

# **All the Little Live Things Study Guide**

## **All the Little Live Things by Wallace Stegner**

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# Plot Summary

All the Little Live Things is a novel by award winning novelist Wallace Stegner. In this novel, Wallace Stegner explores the animosity between the younger and older generations in the sixties. Joe Allston is a retired book editor who recently built a house in a rural California community in order to live out his retirement. Joe becomes involved with two members of the younger generation, one a free-spirited student who takes advantage of Joe's kindness while living on his property, and the other a young mother who gives her life in a struggle with cancer to bring her unborn baby into the world. Joe will find himself at times at odds with both these characters, but will also learn from them in a way that will leave him irrevocably changed. All the Little Live Things begins as a novel of generation against generation, but quickly becomes a novel about individual experiences and personal growth.

Joe and his wife, Ruth, are walking on their property when they discover a young student sitting astride a motorcycle, contemplating a section of their land. The young man, whom Joe instantly dislikes, requests permission to camp on this section of land for an undefined amount of time. Although Joe does not agree with Jim Peck's philosophical beliefs, he grants permission with a list of rules at the behest of his wife. Immediately, Jim builds himself a platform in the trees for his tent and a bridge to access the area more readily. Jim also begins working on a treehouse. Joe finds these renovations contrary to Jim's supposed dislike of all things modern, but keeps his mouth shut to all but Ruth.

A young couple moves into the empty cottage next door. Joe is immediately drawn to the young mother, Marian, who readily argues with him over the idea that nature should be left alone to act as it was intended, including the gopher that is eating all of Joe's plants. They argue in a friendly fashion for quite a while until Ruth finally convinces Joe to change the subject. Joe then tells the Catlins about their neighbors, specifically the Welds. The Welds once owned the land where all the neighbors have their homes, but sold it over time due to an unwillingness to work hard enough to keep up tax payments on the land. To illustrate his story, Joe talks about Weld's unwillingness to change his fences after selling the land the Allstons now own, allowing the horses they boarded to room free through the Allstons' home construction.

Over time, the Allstons and Catlins become good friends, often going on explorations through the city together and sharing late afternoon meals. The Catlins meet Jim Peck, and to Joe's surprise, become friends. One afternoon Debby, the Catlins' six-year-old daughter, convinces Jim to give a tour of his treehouse. Everyone but Joe goes across the dangerous bridge and marvels at the construction. Julie LoPresti, a neighbor who happens to be riding by on her horse, joins the exploration. As Joe watches from across the way, he notices a bright light in the treehouse. The following afternoon while Jim is out, Joe discovers that he has tapped into his electricity and water well, providing for himself more of the modern conveniences he supposedly shuns, without permission. Also without permission, Jim has built a shed by the road that Joe finds unsightly and annoying.



One afternoon Joe and Marian have a discussion about Jim during which Joe voices many of his displeasures regarding Jim's lack of responsibility and respect for others. Afterward, Joe writes a letter to Marian that explains his relationship with his own son, a wanderer much like Jim, who drowned in a surfing accident. Marian has accused Joe of disliking Jim based on his own relationship with his son, and in this letter, which Marian will never see, Joe admits that perhaps his relationship with Curtis does have something to do with his dislike of Jim, but not all.

During a Fourth of July party at the home of the LoPrestis, Joe becomes drunk and says some unfortunately things Fran LoPresti overhears about a sculpture she create. Afterward, Joe walks in on an argument between Fran and Julie having to do with Julie's disrespect for her parents and relationship with Peck. Afterward, Joe takes Marian home. Marian tells both Joe and Ruth that the cancer she fought before she became pregnant has returned. Although Marian tells them that having radiation treatments will not stop the spread of the disease, Joe becomes enraged when he learns she will not have the treatments in order to protect her growing fetus.

After leaving Marian's home that night, Joe focuses his rage on Jim Peck and his friends, who are at that moment having a loud party at Jim's treehouse. Joe goes down and tells them to be quiet and is annoyed at the lack of respect these people show him. Joe tells Jim he has a week to get off his property. A few days later, Jim comes to ask Joe if he was serious about his having to leave. Joe says he is and Jim becomes angry since he has just gotten funding to begin a school of free thinking on Joe's property. However, Jim moves his personal belongings out before his week is over.

Joe and Ruth help Marian as much as they can during her illness, heartbroken to watch her quickly decline. Joe pushes John many times to force Marian to have treatment, but John insists on letting Marian make her own choices about her life. When Marian begins pushing her daughter, Debby, away, Joe asks her why. Marian insists her death will be easier on the child if she is not so reliant on her mother. Joe disagrees and is convinced Marian is going against her own beliefs, but neither Marian nor John are willing to change the situation.

