

The Wife of His Youth – Charles W. Chesnutt

[The Wife of His Youth](#) is a famous short story by the American author [Charles W. Chesnutt](#). Charles Chesnutt was a renowned writer and a lawyer who wrote short stories as well as novels. He is best known for his novel “The House Behind the Cedars” which has critical acclaim in the literature circles. The short story “the wife of his youth” was penned in July 1898.

Considered by many literature experts as the first work where the protagonist is of a mixed race, it opened doors into a new world of fiction in the 19th century. The Wife of His Youth addresses many themes such as the inner conflicts of classism and colorism even within the black community.

This story is included into the high school curriculum of the USA and is read by hundreds of thousands of children across the world. You can download a free PDF copy of The Wife of His Youth story right below and also download a worksheet with many questions and answers.

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Dean of the Blue Veins

Mr. Ryder was going to give a ball. There were several reasons why this was an opportune time for such an event.

Mr. Ryder might aptly be called the dean of the Blue Veins. The original Blue Veins were a little society of colored persons organized in a certain Northern city shortly after the war. Its purpose was to establish and maintain correct social standards among a people whose social condition presented almost inherited room for improvement.

By accident, combined perhaps with some natural affinity, the society consisted of individuals who were, generally speaking, more white than black. Some envious outsider made the suggestion that no one was eligible for membership who was not white enough to show blue veins.

The suggestion was readily adopted by these who were not of the favored few, and since that time the society, though possessing a longer and more pretentious name, had been known far and wide as the "Blue Vein Society," and its members as the 'Blue Veins.'

The Blue Veins did not allow that any such requirement existed for admission to their circle, but, on the contrary, declared that character and culture were the only things considered and that if most of their members were light-colored, it was because such persons, as a rule, had had better opportunities to qualify themselves for membership.

Opinions differed, too, as to the usefulness of the society. There were those who had been known to assail it violently as a glaring example of the very prejudice from which the colored race had suffered most; and later, when such critics had succeeded in getting on the inside, they had been heard to maintain with zeal and earnestness that the society was a life-boat, an anchor, a bulwark and a shield—a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, to guide their people through the social wilderness.

Another alleged prerequisite for Blue Vein membership was that of free birth; and while there was really no such requirement, it is doubtless true that very few of the members would have been unable to meet it if there had been. If there were one or two of the olden' members who had come up from the South and from slavery, their history presented enough romantic circumstances to rob their servile origin of its grosser aspects.

While there were no such tests of eligibility, it is true that the Blue Veins had their notions on these subjects, and that not all of them were equally liberal in regard to these things they collectively disclaimed, Mr. Ryder was one of the most conservative.

I am Mr. Ryder

Though he had not been among the founders of this society, but had come in some years later, his genius for social leadership was such that he had speedily become its recognized adviser and head, the custodian of its standards, and the preserver of its traditions.

He shaped its social policy, was active in providing for its entertainment, and when the interest fell off, as it sometimes did, he fanned the embers until they burst again into a cheerful flame.

There were still other reasons for his popularity. While he was not as white as some of the Blue Veins, his appearance was such as to confer distinction upon them. His features were of a refined

type, his hair was almost straight; he was always neatly dressed; his manners were irreproachable, and his morals above suspicion.

He had come to Groveland a young man, and obtaining employment in the office of a railroad company as messenger had in time worked himself up to the position of stationery clerk, having charge of the distribution of the office supplies for the whole company.

Although the lack of early training had hindered the orderly development of a naturally fine mind, it had not prevented him from doing a great deal of reading or from forming decidedly literary tastes. Poetry was his passion. He could repeat whole pages of the great English poets; and if his pronunciation was sometimes faulty, his eye, his voice, his gestures, would respond to the changing sentiment with a precision that revealed a poetic soul and disarmed criticism.

He was economical, and had saved money; he owned and occupied a very comfortable house on a respectable street. His residence was handsomely furnished, containing among other things a good library, especially rich in poetry, a piano, and some choice engravings. He generally shared his house with some young couple, who looked after his wants and were company for him; for Mr. Ryder was a single man.

