

Identity rayona  
christine



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **A Yellow Raft in Blue Water**

Identity is the ultimate realization of one's true self. It is the culmination of everything that has ever had an impact on a person's life. It is influenced by a person's upbringing and the gradual life experience that they gain. These two factors are both equally necessary parts of what is considered the core of a person. They come together to shape the identities of Rayona, Christine, and Ida, in the novel, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, by Michael Dorris.

Rayona's identity is created through her inability to relate to her mother, Christine, her emotional turmoil concerning her father, and her struggle to escape from it all. "I read it and I read it and I read it and I see only my own picture again, clearer than ever" (103). For all of her young life, Rayona had never had a real role model. As a result, she does not understand who she is or who she wishes to be. She escapes reality by forcing herself into delusions and fantasies. Her unstable upbringing leads her to seek out a better life and the family she has always wanted. This establishes the part of Rayona that is awkward and lonely. However, she continues on, feeling out of place, but desperately needing to belong. "This time I stay where I land. I can move if I have to, but there's no place I need to be" (134). At the rodeo she does not just confront Babe, she confronts her disappointments, her uncertainty, and she confronts the society that she has always wanted to be a part, by breaking social norms. She finally accepts the fact that she is not perfect and neither is her family, because she learns that her family will always be her family. This valuable life experience creates the part of Rayona that is confident and strong. She could not have found herself without both the good and bad experiences. She could not have found her true identity

without both the burdens of her childhood and the triumphs from her growth. She broke away from her need for acceptance, and instead accepted herself.

Christine, however, took a lot longer to learn the same lesson. Christine lived much of her life concerned with appearances and her need to be loved. “ I couldn’t help thinking what my friends would say if Lee really did dodge.”

(163). Unlike Rayona, Christine didn’t want another family; she wanted to force her family to live up to her standards. Her upbringing included a mystery father, a distant mother, and a brother that outshone her.

Throughout her childhood, she wanted attention she wanted to feel the love that always eluded her. She even sought God’s love, but was disappointed.

Whenever events and circumstances arose that threatened to undermine the love and acceptance she received, she coped in negative ways. She

struggled with the church’s betrayal, her guilt over her brother’s death, her husband’s indifference, and the sickness that was slowly killing her. So, she

tried to escape the harsh reality by turning to men and alcohol. She never felt needed, so she neglected her responsibilities. Her childhood made her

irresponsible and unable to cope with life’s hardships. She never thought

about living for anyone but herself, until her imminent death helped her find herself. “ I didn’t care anything. She was my miracle, and I knelt beside her”

(283). Towards the end of her life, Christine wants to live for Rayona, and she

truly becomes the mother she had wanted to be. Her life experience makes her loving, selfless, and more grateful for what she has. Her upbringing and

experience come together to create her identity. The acceptance she never felt from Ida, she was able to feel from Rayona.

Ida gains the same appreciation for family as Rayona and Christine, though her own upbringing shaped her into a cold and distrustful person. “ I wanted to sink into the pillow at her betrayal, at her low opinion of me.” (309). Ida carries the heaviest burden in the novel; the most shattering secret. Her life was ruined because of the betrayal of her family. However, she coped but distancing herself from Christine, a constant reminder of her burden. She became cold to her children and she tries to keep a vestige of her life before Clara by not allowing Christine to call her “ mom”. Her pain and bitterness regarding the way she had to live during her childhood makes her detached and harsh. She refuses to be seen as weak; she refuses to be used and betrayed again. So, when she realizes that Willard is with her out of loyalty, she does not want to end up like her mother, betrayed and married to man who stays with her out of loyalty. So, she leaves, before he can. However, Ida overcomes the hate she has for her old family in order to embrace the love she has for her new one. “ You call for me ...if you want to” (275). Ida learns to care again; her new experiences provoke this change in her. Like her daughter and granddaughter before her, she finds a new strength in herself and a greater appreciation for her family.

The three generations are tied together though their struggles, their triumphs, their secrets, and their search for their identity. The way they were raised and their childhood blend together with the women’s newer life experiences to create who they truly are. Each of them undergoes a profound change by overcoming adversity and becoming testaments to the strength of love in family.