Mary Mebane

The Back of the Bus

Answer the following questions in complete sentences. You may complete these on another document. Be sure you are ready to turn these in to your teacher on the first day of school.

1. Who is allowed to sit immediately behind the “exit door”?

2. Where is the “no man’s land” seat?

3. Why does Mary’s father not want her to look back?

4. Why does Mary like to sit on the long seat that faces another long seat?

5. As the second white man boards the bus, what is Mary nervous about?

6. What does the bus driver ask the black man to do? Why?

7. What is the strangely dressed black woman’s response?

8. Why does the bus driver threaten to drive to the police station? What was his official duty under segregation?

9. What is the main confrontation of the narrative? What emotion(s) does it cause in young Mary Mebane?
10. Who are the “people” to whom Mebane refers to in paragraph 41?

11. In which paragraph does Mebane begin telling the story of the bus ride? Why do you think she starts with the routine of the street sweepers and the homeowners doing yard work?

12. Throughout her story of her wild bus ride, what is young Mary’s role during the wild ride? In which paragraph does she define that role most clearly?

13. Why does Mebane refer to the black passenger who confronts the bus driver as the “windbreaker and porkpie hat” (39)? Whose point of view is she capturing? Is she showing or telling here-and what difference does it make in her essay?

14. How does Mebane use the increasing speed of the bus to show rather than tell about the precariousness of the segregation system?

15. Mebane interrupts her narrative of the events of that Saturday morning in paragraphs 10-13. What is she explaining to the reader, and why is this information necessary?