she always goes back to Glen. In order to justify her actions, she must place the blame on Bone. She tells Bone that she knows better than to make Glen angry, that she must be more careful, that Daddy Glen really does love her.

Anney's words are fitful protests, but Bone, only a child, internalizes these messages and feels herself to be at fault for Daddy Glen's treatment of her. Toward the end of the novel, Bone comes to realize that it is not her fault. When her family finds out how Glen is beating her, her uncles turn on him. Though Bone is upset by the friction this causes between her and her mother, her family's actions validate her own feelings of hatred for Glen. She also realizes just how dangerous he is and that he will never change. For this reason, she tells Anney that she will never live with Glen again. Hearing this, Glen comes to see Bone, but when she continues to defy him—which she has never done to such an extent—Glen violently rapes her.

## Family

The importance of family is clearly demonstrated in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. The majority of the extended Boatwright family lives in or around Greenville. The Boatwright sisters help each other out, look after each others' children, and serve more as surrogate mothers than aunts. Bone spends extended periods of time with her aunts Raylene and Ruth. Glen successfully places a wedge between Anney and her girls and the rest of the family by moving them to more distant areas in the town. The first time he does this, after the death of their child, Alma was "outraged he'd take us far away," but Glen is pleased because they will be on their own. He wants them to form a real family and rely on him, not on the aunts and uncles. He gets angry because the aunts are always telling the girls stories about the Boatwrights, which he attempts to counter with stories about his own family. In subsequent houses, they are sometimes so far away from the aunts that Bone and Reese cannot visit as often as they'd like.

Despite the genuine affection shared by the Boatwrights, Bone knows that they are not the "typical" American family. However, a healthy family is not seen anywhere in the novel. Travis and Ruth have raised children who demonstrate little care for their mother despite her fatal illness. Wade cheats on his wife, Alma, and even tells her how disgusting she is. Carr, married and living in Baltimore, Maryland, still harbors feelings for Wade, whom she loved as a girl. Uncle Earle's wife leaves him, taking their three children with her, after she discovers his affairs. Thereafter, he forms relationships with much younger women, marries them, and soon thereafter deserts them.

Dysfunctional families, however, are not limited to the poor. Glen's parents and his brothers are middle-class. His parents and brothers live in nice homes, but they show no love for him or genuine affection for each other. At family outings and parties, they constantly degrade Glen and his stepfamily, and the narrative clearly

makes a link between this lack of familial love and Glen's violent rages against Bone. The Pearls, who also are much more financially stable than Bone's family, are similarly embedded in a web of family lies. Mrs. Pearl is unable to see the spiteful nature of her daughter Shannon, which contributes to her daughter's self-immolation.

Even the families that are tangential to the novel are not intact. Reese's father's family, the Parsons, has been destroyed. Grandmother Parsons has lost her three boys and is not close with her daughter. Her brothers are simply waiting for her to die so they can sell her land. Though Reese loves her grandmother, Daddy Glen ruins the relationship when he demands payoff money. The African-American family who share the apartment house with Alma lacks a father. He has gone up North to make money to support his family remaining in South Carolina.

Anney attempts to forge a nuclear family through her marriage to Glen, seeing in him a potential father for her girls, but this never happens. Instead of acting as a parental figure, Glen brings out feelings of rage, anger, and hatred in Bone. Yet, Bone continues to cling to the myth of the loving family, wanting "us to be like the families in the books in the library."

### **Poverty and Illegitimacy**

Bone's family, as well as her extended kin, live in poverty. They exhibit all the stereotypical characteristics of those who inhabit a low socio-economic class: too many children, worn-out homes and clothing, drinking, violence. Such an environment engenders instability. As Daddy Glen loses job after job, Bone's family moves so frequently that Anney stops even bothering to fully unpack. Bone and her sister are often hungry. Anney even prostitutes herself one evening in order to obtain money to buy her children food.

The poverty of the Boatwright clan causes Bone to feel shame. She knows that more well-off South Carolinians look down upon her, such as Daddy Glen's family and even Shannon Pearl. She understands that people are judged by how much money they have and that society deems poor people less legitimate than wealthier ones. This is graphically depicted when Aunt Alma and her children move into an apartment in a house shared with an African-American family, which draws the disgust of her husband and Glen. Alma, in deeper poverty since she left her philandering husband, has fallen as low as African Americans—the poor are as disenfranchised as African Americans in the pre-[Civil Rights](#) South.

Part of Bone's illegitimacy stems from this poverty, but her birth is truly an illegitimate one. Anney's mother is a fifteen-year-old, unmarried mother. Bone's father's name does not even appear on her birth certificate; in fact, she never even learns it. Stamped across the document is the word illegitimate, hence the title of the novel. Anney recognizes the stigma that comes with this marking. For years, she tries to obtain a new, unblemished birth certificate for her daughter. She does not want her daughter to carry the mark of their class.

### **Love**

The desire for love among the members of the Boatwright clan is strong and pervasive. The characters demonstrate a belief in the transformative powers of love. Anney, an unwed mother at fifteen and a widow at nineteen, accepts Glen's marriage proposal only after she comes to believe that he will make a good, loving father to her children, but she still wants him to fulfill her own needs. As Alma points out, "She needs him like a starving woman needs meat between her teeth." Anney and Glen are both desperate to be loved, Glen because of his family's scorn for him and Anney because of her desertion by the fathers of her children. Their codependency ties them together, causing Anney to allow the continued abuse of her child and her eventual desertion of Bone in favor of Glen. Anney is tortured by her conflicting needs. As she tells Raylene on the day the uncles beat Glen for beating Bone, "Sometimes I hate myself, but I love him."

The fine line between love and hate is seen in Anney's feelings. It is also seen in her sister Alma, who wants to kill her husband after he insults her and rejects her sexually. As she tells Anney, "That's why I got to cut his throat.... If I didn't love the son of a bitch, I'd let him live forever."



Ruth's need for love is seen both in the birth of her children and her death. Anney tells Bone that Ruth saw each pregnancy as proof that a man loved her. When she knows that she is going to die, she makes her husband promise to delay her funeral until all of the boys have returned home.

Bone manifests a need to love her family and be loved. She rarely enunciates her feelings to her family, however. When she tells her favorite Uncle Earle that she loves him, it is during a rare moment that she feels "fiercely proud, of him, and of myself"—in essence, she is proud of her family despite what others may think of them. She also yearns for a normal family love—though she knows this is impossible—"when I just wanted Daddy Glen to love me like the father in [Robinson Crusoe](#)." Despite the rampant abuse and denial that exists in her family, she still believes in the power of love. "[L]ove would make me beautiful," she thinks, "a father's love would purify my heart, turn my bitter soul sweet, and light my Cherokee eyes."

### **Sexuality**

Through her family morals and through Daddy Glen, Bone is introduced to human sexuality at a young age. She is only about eight or nine years old the first time Glen sexually abuses her, masturbating against her body. Though Bone "knew what it was under his hand ... this was a mystery, scary and hard." Daddy Glen and Anney have sex often, which Anney's young daughters are aware of. Bone agrees with Reese's assessment that it is "mushy," but she also recognizes the power in sex. "Was that what Daddy Glen had been doing to me in the parking lot?" she wonders. Before she is ten years old, Bone has started masturbating. Her first sexual fantasies revolve around violence. She imagines that she is tied up while a fire rages around. Her fantasies evolve, and she masturbates while imagining that people are watching Daddy Glen beat her. As Glen continues to beat her with more force and more regularity, Bone's sexual fantasies become even more violent and complex. By the time she is ten years old, Bone already equates sex with violence and shame. Her shame and confusion is such that when Aunt Ruth asks her if Daddy Glen has ever sexually abused her, she says no.