Eventually Marian's health reaches a critical stage and she is forced to enter the hospital for pain management. On the way to the hospital, Joe finds Jim Peck, Julie LoPresti, David Weld, and another young man blocking the road. Joe honks his horn. Jim loses control of his idling motorcycle, spooking Julie's horse. Julie's horse falls through missing slates on the bridge, further blocking the way. John Catlin is forced to kill the horse in order to get it out of the way. Joe is grieved that this horrific event is the last thing Marian sees of nature.

Marian dies and is buried, along with her infant who did not survive birth. John and Debby move away and the area becomes quiet once more, except for Weld's planned housing development. The LoPrestis no longer associate with the Allstons, but Joe sees them from time to time and notices that Julie's unfortunate pregnancy has brought mother and daughter together once again. Joe reflects on all that has happened and believes that it has made him a better man.



# How Do I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say? And Chapter 1

## How Do I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say? And Chapter 1 Summary

Joseph and Ruth Allston have retired to Southern California where they have bought some property and built a home. The Allstons recently lost their son, thirty-seven-year-old Curtis, who was always something of a wanderer and who drowned in a surfing accident during one of his many attempts to find a path in life.

How Do I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say? Joe Allston and his wife, Ruth, come home from the funeral of Marian Catlin, a neighbor they loved and miss. Ruth goes in to take a nap, but Joe goes out to work in the garden. While in the garden, Joe thinks of all the things that have happened in the past year and the impact Marian had on his life. As he thinks, Joe notices a cherry tree that looks sickly. Joe checks the tree and discovers that a gopher has eaten the roots and killed the tree. It begins to rain and Joe decides to back to the house.

In Chapter 1, Joe begins to tell his story, but struggles with where to begin. Joe decides to begin with a simple afternoon walk. Joe and Ruth take a long walk in early fall across several properties adjoining theirs, including that belonging to the LoPresti's, and angle back around to their own property. As they come over a ridge they find a young man sitting on a motorcycle, contemplating a remote section of their land. Joe is immediately put off by the fact that this young man has trespassed on his property and begins their conversation with a condescending tone. The young man says that he is inspired to meditate in this area and would like to camp there. Joe makes fun of his request, pointing out that if the young man's intentions are to commune with nature, he should not be using so many manufactured items, such as the motorcycle he is sitting on. However, Joe can sense that Ruth likes the young man and feels that they should allow him to stay. Therefore, after some discussion about the evils of society, Joe agrees to let the student stay under the conditions that he not alter the landscape or leave his trash lying around in exchange for the student, Jim Peck, cleaning out the poison oak growing near the area where he wants to camp.

Immediately Peck begins building a wooden platform in the trees for his tent to rest on and a bridge to access the area a little easier. Joe is annoyed by Peck and complains about him to Ruth even as she suggests they invite him to Thanksgiving dinner. Ruth explains that she cannot help but see their son, Curtis, in Peck and imagine that some nice couple did for him what they are doing for Peck. One afternoon, Joe goes for a walk near Peck's camp and discovers he is building a treehouse. Again Joe makes fun of Peck, suggesting he does not need a treehouse in order to commune with nature. Joe also reminds Peck that he promised to clean out the poison oak, but learns that Peck had a bad reaction to the plant and does not want to have it happen again. Not



long after this episode, Peck begins having people to his camp, including a young woman whom Joe and Ruth come upon as she greets the sun topless.

## **How Do I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say? And Chapter 1 Analysis**

The novel begins almost at the end of the story, with Joe Allston returning home from the funeral of Marian Catlin, someone he clearly cares about and who had a large impact on his life. However, the reader is not clear on who Marian is. The author has titled this beginning section, his prologue, with a phrase that implies confusion and an inability to figure out where to begin. This is exactly how the narrator, Joe Allston, clearly feels about his relationship with Marian Catlin and the events surrounding the short time in which Joe knew her. This tells the reader that this novel is to be as much about Joe discovering who he is and what has happened to him as it is a story for the reader to discover Joe and those in his life.

