Guided Reading and Discussion Question for HeLa Chapters 12 to 16.

Chapter 12: The Storm

1. Why did Henrietta’s doctors need to ask for her family’s permission to remove tissue samples after her death? How did Day initially respond to their request?
2. What made Day change his mind and allow the autopsy?
3. What did Mary, Gey’s assistant, realize when she saw Henrietta’s painted toenails? How was the timing of this realization ironic?
4. What happened when the family started to bury Henrietta’s body?
5. Henrietta’s cousin says that Henrietta “was tryin’ to tell us somethin’ with that storm.” What do you think she could have been trying to say?

Chapter 13: The HeLa Factory

1. Explain how a neutralization test is used to determine a vaccine’s efficacy.
2. What characteristics of HeLa cells made them ideal for use in the polio vaccine trials?
3. Why did the Tuskegee Institute become involved in the mass production of HeLa cells? Describe the depth of the Institute’s involvement.
4. Explain the inherent irony of the fact that the Tuskegee HeLa production lab was operating at the same time that the infamous syphilis study was being conducted. What does the juxtaposition of these two projects reveal about race relations in the early 1950s?
5. Paraphrase the explanation of how a virus reproduces found on page 97. Why did the fact that HeLa cells are malignant make them particularly useful in the study of viruses?
6. Why was the development of methods of freezing cells an important scientific breakthrough?
7. Why is standardization important in scientific research?
8. Why did scientists want to be able to clone cells for research?
9. Explain the contribution that HeLa made to the emerging field of genetics.
10. Describe the role Microbiological Associates played in the development of the field of cell culture, and the industry of selling HeLa cells and other human biological materials.
11. Who profited monetarily from the sale of HeLa cells and other human biological materials?

12. Do you agree with Pomerant’s suggestion that Gey should have “finished his own research” before releasing HeLa to the general public?

13. In what ways, if any, did Gey personally profit from the development of HeLa?

**Chapter 14: Helen Lane**

1. How soon after Henrietta’s death did the media attempt to write about her?

2. What reasons did Berg give for wanting information about the woman whose cells were used to grow HeLa?

3. How did TeLinde, Gey, and others at Johns Hopkins respond to Berg’s request? Why did they respond this way?

4. Summarize the various factual errors that appeared in the stories about HeLa.

5. Why didn’t Henrietta’s family know that her cells were still alive?

6. In what specific ways do you think that learning of HeLa soon after Henrietta’s death might have changed her family members’ lives?

**Chapter 15: “Too Young to Remember”**

1. How old were Henrietta’s oldest (Lawrence) and youngest (Joe) children when their mother died?

2. What reason did Ethel and Galen give for moving in with Day after Henrietta’s death?

3. What did some family members think was the real reason Ethel moved in?

4. Describe the abuse that Joe suffered under Ethel’s care. How did this abuse affect him?

5. Describe Deborah’s childhood. What challenges did she have to overcome?

6. What questions did Deborah have about her mother and sister? Why do you think no one told her very much about them?

**Chapter 16: “Spending Eternity in the Same Place”**
1. Describe Skloot’s visit to the family cemetery. What impact does her use of imagery have on you as a reader?

2. According to Henrietta’s cousin Cliff, what is “beautiful” about the idea of “slave-owning white Lackses being buried under their black kin”?

3. How are the white and black Lackses related? Who are their common ancestors?

4. How did Henrietta’s family acquire the land that became known as Lacks Town?

5. Compare and contrast the different attitudes the white and black Lack family members held about race.