Jean Rhys: “The Day They Burned the Books”

1) Why does Eddie say that he doesn’t like daffodils? What do these flowers mean to both Eddie and the young narrator of “The Day They Burned the Books”? How do they both feel about the English—and why?

2) What do Mr. Sawyer’s books represent to Mrs. Sawyer? Why does she want to destroy them?

3) When Eddie’s mother decides to destroy or sell Mr. Sawyer’s books, why does Eddie say, “Now I’ve got to hate you too”? Why are the books important to him? Does his attachment to the books conflict with his feelings toward his father or toward Englishness?

4) How does the age of the protagonists affect your understanding of “The Day They Burned the Books”? What does the story gain by locating events in childhood?

5) Discuss the effect of first-person narration on “The Day They Burned the Books.” We do not know how old the speaker actually is at the time she tells the story, but the point of view is that of a young girl; how would her viewpoint be different from that of an older person’s?