Reese, growing up in the same environment, also starts masturbating at a young age. Like Bone, Reese makes up violent fantasies to go along with her masturbation. Bone sees her one afternoon enacting a scene in which she is attacked and raped. Watching her younger sister, Bone experiences her own sexual fantasy in which someone has beaten her, tied her to a tree, gagged her, and left her to starve. Bone orgasms while "pushing my thighs into the rough bark," while in the bed below her, "Reese pushed her hips into the leaves."

In the culture, children learn about and have sex at a young age. Anney is only fourteen years old when she becomes pregnant with Bone. As Bone points out, there is even a joke about it: "What's a South Carolina virgin? 'At's a ten-year-old can run fast." However, Bone's sexual curiosity is never turned outward. Even by the time she is twelve, she has demonstrated no interest in boys her age. At Aunt Ruth's funeral, her cousin Butch kisses her and uses his tongue. Bone is completely surprised at this behavior and pulls away "in surprise." This scene, though brief and underscored by Butch's order to not make "more out of this than there is," reminds the reader that for the Boatwrights and particularly for Bone, all sex is deviant.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Style**

### **Symbolism**

Bone's birth certificate is the primary symbol of the novel. Stamped with the word *illegitimate*, it decries the circumstances of Bone's birth. Symbolically, as long as the birth certificate takes that form, Bone is unable to escape her past history and her social illegitimacy. At the end of the novel, however, Bone must start her life over. Though this choice is forced upon her by Anney's desertion and by her own realization that "the child I had been was gone with the child she [Anney] had been," it still is a time of rebirth, a transformation physically signified by the birth certificate that Anney has somehow managed to obtain for her—one that lacks that accusatory and demeaning word.

The novel abounds with other symbols. The physical hunger that Bone feels when her family does not have enough to eat is a physical reflection of her spiritual hunger. She wants what other people seem to have: the ability to buy trinkets and candy at Woolworth, a grandmother with her hair in braids instead of hanging messily down her back, a house with a white picket fence. Bone notes that she feels a "dizzy desperate hunger edged with hatred and an aching lust to hurt somebody back." She wonders if this is the same hunger that causes her cousin Tommy Lee to steal money from his mother. She also feels this hunger "swell" when they visit Daddy Glen's family, who are lawyers and dentists, who have wives who stay home instead of working. This barrenness is also symbolically reflected in Bone's environment. The houses that Daddy Glen chooses for them are all cheap, dismal imitations of his family's houses. "The lawns were dry, with coarse straggly grass and scattered patches of rocky ground. There were never any trees or bushes ... the houses always looked naked and abandoned." As Bone's cousin Temple astutely points out, Daddy Glen is "always finding your houses where it looks like nobody ever really wanted to live."

### **Point of View**

The story is told from the first-person point of view of Bone. Because she relates her tale an undisclosed number of years after it happened, her voice is able to reflect a woman's maturity as well as an education. Through the use of such a narrative voice, Allison is able to home in on the true child's voice and experience, while at the same time reflect on the larger issues raised by the novel, such as poverty, social stigma, and the lure of religion. Allison's narrative includes pieces of information that Bone would not have thought of at the time, particularly a knowledge of her extended family's activities and motivations. The novel places Bone in the position of carefully looking back at the past, attempting to make sense of it in her effort to heal herself. The crucial question Bone tries to answer through her telling of the story is why her mother made the choices that she did, but she is unable to do so, perhaps because she—along with many readers—can never truly understand Anney's decision.

### **Setting**

The story takes place in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1955, which Bone describes as "the most beautiful place in the world." The small-town southern setting has a strong influence on the story, for the Boatwrights and their kin are typical "white trash" as Bone identifies them upon reading [Gone with the Wind](#). They epitomize the stereotypical poor white southerner: undereducated, alcoholic, and prone to violence and loose morals.

The physical setting of the South enhances Bone's story, for the heat is terribly oppressive. Bone describes a landscape filled with burned grass and baked dirt, and porches where the family sits holding large glasses of iced tea and damp hand towels. However, the South is oppressive in other ways. The story takes place at the beginning of the [Civil Rights](#) movement, and African Americans are hardly present, depicting the reality of segregation. The exception is the family with whom Aunt Alma and her children briefly share an apartment house. This momentary glimpse provides a convincing portrait of race relations. Alma's husband is displeased that his children are living side by side with African Americans, and Bone's cousin calls the family "niggers" and is proud that the children seem scared of him. For her part, Bone acknowledges that she has never had a normal conversation with an African American and feels nervous and shy around the children. The incident also shows the economic plight of African Americans. The father is absent from the family, instead working in the North where he can earn much more money.

### **Language**

Many critics have pointed out Allison's deftness at capturing the rhythms of southern speech without resorting to the use of dialect. Her dialogue rings true and reflects the ungrammatical speech of the poorer American. Allison discussed her use of language in an interview she gave to Minnie Bruce Pratt for *The Progressive*:

When I really started working on the writing of the language, I discovered that there is this conventional way to frame dialect on the page. Now, the language rhythms of the people I am

writing about come entirely from gospel music, country music, and the church. But the way it is generally written down [is] barely intelligible and has an aura of stupid about it. And that I had to absolutely refuse, because the people whose voices I am using are very smart people. They are simply uneducated.

Allison creates a distinctive use of language in the novel, one unlike other novels that take place among southerners and rely on the same type of transliteration of words, such as "Ah" for "I." For instance, she uses the word *ain't* and insists on the repetition of adjectives, as in Uncle Earle's "black black hair" and "black black heart."

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Historical Context**

### **A Prosperous Nation?**

For many Americans, the 1950s was a decade of economic prosperity. Unemployment and inflation remained low, generally below 5 percent. By the middle of the decade, more than 60 percent of Americans earned a middle-class income, which at that time was a salary between \$3,000 and \$10,000 a year. The number of homeowners increased by over 21 million during this decade, and people enjoyed material comforts and the benefits of household inventions and improvements. Government programs benefited many Americans. Social security and unemployment benefits also expanded in the mid-1950s, and the minimum wage increased. President Dwight D. Eisenhower also supported the largest increase in educational spending up to that time.

Nearly 40 million Americans, however, lived near or below the poverty line of \$3,000 for a family of four, as determined by a 1957 study. As the middle class saw their incomes rise, poor Americans were increasingly earning a lesser portion of the nation's wealth. This was particularly true for African Americans and members of minority groups. Of poor Americans, almost one half lived in rural areas and suffered from inadequate medical care and a lack of education.

### **The South**

Many rural Southerners moved to cities in search of a better life and higher-paying jobs. African Americans made up the single largest group in the rural-to-urban movement. In a continuation of the Great Migration, which had begun during [World War II](#) many African Americans left the South to find work in the industrial North. This movement peaked in the mid-1950s, when some northern cities saw their African-American population growing by about 2,000 each week.

A religious revival took place in the late 1950s but was more pronounced in the South, where many people attended outdoor evangelical revivals. The minister Billy Graham founded his Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1950, which promoted crusades, developed radio and television programs, and produced films.

### **Women in the 1950s**

Many women in the 1950s stayed at home and took care of their families and households, though a large percentage worked outside of the home, often part-time. It had long been common for mothers of poor families to work for wages, but an increasing number of women joining the workforce were middle-class mothers. In general, women often faced discrimination and exploitation both at home and at work. Women often held jobs that were either part-time or low-level with little chance of career advancement. Fewer women were attending college, as well. Many women's colleges either closed during the decade or became coeducational institutions.