In the early days of his connection with the Blue Veins he had been regarded as quite a catch, and ladies and their mothers had manoeuvred with much ingenuity to capture him. Not, however, until Mrs. Molly Dixon visited Groveland had any woman ever made him wish to change his condition to that of a married man.

The beautiful Mrs. Molly Dixon

Mrs. Dixon had come to Groveland from Washington in the spring, and before the summer was over she had won Mr. Ryder's heart. She possessed many attractive qualities. She was much younger than he; in fact, he was old enough to have been her father, though no one knew exactly how old he was.

She was whiter than he, and better educated. She had moved in the best colored society of the country, at Washington, and had taught in the schools of that city. Such a superior person had been eagerly welcomed to the Blue Vein Society, and had taken a leading part in its activities.

Mr. Ryder had at first been attracted by her charms of person, for she was very good looking and not over twenty-five; then by her refined manners and by the vivacity of her wit. Her husband had been a government clerk, and at his death had left a considerable life insurance.

She was visiting friends in Groveland, and, finding the town and the people to her liking, had prolonged her stay indefinitely. She had not seemed displeased at Mr. Ryder's attentions, but on the contrary had given him every proper encouragement; indeed, a younger and less cautious man would long since have spoken.

But he had made up his mind, and had only to determine the time when he would ask her to be his wife. He decided to give a ball in her honor, and at some time during the evening of the ball to offer her his heart and hand.

He had no special fears about the outcome, but, with a little touch of romance, he wanted the surroundings to be in harmony with his own feelings when he should have received the answer he expected.

The Ball to surpass them all

Mr. Ryder resolved that this ball should mark an epoch in the social history of Groveland. He knew, of course—no one could know better—the entertainments that had taken place in past years, and what must be done to surpass them. His ball must be worthy of the lady in whose honor it was to be given, and must, by the quality of its guests, set an example for the future.

He had observed of late a growing liberality, almost a laxity, in social matters, even among members of his own set, and had several times been forced to meet in a social way persons whose complexions and callings in life were hardly up to the standard which he considered proper for the society to maintain. He had a theory of his own.

"I have no race prejudice," he would say, "but we people of mixed blood are ground between the upper and the nether millstone. Our fate lies between absorption by the white race and extinction in the black. The one doesn't want us yet, but may take us in time. The other would welcome us, but it would be for us a backward step. 'With malice towards none, with charity for all,' we must do the best we can for ourselves and those who are to follow us. Self-preservation is the first law of nature."

His ball would serve by its exclusiveness to counteract leveling tendencies, and his marriage with Mrs. Dixon would help to further the upward process of absorption he had been wishing and waiting for.

PART 2 – A poem of beauty

The ball was to take place on Friday eight. The house had been put in order, the carpets covered with canvas, the halls and stairs decorated with palms and potted plants; and in the afternoon Mr. Ryder sat on his front porch, which the shade of a vine running up over a wire netting made a cool and pleasant lounging-place.

He expected to respond to the toast "The Ladies," at the supper, and from a volume of 'Tennyson—his favorite poet—was fortifying himself with apt quotations. The volume was open at A Dream of Fair Women. His eyes fell on these lines, and he read them aloud to judge better of their effect:

"At length I saw a lady within call,

Stillier than chisoll'd marble, standing there;

A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,

And most divinely fair."

He marked the verse, and turning the page read the stanza beginning, -

O sweet pale Margaret,

O rare pale Margaret."

He weighed the passage a moment, and decided that it would not do. Mrs. Dixon was time palest lady he expected at the ball, and she was of a rather ruddy complexion, and of lively disposition and buxom build. So he ran over the leaves until his eye rested on the description of Queen Guinevere:

"She seem'd a part of joyous Spring:

A gown of grass-green silk she wore,

Buckled with golden clasps before;

A light-green tuft of plumes she bore

Closed in a golden ring.

"She look'd so lovely as she sway'd

The rein with dainty finger-tips,

A man had given all other bliss,

And all his worldly worth for this

To waste his whole heart in one kiss

Upon her perfect lips."

As Mr. Ryder murmured these words audibly, with an appreciative thrill, he heard the latch of his gate click, and a light footfall sounding on the steps. He turned his head, and saw a woman standing before the door.

