Saints at the River Questions

p.3-5
1. What is Ron Rash’s view of nature? How do you know?
2. What is Ron Rash’s view of death? How do you know?

Chapter 1
1. Who is the narrator? Describe her.
2. Who is Lee Gervais? Describe him.
4. Maggie makes some judgments in the first part of this chapter, where does she get her wisdom? Give an example from p. 12
5. Based upon the information you find at the top of p. 13 and on p. 15, speculate (make an educated guess) on Maggie’s relationship with her hometown and her family.

Chapter 2
1. Make a list of all the terms, sayings, allusions that you can find. Do you understand them? Does understanding them, or not, hinder your ability to know what’s going on? (Continue this list throughout the book.)
2. Who is Billy? Describe him.
4. What does the existence of “the special” tell you about the people in Oconee County?
5. Add any new information or impressions you gain from this chapter on Maggie’s relationship with her hometown and her family. There is no need to recopy the info. From Chap. 1 # 5

Chapter 3
1. Read the paragraph on p. 47 beginning with, “I glanced at Allen” and speculate what this detail reveals about Allen’s character.
2. Read the paragraph on p. 49 that begins with “Brennon’s voice had the same” and tell what it reveals about the people of Oconee County. (Hint: remember a similar comment about Lee Gervais in chapter one.)
3. List all the internal and external conflicts you can identify in the story so far. (internal conflicts occur within a person’s heart/mind; external conflicts occur between entities (people, institutions, forces) You should come up with at least four significant conflicts.
4. Explain how the incident on pages 41-43 impacts the conflicts in the story.

Chapter 4
1. Describe the relationship between Maggie and her father. What caused it to be the way it is?
2. Why is Maggie’s daddy’s dream significant p. 80-81?
3. How does setting work to forward the theme of this book on p. 81, 83, 84?
4. What is the significance of Luke’s remark about reality on p. 88?
5. Read the last two paragraphs of Chapter 4 and tell what Maggie is doing and whether she believes what she is saying.
6. Now that you know much more about Luke Miller, add to your answer for # 3 of Chapter 2.

Chapter 5
1. How does the conflict between Luke and Allen on pages 99-101 reflect Emerson’s suggestion that “a man must know how to estimate a sour face?”
2. What does Maggie’s putting on lipstick and blush on p. 102 reveal about her personality. (Tip: I know WHY she’s putting it on; I’m asking what it reveals about her personality. Be NICE.)
3. What is Bryan’s philosophy regarding his business and nature? p. 103-104
4. Read Maggie’s observation of the Mosley family. Tell what Maggie thinks about: whether they are happy, whether they have good lives; whether she (Maggie) would have been happy with the same life; now, tell what YOU think about those same three things. Support your answers with evidence from the text. p. 104-5
5. What do you think about the exchange between Luke and Allen between the last paragraph of p. 105 and the 6th line of p. 106?
6. What do you think of Luke’s version of “right” at the bottom of 106 and the top of 107?
8. What does what Maggie say about Ronny and Randy’s willingness to talk say about mountain people? p. 110
9. What is a bonding fire and what does it have to do with the people of Ocone County?

Italicized pages at the beginning of Part II  p. 127-130
10. These pages tell what happened to Maggie and Ben. What is the connection that Rash is making by placing this passage in italics at the beginning of Part Two, similar to how he placed another passage in italics at the beginning of Part One? Save this question for later.

Chapter 6
11. How does Rash use setting to reveal character on p. 130? (We discussed this.)
12. We need to come back to the discussion of photography at the beg. of Chap. 6 later.
13. How does Maggie feel about the picture she created? How do you know?
14. How do you think Kowalsky would feel about this picture being published? How do you know?
15. Why does Allen react so strongly when Maggie steps out in front of a car?
16. What is ironic about Maggie’s saying, “You can’t feel bad about things you didn’t know.”?
17. Maggie suggests that it seems cruel for Hudson to give Allen this assignment knowing that he’s lost his family. Why does Hudson do it? p. 137
18. What is Allen’s motivation for getting involved in the Kowalsky cause? p. 141
19. Describe your impression of fatherhood based upon the images of fatherhood we’ve seen so far.
21. How does the description of death on p. 144 reflect Romantic sentiment?
22. If you were Ben would you be as forgiving? Why/Why not?
23. Ben says to Maggie on p. 147 that her inability to forgive her dad is “about being afraid of what you’ll feel if you can’t feel hurt and anger.” What is she afraid to feel?
24. On p. 149 it talks about “[internalizing] the landscape.” How does the landscape reflect the personalities of Ocone County locals. Give at least two examples.