### **The Fledgling [Civil Rights](#) Movement**

Protest movements took place in the 1950s to try to change discriminatory racial practices. In 1955, African-American citizens in Montgomery, Alabama, launched a bus boycott in an attempt to end segregation

on public transportation. For almost a year, thousands of African Americans stopped riding the buses. In 1956, the Supreme Court declared Alabama's segregation laws unconstitutional. This struggle not only integrated the bus system, but it also brought a new civil rights leader to the forefront: [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) Two years earlier, in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in the monumental decision *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* that the segregation of school by race was unconstitutional. As a result of this decision, states throughout the South moved to desegregate their schools—most unwillingly, however.

### **A Society of Conformity**

The 1950s society was generally dominated by the idea of conformity. For instance, in the suburbs, houses looked the same on the outside and had the same floor plan on the inside. Some teenagers challenged this conformity through literature that mocked the hypocritical adult world, as well as through rock 'n' roll, which many parents disliked. Adults also challenged the conformity of American life. John Kenneth Galbraith argued in his 1958 book *An Affluent Society* that Americans were ignoring pressing social issues in their pursuit of material possessions and comfort. A group of writers and poets known as the Beats challenged literary and lifestyle conventions of the middle class. Jack Kerouac's [On the Road](#), one of the best-known Beat works, celebrated the search for individual identity. Other novelists such as [Ralph Ellison](#) discussed the experiences of those Americans who faced poverty and discrimination.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Critical Overview**

Several years before the 1992 publication of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Allison had already established herself as a writer outside of the mainstream; her 1988 collection *Trash* won the Lambda Literary award for best lesbian book. *Bastard Out of Carolina* was her first novel and considered to be her "crossover" book. It drew immediate attention from critics and readers. George Garrett wrote in his review for the *New York Times*, "When I finished reading *Bastard Out of Carolina* I wanted to blow a bugle to alert the reading public that a wonderful work of fiction by a major new talent has arrived on the scene." That year, as well, the book was selected as a finalist for the National Book Award.

*Bone and her poor, working-class family live in a rundown house like this one in rural South Carolina.*

Some reviewers saw *Bastard Out of Carolina* as a "southern" novel, rich in the gothic tradition of the grotesque and populated with a host of eccentric archetypes. Indeed, in Allison's novel are certain aspects strongly identified with the South, such as a tradition of oral storytelling, a marked interest in family history and lore, the power of evangelical religion, and the class system and social status.

Randall Kenan, however, noted that Allison "skates uncomfortably near the thin ice of stereotype, a feat at once worrisome and brave." Kenan described the southern stereotypes: "poor white trash; liquored-up, malevolent, unemployed, undereducated, country-music-listening, oversexed, foul-tempered men; and long-suffering, quickly aging, overly fertile, too-young-marrying, hardheaded women." Kenan found that "[W]hen Allison succeeds [in her characterization], she succeeds winningly." He particularly felt that Uncle Earle, Raylene, and Bone came across convincingly. Other characters—Anney, Glen, Reese, the cousins—hardly "ever come off as more than characters from a country music song." Garrett, however, would argue with this assertion; he found that the characters are "each distinct and memorable, each a recognizable physical presence."

Many critics also focused on the sexual aspect of the novel, which forms one of the major issues of Bone's young life. The character Bone had earlier appeared in Allison's short stories collected in *Trash*, in which the young sexually abused girl initiates particularly masochistic forms of masturbation. For Allison, writing is closely tied to her lesbian identity, feminism, and politics. She has stated, "It is only as the child of my class and my unique family background that I have been able to ... regain a sense of why I believe in activism, why self-revelation is so important for lesbians." Deborah Horvitz, in an article published in *Contemporary Literature*, takes up this theme. She argues that the abused Bone needs to integrate the past traumas in order to move into the future. Horvitz discusses ways that Bone attempts to do this: "She attempts to transform her nightmare into narrative as a means of coping with what she considers to be her 'damaged' and 'ruined' body, but that proves impossible since her stories themselves, along with her desires, wishes, and passions, are entrenched in sadomasochism." Only when everyone surrounding Bone acknowledges the abuse can Bone

take steps to heal. Writes Horvitz, "At the close of the novel, Ruth Anne, though far from happy, is finally safe. Anney 'wakes up' to the truth regarding Glen's cruelty and simultaneously confronts her own inability to leave him. Only then can she leave Bone safely within Raylene's protection."

Allison early on acknowledged the autobiographical element in the novel. She had been sexually abused by her stepfather from the ages of five to eleven. In an interview with Lynn Karpen in the *New York Times Book Review*, Allison revealed that many of the introductory details are largely autobiographical, and further, that "a lot of the novel is based on real experience, but not the entire thing. The characters are modeled on members of my family and on stories I heard when I was growing up." However, Vince Aletti, writing in the *Voice Literary Supplement*, pointed out that even "if [the novel] is rooted in autobiography, it never takes on the obsessive tone of a confessional or the crusading fervor of an expose." Horvitz maintained that "in order to appreciate the importance of Bone's 'remembering' her past, one must 'read' her story within the context of Allison's life as, in her other work, she encourages us to do.... Allison transforms actual and remembered trauma into art."

On many levels, whether personal, biographical, or narrative, *Bastard Out of Carolina* is a resounding success. Kenan applauded the work as "a singular and important act of art and courage." Amber Hollibaugh, writing in *Women's Review of Books*, took an even more personal approach: "This is a book I had dreamed of reading since I first discovered Allison's writing ... in the late seventies.... She is right to say that her novel isn't easy to read, but neither are our lives. This is a book as consequential as our own stories: a novel that could save a life."

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Character Analysis**

### **Aunt Alma Boatwright**

Aunt Alma is married to Wade and has several children. She loves her husband, despite his numerous infidelities. The first time she learns that Wade has been unfaithful, she leaves him and moves with the children to an apartment. Bone notes at the time that she looks better than ever before and seems to relish her independence. However, when problems with the children arise, she returns home. Alma is devastated when her youngest child dies. Her husband refuses to have sex with her—and make another baby—and she physically attacks him. She is completely devastated because she has given her life, and all her love, to Wade. In her rage, she destroys many of their belongings and waits at home with a razor in her pocket to kill him. In time, however, she allows him to come home.

### **Anney Boatwright**

Anney is Bone's mother. She is one of eight children born to a poor Southern family. Uneducated, underemployed, an unwed mother at the age of fifteen, a widow with two children at the age of nineteen, Anney is desperate for love and a stable family life. She marries Glen Waddell after she comes to believe that he will be a loving father to her two girls. Glen disappoints her—even sexually molesting Bone (though Anney does not know this) while Anney is in the hospital delivering their stillborn child. Anney, however, is determined to make the family work, and she refuses to acknowledge the cruelty that Glen openly displays toward Bone. Instead, she chooses to blame her own daughter for the violent attacks. She does not know of the sexual abuse at this time.

Like many of the novel's characters, Anney demonstrates conflicting aspects of her personality. She is independent and determined—as demonstrated by her multiple attempts to get a new and unmarked birth certificate for Bone, the length of her courtship with Glen, and her prostituting herself to earn money to feed her hungry children. At the same time she is weak, helpless, and even cruel—as demonstrated by her steadfastness in staying with Glen despite his abysmal treatment of her child. Her decision at the end of the novel—to leave town with Glen rather than stay with her child—is incomprehensible to her daughter (and to

many readers). Before leaving, however, she does attempt to bestow upon her daughter a new identity by presenting Bone with a clean birth certificate, one that does not bear the damning stamp "illegitimate."

### **Uncle Beau Boatwright**

Like Bone's other uncles, Beau drinks too much and has a violent temper. He never cared for Glen, primarily because Glen doesn't drink. With his brothers, he soundly beats Glen after the family discovers his violence toward Bone. After Glen rapes Bone, Beau buys himself a new shotgun in case he finds Glen.