The woman with a story

She was a little woman, not five foot tall and proportioned to her height. Although she stood erect, and looked around her with very bright and restless eyes, she seemed quite old; for her face was crossed and recrossed with a hundred wrinkles, and around the edges of her bonnet could be soon protruding here and there a tuft of short gray wool.

She wore a blue calico gown of ancient cut, a little red shawl fastened around her shoulders with an old-fashioned brass brooch, and a large bonnet profusely ornamented with faded red and yellow artificial flowers.

And she was very black—so black that her toothless gums, revealed when she opened her mouth to speak, were not red, but blue. She looked like a bit of the old plantation life, summoned from the past by the wave of a magician's wand, as the poet's fancy had called into being the gracious shapes of which Mr. Ryder had just been reading.

Ho rose from his chair and came over to where she stood.

"Good-afternoon, madam," he said.

" Good-evenin', suh," she answered, ducking suddenly with a quaint curtsy. Her voice was shrill and piping, but softened somewhat by age. "Is dis yere whar Mistuh Ryduh lib, suh?" she asked, looking around her doubtfully, and glancing into the open windows, through which some of the preparations for the evening were visible.

"Yes," he replied, with an air of kindly patronage, unconsciously flattered by her manner, "I am Mr. Ryder. Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, suh, if I ain't 'sturbin' of you too much."

"Not at all. Have a seat over here behind the vine, where it is cool. What can I do for you?"

" 'Scuse me, suh," she continued, when she had sat down on the edge of a chair, " 'scuse me, suh, I's lookin' for my husban'. I heard you wuz a big man as' had libbed heah a long time, an' I 'lowed you wouldn't min' ef I'd como roun' an' ax you ef you'd eber heard of a merlatter man by de name er Sam taylor 'quirin' roun' in de chu'ches ermongs' de people fer his wife 'Liza Jane?"

Mr. Ryder seemed to think for a moment.

"There used to be many such cases right after the war," he said, "but it has been so long that I have forgotten them. There are very few now. But tell me your story, and it may refresh my memory."

She sat back farther in her chair so as to be more comfortable, and folded her withered hands in her lap.

Liza Jane, the Wife and cook

"My name's 'Liza," she began, "'Liza Jane. W'en I wuz young I us'ter b'long ter Mares Bob Smif, down in ole Missoura. I wuz bawn down dere. W'en I wuz a gal I wuz married ter a man named Jim. But Jim died, an' after dat I married a merlatter man named Sam Taylor. Sam wuz free-bawn, but his mammy and daddy died, an' de w'ite folks 'prenticed him ter my marster fer ter work for 'im 'tel he wuz growed up. Sam worked in de fiel', an' I wuz de cook. One day Ma'y Ann, ole miss's maid, come rushin' out ter de kitchen, an' says she, ' 'Liza Jane, ole marse gwine sell yo' Sam down de ribber.'

"'Go way f'm yere,' says I; 'my husban' 's free!'

"'Don' make no diff'ence. I heerd old marse tell ole miss he wuz gwine take yo' Sam 'way 'wid 'im ter-morrow, fer he needed money, an' he knowed whar he could git a t'ousan dollars fer Sam an' no questions axed.'

"Wen Sam come home f'm de fiel', dat night, I tole him 'bout ole marse gwine steal 'im, an' Sam run erway. His time wuz mos' up, an' he swo' dat we'n he wuz twenty-one he would come back an' he'p me run erway, or else save up de money ter buy my freedom. An I know he 'd 'a' done it, fer he thought a heap er me, Sam did. But w'en he come back he did n' fin' me, fer I wuz n' dere. Ole marse had heerd dat I warned Sam, so he had me whip' an' sol' down do ribber.

"Den de wah broke out, an' w'en it wuz ober' de cullud folks wuz scattered. I went back ter de ole home; but Sam wuz n' dere, an' I could n' l'arn nuffin' 'bout 'im. But I knowed he'd be'n dere to look for me an' had n' foun' me, an' had gone erway ter hunt fer me.

