

Junior Summer Reading Study Guide: *To Sir, With Love* by E. R. Braithwaite

To Sir, With Love (1959) was the first published book of Edward Ricardo Braithwaite, who was born in 1920 in British Guiana (present-day Guyana), the large Englishspeaking territory on the north-east coast of South America. Braithwaite attended Queen's College, an elite colonial school in British Guiana, studied at City College in New York, and earned a Master's degree in physics from Cambridge University. During World War II, Braithwaite enlisted in the Royal Air Force, becoming a fighter pilot.

In the autobiographical *To Sir, With Love*, Braithwaite recounts his devastation as he realizes he will not be accepted into his chosen profession of engineering. Acting on the advice of a stranger, he is hired as a teacher at Greenslade Secondary School, one of the worst schools in the East End of London. Braithwaite is appalled at the unruly, uncouth behavior of his 15-year-old pupils, and he struggles daily to discover ways of reaching them.

1. Based on the setting of London's East End, which physical descriptions are strikingly uncomfortable for Braithwaite?
2. What uncommon practices about the school does Braithwaite learn from Miss Blanchard?
3. Greenslade Secondary School is known as a dumping ground for delinquent teenagers. What are some challenging home situations of the students?
4. How does Braithwaite's understanding of the concept of the "British Way of Life" change once he comes to live in Britain as a private citizen?
5. What are Braithwaite's most frustrating observations on his first day of teaching?
6. After an inappropriate act of his students, which causes Braithwaite to lose his temper, what deliberate plans does he enact to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect?
7. Why does the field trip excursion to the museum change many of the students' attitudes towards school and Braithwaite?
8. How does Braithwaite's direct conflict with Denham during P.T. (physical training) change the dynamics in his classroom?
9. How is Braithwaite challenged to grow as a person and as a teacher through his experiences with Pamela Dare, Patrick Fernman, Buckley, Potter, Lawrence Seales, and Miss Gillian Blanchard?
10. What is the significance of the title, *To Sir, With Love*?

“Road to Alexandria”
Part One: Chapters 1–8

1. What claims does the white government of South Africa make regarding the living conditions of blacks?
2. What happened in Sharpeville on March 21, 1960?
3. Who are the Peri-Urban, and why does Mark fear them?
4. Why is Mark’s father arrested, and what punishment does he suffer as a result?
5. What are Number Four and Modderbee? Why is Modderbee so feared?
6. Where was Mark’s father raised, and how does this affect the household?
7. How does Mark’s home life change after his father is arrested?
8. Why is Mark suspicious of his mother? What is the truth behind her actions?
9. What is the Mlothi, and how does it help Mark’s family? Why do they stop going?
10. Describe the event Mark mentions as one of the few times his entire family was happy.

Part One: Chapters 9–20

1. What group does Mark’s mother bring the family to see, and how does the community react to this group?
2. How does hunger educate Mark’s mind?
3. What does Mark do to distract himself from his hunger?
4. Why does Mpandhlani think Mark is a fool?
5. What skill does Mark’s mother possess that fascinates him?
6. How does Mark almost die in his sleep? How is he saved?
7. What lesson does Mark learn from the men who haul away the neighborhood’s human waste?
8. Why does Jackson take Mark to the tribal reserve, and why is Mark afraid to be there with his father?
9. How does Mark become aware that whites are the architects of apartheid?
10. For what do Mark’s parents blame witchcraft?
11. Describe Mark’s grandmother, and explain how she helps the family.
12. What must Mark’s mother do in order to secure his papers for school?

“Passport to Knowledge”
Part Two: Chapters 21–28

1. What alternative to attending school does Mark have, and why is this other lifestyle so attractive?
2. What reasons does Mark give for avoiding school? How is he convinced to go?
3. What is a lobola, and why does Mark’s mother hate it?
4. List five key points the principal discusses on the first day of school.
5. Why is Mark often punished by teachers?
6. What does Mark’s mother purchase at the flea market to help the children at school? Why are some of these items useless?
7. What inspires Mark to learn how to box, and what happens at his first lesson?
8. What does Mark learn from his mother after he discovers Martin Luther King, Jr. has died?
9. What happens when Mark skips school?
10. What does Mark consider the greatest crisis of his childhood, and how does it affect him?
11. How does Mark’s mother save his life?

Part Two: Chapters 29–34 1.

- What immediate effect does Granny's new job have on Mark's life?
2. How does Jackson propose to strengthen the family financially? How does Mark's mother use this proposal to her advantage?
3. What skills does Mark use to make money at home?
4. What opportunity does Granny present to Mark, and why does his family think he should take advantage of this opportunity?
5. Describe Mrs. Smith and Clyde Smith. What parts of white society does each represent?
6. What skill does Mark want to master? Why?
7. Why does Mark finally decide to stop spending time with the gang?
8. Why does Granny become furious with Mark? What does Mark learn from this situation?
9. Why are the zoo's signs pointless?
10. How does Mark discover tennis?

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“Passport to Freedom”
Part Three: Chapters 35–41

1. Around what does Mark’s life revolve?
2. How does Mark feel about organized religion?
3. Why does the mfundisi think Mark is “born of the Devil” (p. 221)?
4. Why is 1973 a great tennis year for Mark?
5. Why is Arthur Ashe different from other athletes who come to South Africa?
6. What is the first championship Mark wins, whom does he defeat, and how does it affect his life?
7. What happens when Mark attends church with his mother, and how does it change his view of her?
8. What does the witch doctor say is the cause of Mark’s eye problem?
9. What pros and cons does Mark see in the school’s required debates? Which debate do students love and hate the most?
10. What author shakes Mark’s confidence in his English abilities? How does he grow to enjoy this author?

Part Three: Chapters 42–49

1. What sets off a “spontaneous explosion” of protests? How does the government react?
2. When asked what he is fighting for, how does Mark respond?
3. Why does Mark begin to hate all whites?
4. What advice does Mr. Ngwenya offer Mark about the protests?
5. How does Wilfred react to what he learns about the riots, and what does he encourage Mark to do?
6. What three things does Mark say are black protestors’ ultimate goals?
7. What happens when Helmut and Mark attempt to defy the apartheid laws?
8. Why does Mark think South Africa’s situation is similar to the Holocaust?
9. Why is Mark eager to meet Andre, and what does Andre teach Mark?
10. Why does Mark have so much trouble finding work with white employers?
11. Why does Mark turn down Simba Quix’s offer?
12. Who is Steven Biko, and why does his death cause such an uproar?
13. What advice does Owen Williams offer Mark regarding the politics of the SAB Open?