### **Aunt Carr Boatwright**

Aunt Carr is the only Boatwright of her generation to leave South Carolina. She was in love with Wade, but he chose Alma instead. Carr quickly found a husband and persuaded him to move to Baltimore, Maryland, where he had family. She returns to South Carolina once a year to visit. She still occupies the role of outsider, for instance, taking Wade's side in arguments and going against her sisters.

### **Uncle Earle Boatwright**

Uncle Earle is Bone's favorite uncle. When he is able, he helps Anney's family with much-needed money. He is known as Black Earle in three counties, and Raylene says it is because of his "black black heart." He is a man of extremes. For instance, he is devoted to his family, but his wife leaves him, taking their three children, because of his infidelity. Women find Earle attractive, and he is always involved with a young woman whom he eventually leaves. Throughout the course of the novel, he spends some time incarcerated in the "country farm," or jail.

### **Uncle Nevil Boatwright**

Uncle Nevil is known as the quietest man in Greenville County. Early on, he recognizes that Glen could easily turn bad. After Bone's rape, he spends his nights searching throughout the county for Glen.

### **Aunt Raylene Boatwright**

According to Bone, Aunt Raylene has always been different from the other Boatwright sisters. Raylene leads a private, solitary life and has few friends. She was wild when she was younger, running off to join the carnival, passing herself off as a man, and falling deeply in love with a woman. After returning home to South Carolina, she took up residence outside of town. She quit working at the mill after twenty years and makes a living by fishing trash out of the river, cleaning it up, and selling it by the side of the road. As Daddy Glen's abuse gets worse, Bone finds in Aunt Raylene a strong, comforting presence and spends increasing amounts of time with her. It is Raylene who discovers Bone's bloody bruises and shows her brothers, thereby inciting their beating of Glen. After the rape, Raylene takes Bone into her home. She tries to make Bone feel as protected as possible and also wants her to understand that her mother does love her despite making the choice to stay with Glen.

### **Aunt Ruth Boatwright**

Ruth is the oldest of the Boatwright sisters, and she helped raise her younger brothers and sisters. She is a maternal woman but is somewhat estranged from her own children. Anney sends Bone to help Aunt Ruth as she grows increasingly weak from the disease that eventually kills her. Bone spends most of the summer with her aunt and uncle. Aunt Ruth shows real concern for Bone, asking if Daddy Glen ever sexually abuses her, but Bone cannot tell her the devastating truth. Ruth dies before the novel ends, and it is at her funeral that the extended family learns the physical extent of Glen's beatings.

### **Ruth Anne Boatwright**

See Aunt Ruth Boatwright.

### **Bone**

Bone is the protagonist of the novel. The story focuses on her life between the ages of five and almost

thirteen. Despite the poverty in which she grows up, Bone develops an intellectual curiosity. She is a born storyteller, entertaining her many cousins with the tales she makes up. She also loves to read, spending her dishwashing earnings on second-hand books. She is briefly drawn to evangelical Christianity for the salvation it promises but comes to recognize its falsity.

Bone is an illegitimate child, born to the unwed, fifteen-year-old Anney. After her mother's marriage to Glen, she becomes the focus of his rage and jealousy. He soon begins sexually and physically abusing her. Partially because of Glen's actions, Bone develops into an independent, defiant, and sexually precocious child. At the same time, however, she blames herself for his unwanted attention and feels enormous shame. She acts out her ambivalence. For instance, she does not tell Aunt Alma about Glen's sexual abuse even when her aunt directly questions her, but she still deliberately provokes Glen. Bone's emotional predicament is not helped by the fact that Anney also places blame for Glen's actions on the child. When the family finally learns of Glen's savagery against Bone, the uncles beat him so badly that he must be hospitalized. Even then, however, Bone continues to apologize to her mother for what is happening to Glen.

After this beating, the family leaves Glen, but Bone is certain that her mother will go back to him. When Anney says that she will only take him back if she is sure that Bone will be safe, Bone, knowing the impossibility of that certitude, refuses to live at home: she will stay with Aunt Alma instead. It is Bone's determination that leads to Glen's final attack. When he comes to Alma's, he claims that he wants only to speak to her, but in his rage—and his desire to subdue Bone once and for all—he brutally rapes her. Though Anney witnesses the culmination of this act, she still decides to desert her daughter and stay with Glen. Bone returns from the hospital to Aunt Raylene's house, feeling like the events of her short life have already shaped her into the woman that she will become: a Boatwright woman.

### **Bone's Real Father**

Bone knows very little about her real father, not even his name. Anney will not talk about him, and Granny chased him out of town after she learned that Anney was pregnant. He saw Bone only once, when he came to visit eight days after her birth. Granny tells Bone that he has a wife and six children, that he sells insurance to African Americans, and that he has never been in jail.

### **Deedee**

Deedee is Bone's cousin, one of Ruth's daughters. She and her mother do not get along. She resents her mother's continuing illness, but she also is angry because she doesn't think her mother spent enough time with her or loved her enough. When Ruth becomes seriously ill, Travis only gets her to return home and help care for her mother by promising to make her car payments. After Ruth dies, Deedee refuses to go to the funeral, but Raylene makes her.

### **Granny**

Granny tells Bone stories about the family. She moves back and forth among the houses of Alma, Ruth, and her sisters. She chased Bone's real father out of town.

### **Grey**

Grey is Bone's cousin, one of Alma's twin boys. Bone likes Grey better than Garvey because he has a "sweetness" to him. Grey becomes Bone's accomplice for breaking into the Woolworth's.

### **Lyle Parsons**

Lyle Parsons is Reese's father and Anney's first husband. He wants to adopt Bone and take care of his family—which will grow when Anney has their baby—but he does not earn enough money at the gas station, and Anney must continue to work during her pregnancy. To earn extra money, he gets a job at the stockcar races, and one day while returning home he has a car accident and dies.



### **Shannon Pearl**

Shannon Pearl is a short, fat, ugly, half-blind albino, whom most of the children dislike. Shannon's father runs a religious store and books performers for the gospel circuit, and her mother makes costumes for gospel singers. Bone recognizes her from the revivals and befriends her, drawn to Shannon's stubbornness and self-sufficiency, both traits that she values in herself. She also thinks that Shannon will be saintly on the inside, but she soon discovers that—again like herself—Shannon is filled with rage against everyone who has ever hurt her. Eventually, Bone and Pearl have an argument, but months later, Shannon invites Bone to a barbecue at her house. There, Bone witnesses Shannon's death when the can of lighter fluid Shannon is holding explodes.

### **Reese**

Reese is Bone's half-sister, younger by about five years. Until Glen ruins it, she maintains a relationship with her loving grandmother. Glen does not beat or molest Reese as he does Bone; in fact, along with other characters, Bone recognizes the kindness with which he treats Reese. Like her sister, however, Reese is sexually precocious, masturbating to violent fantasies at a young age. Reese and Bone are close as children, but as they grow older, they do not get along as well. Reese resents the tension that Bone's predicament with Glen introduces into the family.

### **Uncle Travis**

Uncle Travis is Ruth's husband. He is an alcoholic, but he loves his wife. Bone claims that she never saw him sober until she was seventeen and he had to have his liver and half his stomach removed.

### **Daddy Glen Waddell**

Glen Waddell is Bone and Reese's stepfather. He comes from a completely different background than the Boatwrights: his family is middle-class, not poor; his mother does not work outside of the home; family members are professionals, not blue-collar workers or manual laborers. Glen's father owns a dairy; one brother is a lawyer, the other a dentist. Glen is the black sheep of the family, failing at all his jobs, and—according to his brothers—marrying trash. His family looks down upon him, tolerating his presence at family events rather than welcoming him. He constantly tries to win the love of his family—particularly his father—but is unable to do so. According to many of the characters in the novel, it is this lack of love that leads him to desperately want Anney to himself and to treat Bone so cruelly.