"I's be'n lookin' fer 'im eber sence," she added simply, as though twenty-five years were but a couple of weeks, " an' I knows he's be'n lookin' for me. Fer he sot a heap er sto' by me, Sam did, an' I know he's be'n huntin' fer me all dese years—'less'n he's be'n sick er sump'n, so he could n' work, er out'n his head, so he could n' 'member his promise. I went back down de ribber, fer I 'lowed he'd gone down dere lookin' for me. I's be'n ter Noo Orleans, an' Atlanty, an' Charleston, an' Richmon'; an' w'en I'd be'n all ober de Souf I come to de Norf. Fer I knows I'll fin' 'im some er dese days," she added softly, "er he'll fin' me, an' den we'll bofe be as happy in freedom as we wuz in de ole days befo' de wah."

A smile stole over her withered countenance as she paused a moment, and her bright eyes softened into a far-away look.

The confidence of the woman

This was the substance of the old woman's story. She had wandered a little here and there. Mr. Ryder was looking at her curiously when she finished.

"How have you lived all these years?" be asked.

"Cookin', suh. I 's a good cook. Does you know anybody w'at needs a good cook, suh? I 's stoppin' wid a cullud fam'ly roun' de corner yonder 'tel I kin fin' a place."

"Do you really expect to find your husband? He may be dead long ago."

She shook her head emphatically. "Oh no, he ain' dead. De signs an' de tokens tells me. I drempt three nights runnin' on'y dis las' week dat I foun' him."

"He may have married another woman. Your slave marriage would not have prevented him, for you never lived with him after the war, and without that your marriage doesn't count."

"Would n' make no diff'ence wid Sam. He would n' marry no yuther 'ooman 'tel he foun' out 'bout me. I knows it," she added. "Sump'n's be'n tellin' me all dese years dat I's gwine fin' Sam 'fo' I dies."

"Perhaps he's outgrown you, and climbed up in the world where he wouldn't care to have you find him."

"No, indeed, suh," she replied, " Sam ain' dat kin' er man. He wuz good ter me, Sam wuz, but he wuz n' much good ter nobody e'se, fer he wuz one er de triflin'es' han's on de plantation. I 'spec's ter haf

ter suppo't 'im w'en I fin' 'im, fer he nebber would work 'less'n he had ter. But den he wuz free, an' he did n' git no pay fer his work, an' I don' blame 'im much. Mebbe he's done better sence he run erway, but I ain' 'spectin' much."

"You may have passed him on the street a hundred times during the twenty-five years, and not have known him; time works great changes."

She smiled incredulously. "I 'd know 'im 'mong's' a hund'ed men. Fer dey wuz n' no yuther merlatter man like my man Sam, an' I could n' be mistook. I's toted his picture roun' wid me twenty-five years."

The portrait of the man

"May I see it?" asked Mr. Ryder. "It might help me to remember whether I have seen the original."

As she drew a small parcel from her bosom, he saw that it was fastened to a string that went around her neck. Removing several wrappers, she brought to light all old-fashioned daguerreotype in a black case. He looked long and intently at this portrait. It was faded with time, but the features were still distinct, and it was easy to see what manner of man it had represented.

He closed the case, and with a show movement handed it back to her.

"I don't know of any mail in town who goes by that name," he said, "nor have I heard of any one making such inquiries. But if you will leave me your address, I will give the matter some attention, and if I find out anything I will let you know."

She gave him the number of a house in the neighborhood, and went away, after thanking him warmly.

He wrote down the address on the flyleaf of the volume of Tennyson, and, when she had gone, rose to his feet and stood looking after her curiously. As she walked down the street with mincing step, he saw several persons whom she passed turn and look back at her with a smile of kindly amusement.

When she had turned the corner, he went upstairs to his bedroom, and stood for a long time before the mirror of his dressing case, gazing thoughtfully at the reflection of his own face.

PART III – The ball

At eight o'clock the ballroom was a glare of light and the guests had begun to assemble; for there was a literary programme and some routine business of the society to be gone through with before the dancing. A black servant in evening dress waited at the door and directed the guests to the dressing-rooms.

The occasion was long memorable among the colored people of the city; not alone for the dress and display, but for the high average of intelligence and culture that distinguished the gathering as a whole.

There were a number of school-teachers, several young doctors, three or four lawyers, some professional singers, an editor, a lieutenant in the United States army spending his furlough in the city, and others in various polite callings; these were colored, though most of them would not have attracted even a casual glance because of any marked difference from white people.

