

Sample Pages from
The Hundred Penny Box
By Sharon Bell Mathis



A Teaching Pack

by Margaret Whisnant

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Section Summaries

Section One: Page 9—Top of Page 15

- Michael sits down on the bed that used to be his and watches his great-great-Aunt Dew rocking in her rocking chair.
- He wants to play with the hundred penny box, but Aunt Dew is singing her long song, "*Precious Lord, Take my hand.*". The singing sometimes causes her to forget who he is for a whole day, and then she calls him John, his father's name. Michael's mother keeps trying to explain to Aunt Dew about their names.
- When his father is around and Aunt Dew said, "Where's my boy?" it was hard to tell whether she means him or his father.
- Aunt Dew doesn't call Michael's mother by any name, and Michael has heard her crying because Aunt Dew doesn't like her. She had gone with Michael's father to Atlanta to bring Aunt Dew back to live with them. She has tried to make Aunt Dew comfortable. Still, Aunt Dew refused to talk to her. The old woman sometimes stops talking to Michael when she comes around.
- Aunt Dew is making Michael's mother miserable in her own house.
- Aunt Dew is a hundred years old.
- Michael's father has loved Aunt Dew all his life. At a time when he had nobody, Aunt Dew gave him a home. He assures his wife that Aunt Dew knows they want her. His wife is doing everything right.
- Michael is tired of Aunt Dew's singing. He wants to count the pennies in her large wooden hundred penny box, but it is no fun to count alone. Aunt Dew tells stories about the pennies.
- Michael leans over and calls Aunt Dew's name loudly. She stops rocking, looks at him without speaking, turns her head, and starts singing again.
- Michael picks up the hundred penny box from the floor and carries it to the kitchen. There is no way to stop Aunt Dew once she starts singing the long song. He doesn't answer when his mother asks what's wrong.
- Michael's mother reaches for the hundred penny box. She intends to throw it in the furnace as soon as Aunt Dew is asleep.

Section Two: Top of Page 15—Middle of Page 21

- Michael refused to turn over the hundred penny box to his mother. He threatens to tell his daddy if she takes it and burns it like she has done to the rest of Aunt Dew's stuff. He doesn't tell her that he and Aunt Dew have hidden things in his closet.
- Michael's mother says Aunt Dew, like a child, thinks she needs a whole lot of stuff she really doesn't need. She does not intend to take the pennies, just the big old ugly wooden box that gets in the way.
- Michael's mother puts her hands on her hips when he tells her "No" again. Thinking fast, he asks to take the box back to his room because Aunt Dew won't go to sleep unless she sees it. His mother agrees. She will get the box later.
- Back in his room, Aunt Dew calls Michael "John-boy," but he doesn't mind. His great-great-aunt asks him to play her favorite record on the Victrola that Michael's father had given her, but Michael's mother has thrown the broken machine out.
- Aunt Dew says Michael's momma is going throw her out soon. Michael says his momma can't throw *people* out.

Short Answer Questions

Section One: Page 9—Top of Page 15

1. What sometimes happened when Aunt Dew sang the long song?
2. Where did Aunt Dew live before she came to stay with Michael's family?
3. What part of Michael's house had been given over to Aunt Dew?
4. What was Aunt Dew doing as she sang the long song?
5. Explain why Michael's mother thought that Aunt Dew didn't like her.
6. What was Aunt Dew's presence doing to Michael's mother?
7. How old was Aunt Dew?
8. How did Michael's father feel about Aunt Dew?
9. Why did Michael want Aunt Dew to help count the pennies in the hundred penny box?
10. What did Michael's mother intend to do with the hundred penny box?

Section Two: Top of Page 15—Middle of Page 21

1. What had Momma already done with some of Aunt Dew's stuff?
2. Where had Aunt Dew and Michael hidden all of her stuff that was left?
3. What did Michael's mother say about the pennies in Aunt Dew's hundred penny box?
4. Explain how Michael managed to keep his mother from taking the hundred penny box.
5. What did Aunt Dew say when Michael told her that his momma had thrown out her broken Victrola?
6. What was the name of the long song that was on the record Aunt Dew liked to listen to and sing?
7. How did Aunt Dew answer Michael's question about where she would put the hundred pennies if she lost the hundred penny box?
8. From Aunt Dew's point of view, what was in the hundred penny box?
9. What question did Aunt Dew ask Michael?
10. To Michael, what was the only thing bad about being a hundred years old like Aunt Dew?