Glen first meets Anney through Uncle Earle, and he is immediately drawn to her. He courts Anney diligently, waiting two years for her to accept his proposal of marriage. Though he promises to be good to her and her children, he reneges on that promise through his first act of sexual abuse against Bone. As he continues to fail in providing for his "family," he takes out his rage on Bone. As he continually assaults her, she acts more diffidently to him; thus the cycle of violence is perpetuated and escalated.

Many of the Boatwrights distrust Glen, seeing that propensity for violence in him. When they learn of his treatment of Bone, the uncles brutally attack him. Glen, fearing that Bone will keep him from Anney, rapes her.

### **Uncle Wade Yarnall**

Uncle Wade is Alma's husband. He is continually unfaithful to her.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Essays and Criticism**

## Overview of *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Dorothy Allison's powerful first novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, drew enthusiastic response from readers and critics alike. Nominated for the National Book Award, the book and its success brought the author, previously known for her lesbian writing, into the mainstream. *Bastard Out of Carolina*, which depicts issues uncomfortable to some readers, such as the sexual molestation of children and pre-adolescents' violent masturbatory fantasies, has also had its share of controversy. When Angelica Houston faithfully reproduced Bone's story on film for a cable network, she was told to edit or it would not air; Houston did neither, instead selling it to another channel. Maine's Supreme Court ruled that local school boards could keep the book from being taught, a decision that has led to a counter-group determined to keep the novel in school libraries. Allison is equally out-spoken; she makes no attempt to hide the fact that the novel is partially autobiographical, based on the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her stepfather from age five to age eleven. Her memoir/meditation *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* presents a more personal discussion of the "Boatwright" family, particularly her mother, whom she introduces in *Bastard Out of Carolina*.

Readers respond to *Bastard Out of Carolina* so positively for myriad reasons. Allison raises a wealth of material and issues, so the reader is likely to find resonance in the novel. It is supremely well written. Allison also presents as a major theme the human search for love and acceptance, a topic that many people can understand and appreciate. At the time of its publication, critics responded to many of these attributes. A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* talks about "Allison's remarkable country voice" and the way she "portrays [her 'white trash' characters] ... with understanding and love." In the *New Statesman* and *Society*, Elizabeth Young discusses Allison's hope "to illuminate aspects of a class that has been neglected and misunderstood." George Garrett, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, praises specific characterization, analyzes the function of death in the novel, and raises ideas of literary symbolism. These reviewers also touch upon the crux of the novel: the abuse of Bone—mental, physical, and sexual. Young accurately notes that at one level, "the book traces the ways in which Bone's sexuality is twisted by abuse." Garrett comments that "the most inconceivable—and yet here the most clear—rendering is of how a mother would allow such abuse and how a child could learn to live with it." Anney's continuous assignment of blame for the abuse to Bone and her final decision at novel's end raises questions that perhaps no one can answer: How can a mother treat a child as Anney treats Bone? How can a mother stay with a man who has so severely damaged her child? Allison's exploration of these questions—Bone's attempts to comprehend her past and how it will affect her future—are finely-wrought and haunting.

On a basic level, *Bastard Out of Carolina* convincingly portrays a poor, white, "trashy" southern family living in the 1950s. The Boatwright clan is filled with women who pop out one baby after another, men who spend their lives drunk and unfaithful and in and out of jail, and under-educated children who will grow up to replicate their parents. Aunt Alma keeps a family scrapbook. What predominates, however, are the newspaper headlines and photographs detailing the legal and social trouble that surround the Boatwrights. Bone knows that Alma's "favorite is the four-page spread the *Greenville News* did when Uncle Earle's convertible smashed into the barbershop." Bone thinks that everyone in the scrapbook looks "moon-eyed, rigid, open-mouthed, and stupid," and she recognizes her clan membership when her own picture earns a place in the scrapbook. The photograph captures her leaving the hospital after Daddy Glen has raped her. "I was a Boatwright there for sure, as ugly as anything. I was a freshly gutted fish, my mouth gaping open above my bandaged shoulder and arm, my neck still streaked with blood. Like a Boatwright all right—it wasn't all my blood."

In one scene, brief though it is, Uncle Earle gives voice to the feelings of rebellion and self-respect that the degradations of society can engender. Bone is visiting Earle in jail, and he shows her the leather wallet he has engraved using a mallet and razor blades.

"They count 'em—the punches, the blades. If the count doesn't match at the end of the afternoon, we don't get out for dinner. Of course, sometimes they count wrong, and sometimes the razors break." He wiped sweat on his jeans and brought his hand up, palm open. A slender metal blade glinted in the sunlight.

"They think they so smart." He spit in the direction of the fence.... Only his eyes were the same, dark and full of pain. Now those eyes burned in the direction of the guards walking the other side of the fence.

"They think they so damn smart."

My heart seemed to swell in my breast. His hand wiped again at his jeans, and I knew the blade was gone. He was my uncle.

In just a few lines, Allison succinctly demonstrates the disenfranchising of Bone and people of her class; they don't belong, they are, in fact, worthless. "We're smart, I thought. We're smarter than you think we are." She suddenly feels "mean and powerful and proud of all of us."

Such prideful feelings do not last long, however. For Bone clearly understands that other people in southern society look down upon the Boatwrights: they are good for nothing, knowing little and contributing less to society—except for more children they can't afford to properly care for. Anney rebels against this distinction, but she fulfills it nonetheless when she becomes an unwed mother at the age of fifteen. Bone's birth certificate is stamped with the word "illegitimate," which symbolizes for Anney her treatment at the hands of the rigid southern class system.

Mama hated to be called trash, hated the memory of every day she'd ever spent bent over other people's peanuts and strawberry plants while they stood tall and looked at her like she was a rock on the ground. The stamp on that birth certificate burned her like the stamp she knew they'd tried to put on her. *No-good, lazy, shiftless.*

Anney's numerous attempts to obtain an unblemished birth certificate form a pattern in the novel. At the novel's close, a clean birth certificate is all she can offer Bone. In this action, she attempts to communicate to her daughter that, despite all that has happened, she is a decent person. Bone need not bear the mark of illegitimacy, both through her birth and through her class, that society wants to bestow upon her.

Anney fails in her attempt to raise up the family through her marriage to Glen. His complete inability to hold a job coupled with his insistence on independence from her family actually bring Anney and her daughters to greater financial instability. Instead of trying to fight the social system that labels them as no good, Anney turns to a lifelong habit of denying the truth. At a young age, her daughters learn to turn bill collectors away with the lie that their mama is not at home.

"We're not bad people," Mama told us. "We're not even really poor. Anybody says something to you, you keep that in mind ... we pay our way. We just can't always pay when people want."

Reese and I nodded earnestly, agreeing wordlessly, but we didn't believe her. We knew what the neighbors called us, what Mama wanted to protect us from. We knew who we were.

Attacks against Bone come from even closer sources. Daddy Glen's family are well-established members of the middle class, professional people who live in clean, well-kept homes that the wives stay home and maintain. At a family gathering, Bone overhears a conversation between Glen's brothers.

"Look at that car. Just like any nigger trash, getting something like that."

"What'd you expect. Look what he married." "Her and her kids sure go with that car...."

I pushed my black hair out of my eyes and looked in at one of my wide-mouthed cousins in a white dress with eyelet sleeves looking back at me, scratching her nose and staring like I was some elephant in a zoo—something dumb and ugly and impervious to hurt.

