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Rebecca Skloot is a scientific journalist who first heard the name 'Henrietta Lacks' in a college classroom in the 1980s, when she was a teenager. Henrietta was a black American woman who died of cancer in 1951 at age 31. Before she died, a sample was taken from her tumor, without her knowledge or consent, and used for medical research. The cells in Henrietta's tissue sample, known as HeLa (pronounced hee-lah) were the first human cells to survive in culture - they not only survived, but thrived and multiplied. Consequently, HeLa cells have since been used in scientific research all over the world, and have played a fundamental role in numerous medical advances and developments.

For over two decades, Henrietta's identity was unknown and her family knew nothing about HeLa and the role their mother unknowingly played in medical research. By the 1970s, however, her name was publically revealed and her family found out. When Skloot first hears about Henrietta at college, she is surprised at how little information is given. "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" follows Skoot as she explores complex issues of race, class, and ethics in medicine and beyond. This study guide for Rebecca Skloot's "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" includes detailed chapter summaries and analysis, analysis of major characters, themes/motifs/symbols, top 10 quotes, and discussion questions.

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