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Section One: From Page 9 to the Top of Page 15

Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

- _____ 1. Aunt Dew was Michael's great-great aunt.
- _____ 2. Since it was raining outside, Michael wanted to play with Aunt Dew's hundred penny box.
- _____ 3. Great Aunt Dew sometimes rocked in a rocking chair and sang a long song.
- _____ 4. At times, when she sang her long song, Great Aunt Dew would forget who Michael was and call him John.
- _____ 5. When Aunt Dew asked "Where's my boy?" it was hard to tell if she meant Michael or his father.
- _____ 6. Aunt Dew had decided to sell her house in Atlanta and move in with Michael and his parents.
- _____ 7. Michael's mother didn't mind that Aunt Dew wouldn't look at her or call her name.
- _____ 8. Michael's mother cried because she didn't want Aunt Dew living with them.
- _____ 9. Aunt Dew was one hundred years old.



- _____ 10. When Michael's father was orphaned as a boy, Aunt Dew took care of him.

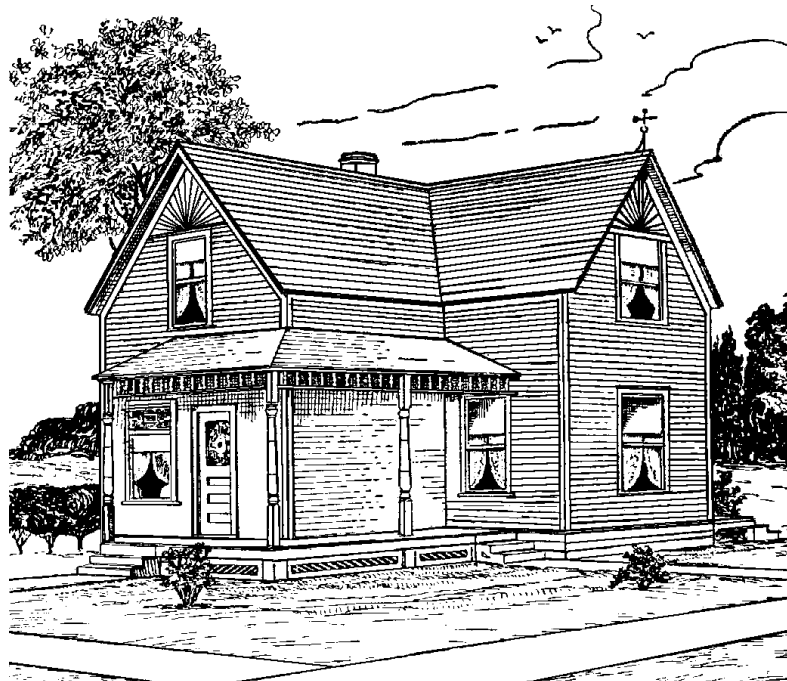
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Section Three: From the Middle of Page 21 to the Top of Page 28

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- _____ 1. When Aunt Dew stared at him, Michael (A) knew she was daydreaming, (B) thought she was angry, (C) never knew what she would say next.
- _____ 2. Aunt Dew said it looked like Michael's father had (A) forgotten her, (B) just spit him out, (C) changed as he grew up.
- _____ 3. Aunt Dew thought her great-nephew John was (A) the only person who ever cared about her, (B) her only living relative, (C) taking sides against her.
- _____ 4. Compared to the trees in her yard back home, Aunt Dew said the trees in Michael's yard were (A) prettier, (B) puny-looking, (C) strange-looking.
- _____ 5. Aunt Dew had lived in (A) Atlanta, (B) Charleston, (C) New Orleans.



- _____ 6. Aunt Dew had (A) three daughters, (B) two sons and two daughters, (C) five sons.
- _____ 7. As a boy, Michael's father (A) loved to climb the trees in Aunt Dew's yard, (B) didn't care to be outdoors, (C) was sickly and shy.
- _____ 8. Michael's father lost his parents in (A) a plane crash, (B) a car accident, (C) a boating accident.
- _____ 9. When his parents died, Michael's father was (A) away at school, (B) visiting with Aunt Dew, (C) with them, but he was rescued.
- _____ 10. After losing his parents, Michael's father (A) wouldn't talk, (B) took apart the boat they had been in and pushed it back into the water, (C) was afraid to ride in a car.