Bone reads the novel [Gone with the Wind](#) and identifies with the degraded and despised Slattery family. "Emma Slattery, I thought. That's who I'd be, that's who we were.... I was part of the trash down in the mud-stained cabins, fighting with the darkies and stealing ungratefully from our betters, stupid, coarse, born to shame and death."

Because of the physical and sexual abuse that Daddy Glen heaps upon her, Bone has an even greater reason to feel shame. Judith Herman describes the victim of child abuse in *Trauma and Recovery*: "The child ... develops the belief that she is somehow responsible for the crimes of her abusers. Simply by virtue of her existence on earth, she believes that she has driven the most powerful people in her world to do terrible things." In Bone's case, this shame is reinforced by the person she loves most in the world: her mother. After witnessing one of Glen's earliest beatings of Bone, Anney gathers her daughter in her arms. "'Baby,' she called me. 'Oh, girl. Oh, honey, Baby, what did you do? What did you do?'" With these words Anney establishes a convincing pattern of blame. By blaming her child, however, Anney is able to escape accepting any personal responsibility. She constantly tells herself and others that Daddy Glen really does love Bone as an explanation of why she stays with him. Bone comes to accept her mother's words, a belief underscored by Anney's complicity in the beatings. "When Daddy Glen beat me there was always a reason, and *Mama would stand right outside the bathroom door* [italics mine].... I knew it was nothing I had done that made him beat me. It was just me, the fact of my life, who I was in his eyes and mine. I was evil. Of course I was." She later confides, "I lived in a world of shame. I hid my bruises as if they were evidence of crimes I had committed. I knew I was a sick disgusting person." Throughout the novel, she reinforces these feelings, at times noting that she is "nasty, willful, stupid, ugly" and again, that she is at fault for the beatings; "I made him mad. I did."

Prior to even entering puberty, Bone begins to masturbate with regularity. She develops perverse and sado-masochistic fantasies. She masturbates while imagining that she is about to burn to death in a fire or that an audience is watching Glen beat her. Her fantasies, however, which she acknowledges got "more violent and more complicated," can be seen as her attempt to take control of a situation that essentially renders her helpless. By masturbating to the "story I told myself about it [the beatings]" Bone is attempting to take ownership of her own body and the trials it undergoes. As quoted in Deborah T. Meem's article in *Feminist Writers*, Allison acknowledged as an adult, "Putting those stories down on paper ... [enables Allison] to shape my life outside my terrors and helplessness, to make it visible and real in a tangible way." Meem further concludes, "Allison insists on the ... equation Self-revelation = Life = Survival." Until Bone is able share her experience, she will not assert control.

After the uncles beat Glen following Ruth's funeral, Bone finally comes to accept the truth: "I can't go back to live with Daddy Glen," she tells Anney. Perhaps hearing her mother that day made her realize how helpless Anney was in the face of her desperate love for Glen—and how much danger that put Bone in. Anney told her sister, "I've just wanted it to be all right.... For so long, I've just hoped and prayed, *dreamed and pretended* [italics mine]. I've hung on, just hung on." With these words come Anney's only acknowledgment of the delusional world that she has created around her family. Still, she returns to this false world of promise as the shock of the brutal events wears off. She swears to Bone, "I won't go back until I know you're gonna be safe," but even after she witnesses the aftermath of Glen's brutal rape of her daughter, Anney can't reject him. Significantly as well, she will not acknowledge her own culpability. With the bloody and beaten Bone in the car watching, Anney holds Glen's head to her belly and pleads, "Help me, God, ... Help me." Anney turns over

responsibility for what has happened to a greater power, which Bone recognizes as a weakness. "I'd said I could never hate her, but I hated her now for the way she held him, the way she stood there crying over him. Could she love me and still hold him like that?"

Bone's ultimate answer in the novel is unclear. As she acknowledges, "I didn't understand," but she also admits that "I didn't want to understand. Seeing Mama hurt me almost as bad as not seeing her had." For the first time, Bone looks at her mother as a separate being, which she later must do to tell this story. "Fourteen and terrified, fifteen and a mother, just past twenty-one when she married Glen." She recognizes her mother's strength, shame, desperation, and determination, neither applauding Anney for these attributes nor castigating her. Yet, at the very end of the novel, Aunt Raylene comes to her. "I let her touch my shoulder, let my head tilt to lean against her, trusting her arm and her love." With this simple action, Bone wordlessly, yet not maliciously, indicts her mother. At the same time, she demonstrates that, despite all the violence and disappointment enacted upon her, she still holds faith in the redemption and power of love.

**Source:** Rena Korb, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale Group, 2001. Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers.

## Sorrow's Child

Flannery O'Connor once observed of the "Southern School" of writing, in an essay called "The Fiction Writer and His Country," that "more often the term conjures up an image of Gothic monstrosities and the idea of a preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque. Most of us are considered, I believe, to be unhappy combinations of Poe and Erskine Caldwell." Thirty-odd years later, despite the sparkling research centers, black Congressmen, skyscrapers galore and designer water by the barrelful, Southern writers are still haunted by these eccentric archetypes. And few works are more entrenched in that mythos than Dorothy Allison's latest effort, *Bastard Out of Carolina*.

This is not to say that her novel is hackneyed or grotesque; rather that, in dealing with the milieu Allison has chosen—poor white folk in small-town South Carolina of the mid-fifties—she skates uncomfortably near the thin ice of stereotype, a feat at once worrisome and brave.

*Weeping willow trees are abundant in Greenville County, South Carolina, where the novel is set.*

Brave because in so many ways this far more bitter than sweet *Bildungsroman's* real subject is not "Trash" (the name of Allison's prize-winning collection of stories) but the explosive and often difficult-to-understand world of child abuse; it is also a Faulknerianly bold attempt to plumb the depths of one girl's emotional acceptance, initially, of such cruelty. Yet so closely linked to this story is a *particular* environment that

engenders this *particular* tragedy that when this environment fails to convince thoroughly, Allison's overarching theme comes dangerously close to running aground. Luckily, she pilots her ship if not always masterfully, often with fine skill.

In this world where "black walnut trees dropped their greenblack fuzzy bulbs," we have Ruth Anne (Bone) Boatwright, a girl-child born out of wedlock, whose daddy was run out of town by her grandmother just before Bone was born. Bone's mother, Anney, bore the child at 15; at 19 poor Anney had married another man, had his child (Reese), and lost him in a freak accident ("That's a handsome boy' one of the pickers kept telling the highway patrolman. 'He wasn't doing nothing wrong, just coming along the road in the rain'"); and by 22 she had married yet again. Such is the world of the Boatwright clan.

The Boatwrights—as Bone tells us in this first-person novel—are devilish, fun-loving, obstreperous, dirt poor, violent. Bone's three uncles are hell-raising fools who "had all gone to jail for causing other men serious damage." Liquor, women, gambling, brawling make up their nights and most of their days. Bone's Boatwright aunts—Alma, Raylene, Ruth, Carr—band together under the caustic but loving wing of their mother and are all (except one) caught in that endless tension between love of a no-good man and rearing up their respective younguns, fighting off loneliness and hardship and the outside world's dim view of their affairs, aided only by grit, humor and each other. Add on the husbands and a passel of cousins and you can readily imagine this family populating a small county with ease.