The first chapter relates Joe's first meeting with Jim Peck. In modern times, Jim Peck would be called a hippie, one of a generation of young people from the sixties who distrusted what they called the establishment and attempted to create a society of their own. In this novel, the word hippie is never used, but Jim Peck is clearly someone who does not embrace the rules of common society and therefore attempts to break those rules as often as possible. This is perhaps the reason why Peck does not respect trespassing laws and goes onto the Allston property to meditate. The reader should realize that with this simple act of disrespect, Peck has set a tone for himself that suggests he will never respect Joe and what Peck sees as Joe's attempts to exert authority over Peck, thus creating conflict. Joe also goes into this relationship with a sense of amusement, making fun of Peck's escape from society but his willingness to benefit from society's modern conveniences. This too sets a tone for their relationship. Despite this mutual hostility, Joe goes ahead and allows Peck to camp on his property, revealing not only Joe's sensitivity to his wife's concerns, but also perhaps some guilt associated with the death of his only child.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Joe and Ruth are working in the yard on a warm spring afternoon when Joe discovers a gopher eating one of his tomato plants. Joe gets a shotgun and kills the gopher before noticing that strangers have walked into the yard. Joe kicks it back into its hole and turns to introduce himself. The strangers are Marian and John Catlin, a young couple who have bought the empty cottage next door. Marian asks Joe why he would kill a gopher who was only doing what nature has taught him, arguing that Joe's tomato plant is not native to the area and should not have been a temptation to the creature in the first place. Marian expresses the opinion that nature should be left to grow and mature the way it was intended, rather than suffering the interference of humans. Joe argues that humans should interfere because they are simply a piece of the cycle that controls the overgrowth of unwanted creatures and plants. Joe then asks Marian if she would seriously consider allowing her daughter to play in a yard full of foxtails or to have a dog who would constantly need to go to the vet to have foxtails removed from its ears. The argument is exciting for Joe, so much so that he misses several signals from his wife to stop.

Joe changes the subject and tells the Catlins about their neighbor, Tom Weld. Weld's family once owned all the land that the neighboring houses are on, including the land the Allstons own. When the Allstons began building their house, they met Lucio LoPresti one afternoon when they saw a dog running from his property with a chicken in its mouth. The dog belongs to Weld's brother, but Weld and his brother both refuse to do anything to stop the dog from killing the chickens, so LoPresti is forced to butcher the chickens to prevent the dog from stealing them. As a result, the dog impregnated their cocker spaniel. Around the same time, Joe and Ruth came to check on the progress of the house on a rainy day. They became stuck in the mud and asked Weld's help in getting out. Afterward, they arrived at the house to find several horses that Weld was responsible for seeking shelter inside their half completed house. When Joe complained to Weld, he refused to change the fence line that should have been altered upon the sale of portions of his land to the developer who sold it to the Allstons. Not until the horses broke through some fencing on Joe's property and Joe refused to fix it did Weld finally fix his fences. However, instead of building a fence alongside the bridge everyone must use to get into town, Weld simply removed some of the planks to create a cattle guard. However, this does not always keep the horses in and they still occasionally wake to a horse at their bedroom window.

The Catlins leave a short time later. Joe decides that he likes them both, especially Marian. However, Ruth points out that Joe is dense when it comes to women. Though Joe noticed that Marian was pale, he did not realize she had recently had a battle with breast cancer that resulted in surgery to remove one breast and most of the lymph nodes on that side of her body. Nor did Joe notice that Marian is in the early stages of pregnancy.



## Chapter 2 Analysis

The gopher is a pest that will appear again and again in this narrative. The gopher is an animal that digs underground and damages plants almost without notice until the plant is so far gone that it cannot be saved. In this chapter, the Catlins arrive at the Allston home at the same moment that Joe is killing one of these pests. This spurs a friendly argument between Joe and Marian Catlin regarding the ideas of nature versus human interference. Joe believes that humans have a responsibility to fight pests, while Marian believes that nature should be allowed to proceed as intended without interference. This conversation seems insignificant at this point, serving only to introduce two new characters and to establish both Joe's joy of intelligent debate and Marian's willingness to spar with him. However, this conversation will take on deeper meaning as the plot continues to progress.

Marian is a gentle, intelligent woman who is not afraid to stand up for her beliefs. Marian is fascinating, lovely, and the type of woman who inspires a need to protect in others. It is clear from this very first meeting that Marian will play a significant role in Joe's life. However, what that role will be is unclear at this point. The fact that Marian is both a cancer survivor and expectant mother, however, implies to the reader that she is a woman who will need care and Joe is a man who is willing to provide it.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Over the next few weeks the Allstons and the Catlins become good friends. The Allstons take the Catlins on tours of the city and they often find themselves relaxing at each others' homes, like they were old friends. The intimacy develops quickly between them. One afternoon the Allstons stop by the Catlins' on their way to town to bring Marian flowers, and they have a nice conversation that continues the debate Joe and Marian had the first day they met. Joe learns that Marian and John have met Jim Peck, and he is a little put off by this, but Marian seems to like Peck. That evening, John invites the Allstons to have drinks with them and Joe is excited, until he discovers Peck is also an invited guest. The party proceeds quietly and Peck behaves himself, but Joe continues to find himself finding fault with everything Peck believes. When Joe learns that Peck's father owns a meat processing plant and this is the basis of many of Peck's problems with society, he is not surprised, having already been suspicious of some such motive to Peck's behavior.