Chapter 7
1. The following lines are from Luke’s e-mail to Maggie after her picture is published: “It’s the only free-flowing river left in this state. Is it too much to ask that one river in South Carolina not be turned into a lake or open sewer? Just one, Maggie, one river left alone? Is that so radical, so uncompromising?” Do you agree with Luke? Why?
3. When Lee tells Maggie that she’s “in high cotton” because of the positive reception her photo has received, she asks if that means that she “can get that Volvo [she’s] been wanting all [her] life? It’s a flippant remark, but what does it reveal about Maggie’s subconscious desires? Think about what a Volvo could symbolize, and consider Maggie’s observation of the Mosely family in Chap. 5.
4. What is Lee forgetting on p. 155 when he says “This is the best thing that could happen for everyone involved?”
5. What Emersonian quality does Luke display on p. 156-7 regarding the negative e-mail he received?
6. What is ironic about the line “Seeing is believing” on p. 157?
7. What can you infer about the bullet holes mentioned on p. 28 and p. 157? Fully defend your claim.

9. Do you believe that truth can be staged?

10. What could be dangerous about staged truth?

11. What is significant about the fact that, when choosing the Phillips photo, Maggie selects “the one with the widest perspective?”

12. What does the allusion to Solomon have to do with the plot of Saints at the River? (How is the allusion to Solomon apt?)

13. What is ironic about the choice of Luckadoo for Supervisor of Forests? p. 160

14. Why is Maggie defensive in her response to Luke at the bottom of p. 160? (“my voice more defensive than I’d have liked.”)

15. What does it reveal about Maggie’s personality that she “began to dress like the others” referring to Luke’s followers? p. 161 Consider also her application of make-up for Allen.

16. Luke takes Maggie to his “favorite place in the whole watershed” where he offers her a drink “from three springs…It’s the purest water in the state…‘Drink and be whole again beyond all confusion.’” These waters feed the Tamassee. How do these lines provide symbolic support for Luke’s Romantic view of the river?

17. Pages 162-4 discuss the social mores (rules/expectations) of Oconee County girls. On p. 166 Maggie makes a deliberate decision to separate herself from that code.


19. On p. 170-1, Maggie feels that she may have been to quick to stereotype Kowalsky (“made judgments that were a little too easy and convenient”). Who else has been too quickly stereotyped, and by whom?

20. What does the reaction to the Atlanta Constitution’s photographer reveal about the people gathered at the meeting on p. 171. Who are these people and why is this fact significant?

21. Why does Ron Rash use the term “confessional booth” in the first paragraph on p. 172?

22. Why does Ellen have local support for getting her daughter out of the river? p. 172-3

23. Using evidence from pgs. 167, 168, and 174, show how “we take care of our own.”

24. Do you think that Maggie’s dad set her up to have to drive him home in order to get a chance to apologize to her about Ben’s accident? Give textual evidence.

25. Why doesn’t Maggie press her dad for the answers to her questions: “why did you treat Ben like it was his fault…why didn’t you ever tell me that I shouldn’t blame myself?” p.176

26. Please explain Maggie’s distaste for the memory of her father’s attention on p. 178.

27. What do you make of the connection between water and mirrors as conduits to the afterlife? p. 64, 179

Chapter 8

1. How does Maggie reflect Romantic thought on p. 182?

2. Explain Maggie’s internal conflict on p. 183.

3. What Emersonian qualities does Maggie display on p. 183 during her conversation with Allen?


5. What does the fact that Brennon cannot remember the Mosley’s name reveal about Brennon’s character?

6. On p. 189, how does the setting work symbolically to forward a theme of the book? It appears again on p. 192.

7. What does Maggie’s assessment of the river reveal about her character? p. 191

8. The image of the dead raccoon has several purposes. Discuss two.

9. What purpose do the following images serve: the spectators splashing in the pool, the man eating a Hardee’s biscuit standing where Herb Kowalsky stood in Maggie’s picture?