Hence the danger. The stereotype of poor white trash: liquored-up, malevolent, unemployed, under-educated, country-music-listening, oversexed, foul-tempered men; and long-suffering, quickly aging, overly fertile, too-young-marrying, hardheaded women. Of course, all stereotypes derive from some root of truth, but for the most part this band of sorry souls lacks the piss and vinegar, the quiriness and subtleness, the unpredictability and the balm one truly encounters among farmers, mechanics, factory workers and waitresses who populate the Carolinas. Early on, it becomes clear that Allison is intimately involved with that world—she brings so much of her small postage stamp of Greenville, South Carolina, to life—but she seems to trust too often that we will see the charm, the hard faith and the rationale with which these folk operate and which operates them.

When Allison succeeds, she succeeds winningly. Uncle Earle in particular comes vividly to life. "Earle was good with a hammer or a saw, and magical with a pickax. He drove a truck like he was making love to the gears and carried a seven-inch pigsticker in the side pocket of his reinforced painter's pants.... Moreover, Earle had a gift for charming people—men or women." Allison demonstrates throughout the novel how complex a character Earle is, generous and devoted to his family, coming through when he can; but violent to a deadly fault, addicted to teenage girls and of course overly fond of whiskey.

Another character painted with a fine brush is Anney's older sister, Raylene, who had "always been different from her sisters." Something of a recluse, never married, she lives alone way off by the river, making her living by selling canned vegetables, fruit, chow-chow and whiskey, and by fishing refuse from the river and recycling it after a fashion. "'Trash rises,' Aunt Raylene joked the first afternoon I spent with her. 'Out here where no one can mess with it, trash rises all the time.'" Direct, nonsensical and disciplined, she has unexpected resources of compassion and a particularly painful secret—more so than her obvious lesbianism—which creeps out near the novel's end.

By drawing these characters so freshly, Allison gives us two beacons in an otherwise dim constellation for little Bone Boatwright. Neither her grandmother—witty, lovable and outrageous, though never fully seen; nor her mother, Anney, a wispy woman of mindless devotion who flickers in and out of focus, though rendered sharply in her annual bid to get "illegitimate" off Bone's birth certificate and in the annals of her coming to wed Glen Waddell; nor Bone's sister Reese; nor her bad cousins ever come off as more than characters from a country music song.

Nonetheless, Bone herself does march across these pages as more than a Southern-styled Dickensian bastard. Many of her scenes—after she has attained adolescence—are made quite literally of fire. Her stormy relationship with Shannon Pearl, a child so ugly the sight of her made someone exclaim, "That child is a shock to the digestion," is at first a case study in the real behavior of young girls, and ends in an unforgettable scene of horror. Another scene, in which Bone acts out her internalized rage by breaking into Woolworth's after dark, makes the reader fear for the child. And a particularly touching episode in which she visits her Uncle Earle at the "county farm" is perhaps the most moving and deftly handled of all. Brief, poignant, delicate, it comes close to making impalpable emotions palpable.

Of course, the most devastatingly real scenes are those between Bone and "Daddy Glen." Here, Allison is at her most convincing and disturbing. In fact, the scenes and their aftermath are so brutal one wants not to believe them—though a cursory glance at the newspaper or a local newscast confirms that as much and worse is done to children daily. And the most inconceivable—and yet here the most clear—rendering is of how a mother would allow such abuse and how a child could learn to live with it. And, ultimately, how it affects her.

Another of the key fashions in which Allison lets us know she knows from whence she writes is the way death functions in the novel—very like the way it functions in Southern life: to shape and structure the surrounding lives. The death of Bone's first stepfather moves her mother to marry the handsome, though vaguely menacing, Glen; the stillbirth of Anney and Glen's first child (and Anney's inability to have another) leads to Glen's increasing hostility toward Bone; the death of Bone's close friend Shannon leads to her closer and important relationship with hard-willed Aunt Raylene; the dying, death and funeral of Aunt Ruth sets the stage for Glen's exposure to the wider family as a child abuser; the death of Aunt Alma's baby—born with a bad heart—leads to her pyrotechnic mental collapse and to staging the novel's Roman candle of an ending, which—to Allison's credit—is handled not with melodrama, as it could easily have been, but with a calm and quiet understatement that goes far beneath the nauseating violence, and deeply into the complex skeins of love and hate and shame that compel and contort the hearts of those inextricably bound by both blood and heinous sin. Not only does the heart break during these final scenes but the mind expands to understand in a dark new way why the abused make the hard choices they often do; to understand a bit more the strange logic of the heart in the face of such unbelievable cruelty.

Perhaps it's a bit mandarin or churlish to demand that the parts always add up to the sum, for in this case the parts Dorothy Allison has created seem so flinty and true they sing loudly enough on their own. For this reason—pecan pie and gospel music, snuff-dipping grannies and kissing cousins notwithstanding—*Bastard Out of Carolina* is a singular and important act of art and courage.

**Source:** Randall Kenan, "Sorrow's Child," in *Nation*, Vol. 255, No. 22, December 28, 1992, pp. 815-16.

## Review of *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Set in the rural South, this tale centers around the Boatwright family, a proud and close-knit clan known for their drinking, fighting, and womanizing. Nicknamed Bone by her Uncle Earle, Ruth Anne is the bastard child of Anney Boatwright, who has fought tirelessly to legitimize her child. When she marries Glen, a man from a good family, it appears that her prayers have been answered. However, Anney suffers a miscarriage and Glen begins drifting. He develops a contentious relationship with Bone and then begins taking sexual liberties with her. Embarrassed and unwilling to report these unwanted advances, Bone bottles them up and acts out her confusion and shame. Unaware of her husband's abusive behavior, Anney stands by her man. Eventually, a violent encounter wrests Bone away from her stepfather. In this first novel, Allison creates a rich sense of family and portrays the psychology of a sexually abused child with sensitivity and insight.

**Source:** Kimberly G. Allen, Review of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, in *Library Journal*, Vol. 117, No. 4, March 1, 1992, p. 116.

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Suggested Essay Topics**

### **Chapters 1-6**

1. Compare and contrast the Waddell and Boatwright families. How do they differ in respect to economic class? What do the families think of one another?
2. Compare and contrast how Glen Waddell changes after his baby is stillborn. Do you think Glen is a bad person, or that he is just incapable of dealing with the death of his son?

### **Chapters 7-11**

1. Bone becomes interested in gospel music and religion. Do you think she is really religious? How do the Boatwrights react to Bone's religious conversations? Use examples from the text to back up your assertions.
2. Bone is an abused child; her stepfather beats her regularly. Does Bone realize she is abused? Does her mother? How do they "deal" (or not deal) with what is occurring?

### **Chapters 12-16**

1. Closely analyze the description of Shannon Pearl's death. Although the event is, seemingly, a gruesome accident, do you think that Shannon Pearl might have been deliberately careless? Did the event that preceded the accident help cause Shannon to be careless? Explain.
2. Compare and contrast the life that Aunt Raylene leads with that of the other Boatwright women. Do you think she is happier than they are? Is she better off without a husband?

### **Chapters 17-22**

1. Author Dorothy Allison begins the book with an epigram by [James Baldwin](#) which implies that people "pay for what they do ... by the lives they lead." Analyze this epigram. How do you think it applies to the novel? Does Bone pay for the life that she leads? Or is she just a victim? How does Anney "pay"?
2. Bone, the narrator, remarks at the end of the novel that she is now just a couple of years younger than her mother when her mother first became pregnant with her. Given what has happened to Bone, do you think that she will escape the cycle of poverty and abuse? Will she end up like her mother?

## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Sample Essay Outlines**

### **• Topic #1**

Gender differences are prominent throughout *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Discuss the stereotypes of men and women that are displayed in this novel with respect to the burdens and expected behavior of each gender. Bone admires men, particularly Earle, as well as her Aunt Raylene, who escapes many parts of the female stereotype. Explain Bone's perception of gender in her family and how she identifies herself within these stereotypes.