Most of the ladies were in evening costume, and dress coats and dancing pumps were the rule among the men. A band of string music, stationed in an alcove behind a row of palms, played popular airs while the guests were gathering.

The dancing began at half past nine. At eleven o'clock supper was served. Mr. Ryder had left the ballroom some little time before the intermission, but reappeared at the supper-table. The spread was worthy of the occasion, and the guests did full justice to it.

When the coffee had been served, the toastmaster, Mr. Solomon Sadler, rapped for order. He made a brief introductory speech, complimenting host and guests, and then presented in their order the toasts of the evening. They were responded to with a very fair display of after-dinner wit.

"The last toast," said the toast-master, when he reached the end of the list, "is one which must appeal to us all. There is no one of us of the sterner sex who is not at some time dependent upon woman—in infancy for protection, in manhood for companionship, in old age for care and comforting. Our good host has been trying to live alone, but the fair faces I see around me to-night prove that he too is largely dependent upon the gentler sex for most that makes life worth living—the society and love of friends—and rumor is at fault if he does not soon yield entire subjection to one of them. Mr. Ryder will now respond to the toast—The Ladies."

The wife of his youth

There was a pensive look in Mr. Ryder's eyes as he took the floor and adjusted his eyeglasses. He began by speaking of woman as the gift of heaven to man, and after some general observations on the relations of the sexes he said: "But perhaps the quality which most distinguishes woman is her fidelity and devotion to those she loves. History is full of examples, but has recorded none more striking than one which only today came under my notice."

He then related, simply but effectively, the story told by his visitor of the afternoon. He told it in the same soft dialect, which came readily to his lips, while the company listened attentively and sympathetically. For the story had awakened a responsive thrill in many hearts.

There were some present who had seen, and others who heard their fathers and grandfathers tell, the wrongs and sufferings of this past generation, and all of them still felt, in their darker moments, the shadow hanging over them. Mr. Ryder went on:

"Such devotion and such confidence are rare even among women. There are many who would have searched a year, some who would have waited five years, a few who might have hoped ten years;

but for twenty-five years this woman has retained her affection for and her faith in a man she has not seen or heard of in all that time.

“She came to me today in the hope that I might be able to help her find this long-lost husband. And when she was gone I gave my fancy rein, and imagined a case I will put to you.

“Suppose that this husband, soon after his escape, had learned that his wife had been sold away, and that such inquiry as he could make brought no information of her whereabouts. Suppose that he was young, and she much older than he; that he was light, and she was black; that their marriage was a slave marriage, and legally binding only if they chose to make it so after the war. Suppose, too, that he made his way to the North, as some of us have done, and there, where he had larger opportunities, had improved them, and had in the course of all those years grown to be as different from the ignorant boy who ran away from fear of slavery as the day is from the night. Suppose, even, that he had qualified himself, by industry, by thrift, and by study, to win the friendship and be considered worthy the society of such people as these I see around me tonight, gracing my board and filling my heart with gladness; for I am old enough to remember the day when such a gathering would not have been possible in this land. Suppose, too, that, as the years went by, this man's memory of the past grew more and more indistinct, until at last it was rarely, except in his dreams, that any image of this bygone period rose before his mind.”

“And then suppose that accident should bring to his knowledge the fact that the wife of his youth, the wife he had left behind him—not one who had walked by his side and kept pace with him in his upward struggle, but one upon whom advancing years and a laborious life had set their mark—was alive and seeking him, but that he was absolutely safe from recognition or discovery, unless he chose to reveal himself. My friends, what would the man do? I will suppose that he was one who loved honor, and tried to deal justly with all men. I will even carry the case further, and suppose that perhaps he had set his heart upon another, whom he had hoped to call his own. What would he do, or rather what ought he to do, in such a crisis of a lifetime?”

The wife of my youth

"It seemed to me that he might hesitate, and I imagined that I was an old friend, a near friend, and that he had come to me for advice; and I argued the case with him. I tried to discuss it impartially. After we had looked upon the matter from every point of view, I said to him, in words that we all know"

'This above all: to thine own self be true,

And it must follow, as the night the day,

Thou canst not then be false to any man.'

