

The Botany of Desire

Study Guide

Chapter 1

Desire: Sweetness // Plant: The Apple

Pre-reading

1. Study the material (see website links) on grafting. Explain the idea of grafting.
2. Study the material (see website links) on Dionysus and Apollo. Be able to explain who these figures are, and what they represent.
3. Study the material (see website links) on natural and artificial selection. Again, be sure you can explain these concepts in your own words.
4. Scan the chapter and underline the following vocabulary words: supposedly, to be substituted for, domesticated, to exploit, paradox, Dionysus, Apollo, magnitude, to give credit where credit is due, biodiversity, foliage

Comprehension (*Answer ten*)

1. Paraphrase: “Even the power over nature that domestication supposedly represents is overstated.” (5) [It may take you a few sentences to explain this idea.]
2. Explain in your own words: How is the apple a hero? (6) [You won’t be able to answer this until you have finished the chapter.]
3. Explain the difference between planting grafted trees vs. (versus) seedlings. (See pp.9-10, and page 42 – “Planting seeds instead of clones [grafted trees] was an extraordinary act of faith in the American land. . .”
- 2) On p.13, and again on p.49, Pollan discusses the story of the apple as a metaphor for immigration. Explain this metaphor.
- 3) Paraphrase, and explain why this was true: “Up until Prohibition, an apple grown in America was far less likely to be eaten than to wind up in a barrel of cider.” (21)
- 4) What are some of the paradoxes in Chapman’s life?
- 5) Why does Pollan tell us about “Chapman’s love life”(29)? (*Answer in one well-developed paragraph.*)
- 6) What is the difference between the way Bill Jones sees Johnny Chapman (p. 36) and the way Michael Pollan begins to see Chapman? To answer this, you will have to explain how Chapman resembles Dionysus.
- 7) Paraphrase the top sentence on page 42: “Everyone knows that . . . in the New World.”
- 8) p.44: What are “the Esopus Spitzenberg and Newtown Pippin, the Hawkeye and the Winter Banana?” Where does Pollan find them? And on p.46, he writes, “I found apples that tasted like bananas, others like pears.” Where did he find these apples? (*Hint: see p.43*)
- 9) Paraphrase this sentence from p.51: “Thousands of apple traits, . . . our narrow conceptions of sweetness and beauty.”
- 10) On pp.53-57, where does he visit and why? What does he see and learn there?

