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English 2 Period A2

15 October 2017

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Double spaced with one inch margins
*Print on the **front side** of the paper only.

I learned to drive on an old post office truck with the driver's wheel on the right side. I have to use a wrench to shift gears and there is no back seat. But it runs and the freedom it gives me makes me love it. In *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver, the main character, Taylor, also gains freedom with her first car because it is what allows her to leave her hometown of Pittman County and start a new life for herself. This story is about a young woman who ends up in Arizona with two flat tires, no job or friends and a child she has picked up along the way trying to make it on her own. The reoccurring motif of tires is used in *The Bean Trees* to convey the message that with the support of others, we are able to begin new lives with new opportunities and even overcome our fears.

The motif of tires is initially used to show that Taylor's fears lead her to search for a better life. One of the first things we learn about Taylor is that she is "afraid of putting air in a tire ever since [she] saw a tractor tire blow up and throw Newt Hardbine's father over the top of a Standard Oil sign" because he "overfilled the tire" (1). The **connotation** of tractor brings to mind farming. The tractor tire is a **symbol** for the limited opportunities in Pittman County which include being a farmer or a tobacco farmer's wife. Taylor's real fear, shown by the exploding tire, is what her future will be like staying in Pittman County. This is what causes her to leave. When Taylor arrives in Arizona, she recognizes the opportunity to build a different kind of life when she meets Mattie who owns Jesus is Lord Used Tires. Taylor is surprised because

“In Pittman if a woman had tried to have her own tire store she would have been run out of business” (59). The phrase “run out” **brings to mind** something being deliberately chased away. Taylor is suggesting that the women where she grew up were treated as second-class citizens who would be chased away if they went against what was expected of them. The tire business Mattie owns is a **symbol** that represents her ability to financially support herself and be independent and Taylor respects this and wants this for herself. It is because of this that she decides to stay in Arizona and begin building a new life for herself.

But building that life is not easy, and the motif of tires is used to show that because Taylor is supported by Mattie, she is able to become more independent and overcome her fears. Taylor is not sure about what to do when she finds out her tires need replaced and doesn't have the money to pay for it. But then Mattie offers her work. Taylor admits, “When Mattie said she'd throw in two new tires and would show me how to fix my ignition, I knew I'd be a fool to say no” (104-105). The **connotation** of “show me” is learning and independence because when you can fix something yourself, you don't have to pay others to do it for you. The reader can **infer** Taylor realizes the benefit of learning new skills. It means that she won't have to rely on someone else which helps her become more independent. It is also with Mattie's help that Taylor is able to overcome her fear of exploding tires so that she can keep her new job. After Taylor confesses her fear about exploding tires, her new boss throws a heavy can at her. Mattie tells Taylor, "Knocked the wind out of you, but it didn't kill you, right? That's twenty-eight pounds of water. Twenty-eight pounds of air is about what you put into a tire. When it hits you, that's what it feels like" (108). The word “kill” **brings to mind** danger. Mattie uses it to teach Taylor the lesson that sometimes what we are afraid of really can't hurt us at all and that our fears are more in our own minds. It is with this support that Taylor is able to begin building a

new for life for herself and Turtle.

More importantly, tires are used to show that Taylor is able to overcome her greatest fear of all – her inability to protect Turtle – with the help of Mattie and Lou Ann. After Turtle is attacked in the park, Taylor blames herself and begins to question whether she should keep Turtle. Thinking back to when she first arrived, Taylor says, “I was embarrassed to think of how Mattie must have seen straight through my act. Driving up here ...with my ... smart remarks, acting like two flat tires were all in a day’s work and I just happened to have been born with this kid growing out of my hip” (238). “Flat tires” **bring to mind** something that is broken and doesn’t work. That is how Taylor feels as a mother. Like the flat tires on her car which make it impossible to drive anywhere, she feels like a terrible mother who can’t help this little girl move forward and that it must have seemed obvious to everyone but her. It is Lou Ann and Mattie’s advice though that begins to make her feel differently. When Taylor is visiting Mattie in Jesus is Lord Used Tires, Mattie tells her, “Nobody can protect a child from the world” (239). The phrase “Used Tires” **brings to mind** sharp things that damage tires. Just like tires can’t always avoid sharp things on the road that can damage them, Mattie is trying to show Taylor we can’t always avoid the dangers of the world. **This isn’t the first time** Taylor has heard this advice. **We also see this** when Lou Ann tells her the same thing. **Previously**, Taylor didn’t want to believe it but now hearing it a second time from Mattie, she begins to realize it is true. It is with this new realization that Taylor is able to commit to doing everything she can to become Turtle’s permanent mother.

In conclusion, tires is a symbol for Taylor’s fears and desire to start over and Kingsolver uses tires to suggest that beginning a new life is possible with the support of loved ones. Taylor

realizes she doesn't know everything there is to know about life and it's her old car with flat tires that helps her to listen to someone who is an expert at fixing them. As she overcomes her fears about tires, she is able to trust that this same woman, Mattie, might know a thing or two about being a mother and life. This message is important for all of us. It's sometimes hard to admit when we don't know something. And it's especially difficult when we feel guilty or ashamed for something we have done. If we can learn that determination is not only about being self-reliant but also means looking to others for advice, we can get that much farther in life.