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Whole Book Test

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- _____ 1. Aunt Dew was Michael's (A) great aunt, (B) great-great aunt, (C) great grandmother.
- _____ 2. Before she came to live with Michael's family, Aunt Dew lived in (A) Atlanta, (B) Charleston, (C) New Orleans.
- _____ 3. The long song that Aunt Dew sang was (A) *Jesus Loves Me*, (B) *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, (C) *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*.
- _____ 4. When Aunt Dew sang her long song, Michael (A) left the room, (B) couldn't get her attention, (C) liked to listen.
- _____ 5. Michael liked to hear Aunt Dew (A) sing, (B) read Bible stories, (C) tell stories about people.
- _____ 6. Aunt Dew was (A) one hundred years old, (B) eighty-five years old, (C) one hundred and five years old.
- _____ 7. When Michael counted the pennies in the hundred penny box, Aunt Dew (A) cleaned the coins, (B) told stories about each one, (C) sang her long song.
- _____ 8. Each penny in the hundred penny box represented (A) a year in Aunt Dew's life, (B) a person Aunt Dew had met, (C) a verse from the Bible.
- _____ 9. Aunt Dew was born during (A) slavery times, (B) the Civil War, (C) the Reconstruction period after the war.



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Something to Think About. . .
Something to Write About. . .
(Individual Sections)



Section One: Page 9—Top of Page 15

Michael's mother was heartbroken because she thought Aunt Dew didn't like her.

- Do you think Michael's mother might be right? Why or why not?
- Consider the fact that Aunt Dew had taken Michael's father in when he had nobody else and that she sometimes called Michael by his father's name. Also, Aunt Dew is one hundred years old. How might these facts explain Aunt Dew's behavior around Michael's mother?

Michael's parents went to Atlanta to bring back Aunt Dew. Michael's father said not long after her arrival, "She knows we want her. She knows it."

- Speculate as to why Aunt Dew left her home in Atlanta to come live with Michael and his parents.
- Do you think Aunt Dew made the move willingly? Explain.
- Do you agree with Michael's father that Aunt Dew knows they want her to live with them? Add details to explain your thinking.

It was difficult for Michael to get Aunt Dew's attention when she sang her long song.

- What do you suppose Aunt Dew was thinking when she was singing?
- Think of the way you feel when you listen to your favorite songs. What do you have in common with Aunt Dew when the music is floating in your head? (See **Graphic Organizer #1—A Sojourn with a Song**)

Something to Think About . . .
Something to Write About . . .
(Whole Book)

Michael's parents had gone to Atlanta to bring Aunt Dew back to live with them.

- Do you think Michael's parents did the right thing in taking Aunt Dew from her big house and bringing her to live in Michael's bedroom? Use evidence from the story to support your answer.
 - Why do you suppose Aunt Dew came to live with Michael's family and not with one of her five children?
 - What facts can you find to prove that Michael's daddy loved Aunt Dew a lot?
 - How would you feel if your very favorite relative came to live with your family and took your bed as Michael's great-great-aunt had done?
-

Michael tried to convince Aunt Dew that she needed something better than *an old cracked-up, wacky-dacky box with the top broken*. But Aunt Dew said, "*When I lose my hundred penny box, I lose me. . . It's my old cracked-up, wacky-dacky box with the top broken. . . Them's my years in that box. . . That's me in that box.*"

- Do you think Aunt Dew would have been able to remember the important events in her life without the hundred penny box? Explain your answer.
 - What are some different ways people preserve the memories of their lives? How are they like Aunt Dew's hundred pennies?
-

Michael said Aunt Dew kept on forgetting things.

- Do you think Aunt Dew really forgot things or was it sometimes what people speak of as "selective memory"? Could it have been a combination of both? Explain and give examples.
 - How do you know that sometimes Aunt Dew *did* remember events from the past and new information as well?
-

Aunt Dew said she and Momma couldn't talk the same way she and Michael's daddy did. Momma didn't know what she and John knew.

- Explain how the *history* that Aunt Dew and Michael's daddy shared allowed them to form a loving, comfortable relationship.
 - How did the lack of *history* between Aunt Dew and Michael's mother create a problem relationship?
 - Though she had very little history with Michael, Aunt Dew easily formed an affectionate bond with him. Why do you suppose this happened? Why did Aunt Dew feel connected to her great-great nephew without first building a history with him? Did his physical appearance play a part?
 - What adult have you shared more of your life with—including the things you think about—than any other person? Explain how this makes your relationship with them different.
 - Explain why many adults have childhood best friends that they never forget.
-

A Sojourn with a Song

(**sojourn** *sō' jûrn* a brief period of residence or a temporary stay in a place)