Then, finally, I put the question to him, 'Shall you acknowledge her?'

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, friends and companions, I ask you, what should he have done?”

There was something in Mr. Ryder's voice that stirred the hearts of those who sat around him. It suggested more than mere sympathy with an imaginary situation; it seemed rather in the nature of a personal appeal. It was observed, too, that his look rested more especially upon Mrs. Dixon, with a mingled expression of renunciation and inquiry.

She had listened, with parted lips and streaming eyes. She was the first to speak "He should have acknowledged her."

"Yes," they all echoed, "he should have acknowledged her."

"My friends and companions," responded Mr. Ryder, "I thank you, one and all. It is the answer I expected, for I knew your hearts."

He turned and walked toward the closed door of an adjoining room, while every eye followed him in wondering curiosity. He came back in a moment, leading by the hand his visitor of the afternoon, who stood startled and trembling at the sudden plunge into this scene of brilliant gayety. She was neatly dressed in gray, and wore the white cap of all elderly woman.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "this is the woman, and I am this man, whose story I have told you. Permit me to introduce to you this wife of my youth."

Theme and moral of the story

The moral of the story "The Wife of His Youth" is "The Wife of His Youth" one must overcome divisions between classes to forge solidarity between oppressed people. The main theme behind this story is that colour and class prejudice not only exists between white and colored people but could exist even among members of Black and mixed-race.

Summary of the Wife of His Youth

Mr. Ryder is the protagonist of the short story "The Wife of His Youth". Mr. Ryder is a man of mixed race who heads the "Blue Veins Society", a famous social organization which allows inclusion of colored people in a northern town.

The Blue Veins Society consists of people with a higher proportion of European ancestry, similar to Mr. Ryder and hence they would look more white than black.

Mr. Ryder is unmarried and is quite popular in town. He is sought after by the town's women but he wishes to be married to Mrs. Molly Dixon. Molly is a widowed light mixed-race woman from Washington.

He organizes a great ball during which he plans to propose to her. Since he is organizing the ball, he is giving the keynote speech during which time he plans to propose. Just before his speech when he is alone, an older plain-looking black woman introduces herself as Liza Jane

She is searching for her husband Sam Taylor, whom she has not seen in 25 years, since the Civil war. She reveals that she was married long ago to Sam Taylor before the Civil War. At that time, she and Sam was enslaved. She reveals that Sam was hired as an apprentice to the family of her master.

Taylor was already freed and was no longer a slave. However the family is very cruel to black people and tries to sell him back into slavery. She is kind and assists Sam in escaping, and Sam promised to return and free her, but she was sold to a different master.

Ryder asks her many questions trying to see if she believes if Taylor could have died or might have outgrown her or could have even remarried. However, she says that her love is true and so is his and that she believes that her husband has remained faithful.

Mr. Ryder advises her any slave marriages which were made before the Civil war did not count as a legal marriage. She shows him an old picture of Sam and leaves.

At the ball Ryder decides to abandon his plan and makes an emotional address to the members about 'Liza Jane's story. At the end of the story, he asks the attendees whether or not they think the man should acknowledge his wife. He says that if the person does not reveal who he is, no one would know. However the crowd says that he should acknowledge his wife.

He brings out the shivering woman 'Liza and says, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is the woman, and I am the man, whose story I have told you. Permit me to introduce to you the wife of my youth."

Analysis of the Wife of His Youth

- In the short story "The Wife of His Youth", the author explores the concept of race consciousness experienced among those of mixed race.
- Until this time, mixed races were quite rare and were an oddity because of the existence of systemic slavery. Mixed race marriages were unheard of in North America.
- Until this story, most short stories and novella discussed relationships between white people, in between black people and also relationships between whites and black people.
- In this story the whole point of focus is around the troubles and mental choices faced by the mixed race.
- Ryder is a man of mixed race who tries his level best to ignore his ancestral black roots. This is shown when he tries to speak in the accent and tongue of privileged "white" English people.
- His choice to become more imbibed and accepted by the white people is also seen when he emulates books like Tennyson.
- Ryder can be described as pretentious and class driven, and is seen to be concerned about the delineations in class based on color of one's skin.