10. On p. 193, Maggie says, “Maybe I’ll have one good memory of this place.” How does this statement reflect Emerson’s idea of “ignorance.”
11. How does Billy’s hope that “There’s still enough wild acreage left up here to hide a few things” reflect Romantic sentiment. Don’t tell me “Nature.” What about nature?

12. On page 198, Maggie asserts the power of the river and the power of local knowledge. That Phillips “[scans] the river’s edge, [looking] like a man trying to read a language he [doesn’t] understand” shows his humility in knowing that he doesn’t have local knowledge. Phillips defers to Brennon only because of the pressure from his bosses, not because he doesn’t believe the locals. He needs to become self-reliant.

13. On p. 202, Maggie wonders who Sheriff Cantrell would consider “the bad guys” in this situation. Who do you think RON RASH thinks the bad guys are? Give evidence to support your answer.

14. Who do YOU think the bad guys are in this situation? Give evidence to support your answer.

15. Do you think that Randy’s willingness to dive under the dam is believable on p. 203 or is it too dramatic to be realistic? Support your answer.

16. What is interesting about Ronny and Randy’s speech patterns on p. 203? What does it reveal about them?

17. “One black fin broke the surface and he was gone.” How can you relate this quote to the question about mirrors? (What do you make of the connection between water and mirrors as conduits to the afterlife? p. 64, 179)

18. On p. 205, Randy is trapped, but Maggie “[doesn’t] turn or reach [her] hand back to grasp [Allen’s].” What does this reveal about Maggie’s character?

19. Ron Rash’s references to dogwoods culminate in the image of Ellen Kowalsky being led from the pool by Allen. What connection does the legend of the dogwood have to this story? Refer to p. 222 for more support for your answer.

Chapter 9

1. What do you think about the Sheriff’s decision to handcuff Ronny until well after Randy’s air had run out? Why do you think he did it? Assume a local’s perspective. The answer must be inferred. It’s not in the book.

2. On p. 209, what does Allen mean when he says “We’re in this together.”? In what?

3. Notice on p. 211 that the longer Maggie stays, the further back she is able to remember. She remembers a time that her dad said “It would near about kill your daddy if one of his babies was to get hurt,” and she doesn’t comment negatively about remembering it as she did earlier about another “inconvenient memory.”

4. What is ironic about Maggie’s seeking solace in a hot shower on p. 211? How does it reflect Romantic ideals?

5. Why does Maggie call her dad on p. 214-215? How is it significant to their relationship? What is significant about her sleep pattern that night? Consider p. 79 and p. 155 as you answer.

6. How does the first full paragraph on p. 216 reflect a resistance to Emersonian ideas?

7. Whose face do you think Maggie sees on p. 217? Why?

8. On p. 219, Maggie enters the cave that she has not been to since she discovered it in her childhood. What is the significance of what she discovers there, and what is the significance of her staying there?

9. The mention of the Smithsonian’s recording Aunt Margaret’s voice serves two purposes: one, to show that a fashionable interest in Appalachian culture had developed in the “outside” world; two, to show that Appalachian culture was dying and had to be preserved artificially instead of being passed “knee to knee” as it had been.

10. What Emersonian trait does Phillips display on p. 225?

11. What is ironic about Maggie’s desire to be “more generous to” Kowalsky on p. 228?

12. What do you think about Ronny’s decision to throw dynamite into the pool? What does Ronny’s action reveal about local knowledge? Consider the last paragraph of the book and Romantic sentiment.

Chapter 10

1. What do you think about the resolution that Maggie and her daddy have to their relationship?

2. What do you make of Maggie’s taking her dad’s jean jacket?

3. What do you make of Maggie and Ben’s decision not to sell their family land?

4. Why do you think Earl Wilkinson acknowledges Maggie as she stands on the bridge, but doesn’t smile?

5. What was the most damaging thing done to the Tamassee?

6. What is the main conflict of this story?

7. What is Ron Rash trying to teach us through this story?