

## *Swimming Lessons*

1. Monroe's novels are inspired by the natural world. For *SWIMMING LESSONS*, Mary Alice volunteered at the sea turtle hospital at the SC Aquarium. In the novel she writes about the rehabilitation and release of a beautiful loggerhead on the Isle of Palms—"Big Girl." The reader witnesses the transformation of the sea turtle from an emaciated, weak, barnacle encrusted creature to a gleaming, healthy and strong specimen of a sea turtle in her prime. How is this symbolic of Toy's transformation in the novel?
2. Toy raises the universal question, "Am I a good mother?" As Toy explores this question, she examines the tending instinct. Is the tending instinct, or the drive to nurture, inherited? Is it carried on the X chromosome? Or is being a good mother something that is a learned behavior?
3. Sea turtles are guided by their instinct to return to the beach of their birth, to leave the sea and to crawl ashore to dig a nest. Then they return to the sea, never to return to the nest. Despite this seeming abandonment, this is their biological model. They are following an instinct over 100 million years old. What makes a good mother in the human species? What instincts do we follow?
4. Toy's story is a redemptive one. How does Ms Lovie change Toy's life? Discuss how the power of one person-- a role model or a mentor--has the power to change someone's life.
- 5 In *SWIMMING LESSONS*, Toy's life was changed by the influence of Miss Lovie, and later, the women in the Turtle Team. As the years pass, Toy's daughter, Little Lovie, is raised by the "village" of the Turtle Team. Discuss how this kind of innovative family structure can provide a network of love and support.