- He promotes advancement of lighter-skinned people, some of whom were privileged enough to have already been educated before the Civil war.
- Ryder can also be seen in positive light by trying to abandon his past of slavery and to move into a more promising future.
- The Author uses verbal, dramatic, and situational irony in copious amounts. An example of the irony is that Blue Vein Society does not consider skin color as a membership criterion although it is predominantly light skinned.
- A sharp contrast in the worlds of the privileged and the slaves is seen when Mr. Ryder plans a grand ball for the “Blue Veins” society, as an occasion to propose marriage to Mrs. Molly Dixon. The ball symbolizes the difference in marriage proposals between the two worlds where slaves were married in private away from people’s eyes.

Questions and Answers - The Wife of His Youth – Set 1

1. Who are the main characters in The Wife of His Youth?
 - The main characters in the story are Mr. Ryder and his wife Liza Jane.
2. Who is the protagonist of the story The Wife of His Youth?
 - The protagonist of the story is Mr. Ryder, a man of mixed race.
3. Is The Wife of His Youth a true story?
 - The Wife of His Youth is not a true story and is a work of fiction. The settings are written to draw inspiration from the transition of slaves into free people in the continent of North America back in the 18th century.
4. What is the main idea or theme behind The Wife of His Youth?
 - The main theme behind this story is that colour and class prejudice not only exists between white and colored people but could exist even among members of Black and mixed-race.
5. What happened in the start of story The Wife of His Youth?
 - Mr. Ryder is planning to throw a grand ball in order to propose to Mrs. Molly Dixon.
6. What is the moral of The Wife of His Youth?
 - In the story, the author demonstrates the importance of overcoming divisions to forge solidarity between oppressed people.
7. What is the Blue Veins society?

- The Blue Veins society is an association of mixed-race people who join together to try to improve their social conditions.

Questions and Answers - The Wife of His Youth – Set 2

8. What is the symbolism of the difference between the oppressed people and the privileged classes?

- The ball that Mr. Ryder is planning as an occasion to propose marriage to Molly Dixon, symbolizes the refined social world that Mr. Ryder occupies now which is a sharp contrast to the brutal oppression faced by the black community in the era of slavery.

9. What happens at the end of The Wife of His Youth?

- Ryder acknowledges and accepts his wife, Liza Jane as advised by the fellow members of the Blue Vein Society.

10. What does the accent of and the presentation of Liza Jane represent in The Wife of His Youth?

- Liza Jane's accent and ageing represents the physical impact of slavery on African Americans during the 1800s. Not only that, her resolution to search for her husband without losing faith represents her resilience.

11. Write a brief summary of the wife of his youth.

- The Wife of His Youth is a short story about a man whose wife finds him after searching for 25 years after slavery was abolished and his conflict in whether or not to accept her.

12. Why is Mr Ryder throwing a ball in the wife of his youth?

- Ryder throws a ball for the Blue Veins society in honor of Molly Dixon whom he intends to propose to.

13. Who was the husband of Liza Jane at the end of the wife of his youth?

- Sam Taylor, the protagonist of the story is revealed to be the husband of Liza Jane at the end of the wife of his youth.

14. What was Mr Ryder's attitude toward Liza Jane when he first meets her?

- He immediately identifies who she is but is conflicted with his emotions. He does not embrace his former wife immediately and instead probes her with questions.

15. What is the name of Mr Ryder's other alias in the wife of his youth?

- Mr. Ryder is called the dean of the Blue Veins.

16. What is the historical context of the short story the wife of his youth?

- In the short story "The Wife of His Youth", the author explores the concept of race consciousness experienced among those of mixed race. Until this time, mixed races were quite rare and were an oddity because of the existence of systemic slavery. Mixed race marriages were unheard of in North America. In this story the whole point of focus is around the troubles and mental choices faced by the mixed race.

17. What is Mr Ryder's dilemma in the wife of his youth?

- Mr. Ryder's key dilemma is whether or not to acknowledge her as his former wife. If he does not, he would be a cruel man. Accepting her would mean completely reordering his identity and life plans.

18. Who is Liza Jane?

- Liza Jane is the wife of Mr. Ryder from his past before the civil war when she was a slave.