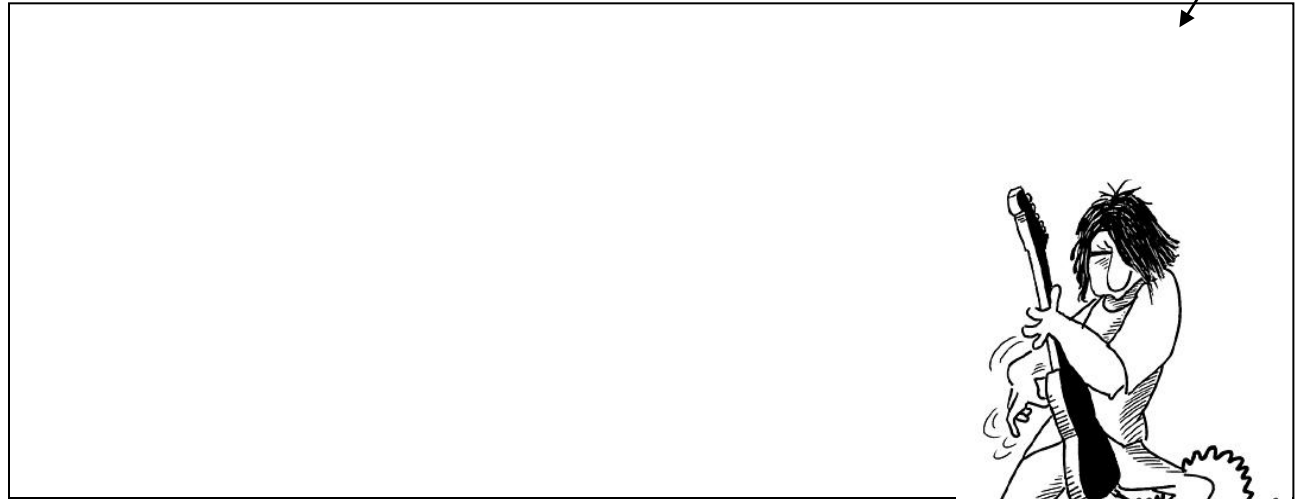
It was difficult for Michael to get Aunt Dew's attention when she was singing her long song. The music temporarily transported his hundred-year-old great-great aunt to another time and another place. Of course, music doesn't require a person to be one hundred years old for a sojourn into its realm. All ages are welcome.

What song, like Aunt Dew's long song, takes you to a world of your own? When you are under its spell, what thoughts are floating through your head? Are you thinking about the message in the words? Do you sometimes imagine that you are a star performing the song before cheering fans? Does the beat stay in your imagination or do your feet demand to move?

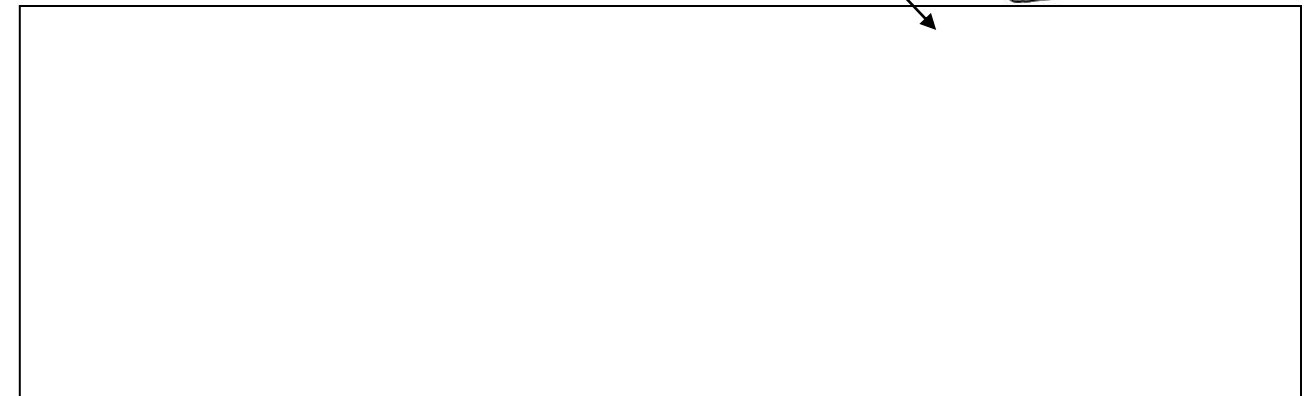
Organize your thoughts below and then write a composition about **A Sojourn with a Song**.

Name the song that you like to listen to over and over.

Where does the music take your imagination? What do you see, hear, and feel? What is happening?



Describe how the rhythm spills out of your imagination and into your body.



Explain how the music stays with you when are no longer listening to the song.

