

Questions on “Barn Burning” by William Faulkner:

1. At one point in “Barn Burning”, Sarty thinks that “maybe” his father “couldn’t help but be “ what his is (par. 40). What is Abner Snopes? What desires, motives, values and views - especially of justice - seem to drive and explain him? What does the story imply about how and why he has become the man he is? What might be admirable, as well as abhorrent, about him? How does the narrative point of view shape your understanding of, and attitude toward, Abner?
2. How is Sarty characterized? How is this characterization affected by the multiple flashforwards in the story and by the way Sarty’s thoughts are presented? Does Sarty change over the course of the story? How and why does he change or not change?
3. What do each of the minor characters contribute to the story, especially Sarty’s mother, sisters and older brother ?
4. Why do we feel at the end of the story that we know Sarty better than we know his father? What does Faulkner gain by characterizing Abner the way he does?
5. To what degree does the end of “Barn Burning” offer closure (a sense that all loose ends are accounted for and tied up)? If a story ends somewhat inconclusively, is this good or bad, or does your answer depend on the story? Which story leaves you with more to think about?