

# 16. Reading

In Chapter 16 of the narrative, Kya experiences a deepening sense of loneliness and a thirst for human connection after her informal tutor, Tate, ceases his visitations. Compelled by a need for companionship, she ventures into Colored Town with a gift of homemade blackberry jam for Jumpin' and Mabel, acknowledging their kindness towards her. During her journey, she witnesses a disturbing racial confrontation involving Jumpin' and two disrespectful white boys, which prompts her to take a physical stand in defense of the older man.

Returning home, Kya's feelings of isolation intensify until Tate reappears, ready to continue her reading lessons. He introduces her to the wonders of alphabets and words, choosing Aldo Leopold's "A Sand County Almanac" as her first reading material. This marks a significant turning point for Kya, as she not only begins to grasp reading, which opens new worlds to her, but also finds a profound connection with Tate, her mentor and friend.

Their lessons expand beyond literacy, touching on natural sciences and basic arithmetic, areas where Kya's knowledge already shines. As her abilities grow, so does her curiosity about the world and her own personal history. She begins exploring texts with newfound independence, discovering her family's names and histories through an old Bible—a revelation that brings her closer to the roots she has lost.

Through Tate's patient guidance, Kya's world is transformed. She learns the power of words, the joy of discovery, and the pain of her own family's legacy. Reading and learning become sources of joy and empowerment for Kya, allowing her to label her specimens and explore her environment with an enriched understanding. This chapter emphasizes the transformative power of education, the significance of human connection, and the harsh realities of racial discrimination in Kya's world. It showcases a pivotal moment in her life, one that significantly impacts her sense of self and her view of the world around her.