### **Outline**

I. Thesis statement: Bone notices that the females are, for the most part, oppressed by their male counterparts, and she eventually ends up identifying with the males and the one female in the novel who is most like them.



- II. The women are burdened with raising large families early in their lives.
- A. Anney is an unwed mother who must struggle to raise her children.
  - B. Aunt Alma is very busy with her children while her husband, Wade, is never around, for one reason or another.
  - C. Travis is never around to help his wife, Ruth. The children have turned out badly. One, Tommy Lee, is a thief who has stolen from his mother.

- III. The men are often carousing and drinking, leaving the women alone. They are, for the most part, insensitive to their wives emotional needs. Often, husbands and wives briefly separate.
- A. Alma leaves Wade because of his carousing. Later she takes him back. However, after their infant dies, Wade tells Alma that she is too ugly for him to make another child with her. Alma's subsequent insanity results from this insensitivity.
  - B. Glen is incapable of supporting his family. On one occasion, Anney must prostitute herself.
  - C. Uncle Earle is separated because he always cheats. According to him, it is not his fault.
  - D. Travis, Ruth's husband, is a drunk.

- IV. Bone develops many male traits.
- A. She burglarizes a Woolworth's. Most burglars are male.
  - B. She develops children's games in which the female characters get to be as bad as the male characters.

V. Conclusion: Bone believes men have it much better than women. On numerous occasions, she openly wishes she were a man. She looks up to her Uncle Earle, who embodies the Boatwright male traits. Ultimately, Bone ends up closest to Aunt Raylene, a woman whose closest relationship was with another woman.

• **Topic # 2**

Ugliness, or a character's perceived ugliness, is a major theme in the novel. Several characters are described as ugly, and Bone thinks that she is very ugly, particularly after Daddy Glen begins abusing her. Make an argument for the role of beauty in Bone's self-definition. Does it affect her perception of her family? How is class linked to beauty?

**Outline**

I. Thesis Statement: Bone's attitudes of social class and low status are linked to her perceptions of physical attractiveness. Ugliness is discussed openly throughout the book, and its constant presence contributes to Bone's feelings of inferiority.

- II. The women often talk openly about physical beauty.
- A. Little Earle is teased for being ugly.
  - B. Alma mentions to Bone that it is good that she is smart so that she can compensate for not being attractive.
  - C. Anney talks to Bone, before Ruth's funeral, about how ugly Ruth was and how she had had children to compensate for this.

- III. Bone befriends Shannon Pearl on the school bus.
- A. Shannon Pearl is an exceptionally ugly child. Even strangers are rude to her and comment on her ugliness.
  - B. Bone's friendship with Shannon may partly be the result of Bone wanting to feel superior; she has found someone uglier than herself.
  - C. When the two children argue, the friendship ends with Bone telling Shannon how ugly she is; Bone feels superior, or less ugly.

IV. The physical abuse Bone suffers and her own sense of class-consciousness leads her to conclude that she is ugly and that Boatwrights are ugly.

A. Bone dwells on how unattractive she is. She doesn't even have a good singing voice.

B. Bone realizes her mother has lost her looks at an early age.

C. Bone ultimately thinks the Boatwrights are rather ugly and describes them as such, at least physically, at numerous points in the text.

V. Conclusion: The constant obsession with ugliness and social class leads Bone to believe that she and all the Boatwrights are rather unattractive. This trait of unattractiveness is related to low social standing. She suffers from low self-esteem and dwells on how others perceive her as low-class and ugly.

## Bastard Out of Carolina: Compare and Contrast

- **1950s:** A 1957 study determines that around forty million Americans live near or below the poverty line of \$3,000 for a family four.

**Today:** In 1995, 36.4 million Americans, which includes 27.5 million families, live in poverty. The average income cut-off level for a family of four at the poverty level is \$15,569.

- **1950s:** Throughout the decade, an average of sixty-three percent of the U.S. population considers themselves to be church members. In 1958, 109 million Americans have an official religious affiliation.

**Today:** In 1998, seventy percent of Americans claim to be members of a church or synagogue. Forty percent have attended a church or synagogue within the last week.

- **1950s:** By the end of the decade, thirty-nine percent of all women with children ages six to seventeen work for wages outside the home. Around 6.6 million women with children ages seventeen and under work outside of the home.

**Today:** In the early part of the decade, seventy-one percent of married women hold jobs outside the home. Around 18.2 million women with children ages seventeen and under work outside of the home.

- **1950s:** The birthrate in 1957 is 4.3 million, or 25.3 births per 1,000 Americans.

**Today:** The birthrate in 1997 is 3.8 million, or 14.6 births per 1,000 Americans.

- **1950s:** The average age for the first marriage for women is twenty. The average age for men is almost twenty-three.

**Today:** The average age for the first marriage for women is twenty-four. The average age for men is almost twenty-six.

- **1950s:** By the end of the decade, 125 million Americans live in urban areas and 54 million Americans live in rural areas. Throughout the decade, rural population drops by seventeen percent with an average of 1.4 million rural dwellers leaving each year for higher-paying jobs in cities.

**Today:** Today, the majority of Americans—over seventy-five percent—live in urban areas.

## Bastard Out of Carolina: Topics for Further Study

- Imagine that you are Bone and you have just finished writing this book. You want to get in touch with Anney and tell her how you feel about your past and about her. Write a letter to Anney.

- Most of the people around them view the Boatwrights as useless and shiftless. What positive attributes do the Boatwrights demonstrate? Write a few paragraphs countering the argument that the Boatwrights are simply poor, white trash.
- Conduct research to find out more about how child abuse affects the family members involved and the victim. After you have finished your research, assess whether or not Bone and Anney are realistically drawn characters.
- Counselors often use creative outlets, such as art therapy, to help their patients heal from the trauma of sexual and physical abuse. What kind of art do you think Bone would create to express her feelings about what has happened to her in the past? Describe what a piece of Bone's work might look like.
- Bone narrates her story some years later, when she is at least past the age of seventeen. Judging from Bone's voice and the perceptions and wisdom she holds, how old do you think Bone is when she tells her story? Explain your answer.
- Write a short paper explaining why Bone might have decided to share her story and what she hopes to accomplish by doing so.

## Bastard Out of Carolina: Media Adaptations

- An audiotope of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, read by Allison, was published by Penguin Highbridge Audio in 1993.
- Angelica Houston directed the movie version of *Bastard Out of Carolina* from a screenplay written by Anne Meredith. Jennifer Jason Leigh played the role of Anney, and Jena Malone played Bone.

## Bastard Out of Carolina: What Do I Read Next?

- *The Beans of Egypt Maine* (1986) by Carolyn Chute tells the story of a poor, uneducated family from the backwoods of Maine.
- In Ursula Hegi's novel *The Salt Dancers* (1985), forty-one-year-old Julia, haunted by memories of her abusive father and the mother who abandoned her, returns home to see her father after twenty-three years. Unmarried and pregnant, Julia believes she must come to terms with her past in order to nurture her own child.
- *One or Two Things I Know for Sure* (1995) is Dorothy Allison's memoir of her family and childhood. The text draws on a spoken word performance and is embellished by photographs.
- Southern writer Bobbie Ann Mason's memoir, *Clear Springs* (1999), recounts the author's childhood growing up in rural Kentucky and the effect that her past had on her career as a writer.
- [To Kill a Mockingbird](#) (1960), Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, is the story of a young girl's awakening to the racial prejudice of the 1930s South.
- Allison's second novel, [Cavedweller](#) (1999), tells the story of Delia Byrd who returns to the South to be a mother to her children years after leaving them in the hands of her abusive husband.

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## **Bastard Out of Carolina: Pictures**

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