

Summer Assignment:

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Before 1951, the ability to grow cells derived from animal tissue remained elusive. While cells derived could grow for a short period of time, they died and could not be propagated. This changed in 1951 when a woman by the name of Henrietta Lacks was biopsied for a painful tumor and later died. Cells derived from her cervical cancer were found to thrive in an artificial environment. This gave rise to the birth of biotechnology and the techniques learned from propagating these cells would eventually lead to advancements in finding a Polio vaccine.

Read *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot and answer the following questions in writing. Be prepared to engage in a class discussion, Socratic seminar, essay, or research assignment in September based on these questions.

- Observe the effect of the different voices heard in describing the historical events. Did they move you in any way?
- What is the controversy over the ownership of the cells?
- Do you think it was appropriate to take cells from a biopsy for personal research without consent?
- Do you think it was ethical for the lab assistant to go into the morgue to retrieve more cells from the corpse without the family's consent?
- Do you feel Henrietta's economic status factored into the removal of her cells for such purposes without consent?
- Do you feel Henrietta's racial background factored into the removal of her cells for such purposes without consent?
- Henrietta's cells were freely passed along around the world. It is said that she is immortal because of this. Because Johns Hopkins did not make any money and aided greatly to the fields of Science and Medicine, do you feel that they are obligated to provide compensation to the Lacks family?

The book can be purchased at Amazon.com for \$9.99 or at any other book retailer. In addition, the New York Public Library has limited e-book copies available to borrow through the SimplyE free e-reader app.