Debby, the Catlins' six-year-old daughter, convinces Peck to allow everyone a tour of his treehouse. Joe goes along, but he refuses to cross the rickety bridge that Peck has built to make his tree more accessible. As everyone explores the treehouse, exclaiming its virtues, Joe sees a light come on that is brighter than any flashlight and leaves him suspicious that Peck is using more than camping supplies in his treehouse. While everyone is still inside, Julie LoPresti, the LoPrestis' fifteen-year-old daughter, comes riding up on her horse. Julie is invited to see the house too, so she leaves the horse in Joe's care and goes across the bridge. A short time later, everyone makes the trek back across and Peck tells Julie and Debby than can come back any time he is home.

A short time later, Joe goes down to Peck's camp and explores the area. Fairly quickly, Joe is able to locate an electrical connection stealing power from his well pump and a pipe leading from the well to the treehouse. Peck is stealing electricity and water even though he promised to only use a bucket of water a day. Joe goes home to complain to Ruth, but she does not see the problem in what Peck has done. In fact, Ruth suggests it is Joe's fault that Peck will not ask permission because he was hostile toward him the first time they met.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

The relationship between the Allstons and the Catlins grow until they are almost like a close knit family. However, Peck interferes in this, just as he has interfered in Joe's quiet retirement. Peck has befriended the Catlins as well, and Joe is shocked to find that Marian has welcomed him into her circle of friends as though he were a normal college student, not an anti-establishment freak. This situation does, however, allow Joe to learn more about Peck. What Joe learns confirms in his own mind that Peck is simply a

young man who is put out with his father, making him act out in ways he might not have otherwise.

Joe refuses to go into Peck's treehouse when the others are invited, but discovers that Peck is stealing water and electricity from him. This infuriates Joe and makes the reader wonder why he does not throw Peck off his property. Ruth convinces Joe that what Peck has done is not that big of a deal and even suggests that it might be Joe's fault. This shows the reader how Joe and Ruth's relationship is designed and suggests what it might have been like for both of them when their son Curtis was alive. Finally, Julie LoPresti has discovered Jim Peck and his treehouse. The fact that Julie shows interest in Peck and that she has been invited back suggests to the reader that trouble might come for the young girl as the plot continues to develop.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Spring came beautifully that year. Julie began babysitting for the Catlins, often taking Debby with her to visit Peck's treehouse. Joe and Ruth spent a great deal of time with Marian, keeping an eye on her whenever John would go out of town for work, which was often. One afternoon, watching the wear and tear it was causing Marian to entertain Debby all day, he offered to allow them to board a horse on his land. Marian immediately went out and bought an old, gentle piebald horse. That weekend, Joe, John, and David Weld set about to build a corral for it. As they worked, the women were distracted by the sight of Peck doing yoga on the porch of his treehouse. Joe was simply annoyed that Peck did not have the insight to offer his help.

At some point that spring, Peck put out a mailbox next to the Allstons, along with a makeshift shed he built to house his motorcycle during the winter months. Now the shed was full of other junk, chairs and books and such. Peck never asked for permission to do either and Joe finds himself burning most of the mail Peck leaves scattered on the ground. Peck also has begun having guests stay for weeks at a time, creating a situation that leaves Joe feeling pushed out and taken advantage of. One afternoon at the Catlins, Joe discovers that Peck has come before him. Joe and Marian begin to discuss Peck. Marian tells Joe that Peck wants to begin a school of free thinkers and that John has told him where to get funding. Joe finds this ridiculous and offensive. Marian suggests that Joe's poor opinion of Peck is based in his own feelings regarding his son. That night Joe goes home and writes a letter to Marian, telling her about his son.

Curtis was a troubled child, refusing to listen to his parents or learn from their experiences. Curtis was kicked out of school on several occasions and discharged from the army for homosexual behaviors that Joe knows he performed only to be released from his obligations. Curtis moved around a lot and never held a job for more than a month or two. Joe would get Curtis jobs, only to be embarrassed by his behaviors at work. Curtis would always come home after each new venture failed and Ruth would welcome him, despite the fact that Curtis treated his mother poorly, perhaps out of embarrassment for her gentle treatment of him. Joe and Curtis would often fight and this treatment of Ruth was almost always the root cause. Finally Curtis decided to go to school in San Diego. However, Ruth and Joe quickly learned Curtis had quit after a semester and joined a surfing gang. Shortly after that, Curtis drowned in a surfing accident. Curtis was only thirty-seven. Afterward, Joe felt lost. Most people would go home after such an episode, but Joe's mother was a maid who moved a lot, so he never had a true home. For this reason, he ended up in California, not far from where his son died.



## Chapter 4 Analysis

As Joe's dislike of Peck grows because of Peck's continuing lack of respect for Joe and his property, Marian's appreciation of Peck grows. Marian finds Peck refreshing, a person who has strong beliefs and is willing to do all it takes to support those beliefs. Julie seems to feel the same way, constantly going to Peck's treehouse and spending time with him. Peck has other friends as well, groups of people who come and stay with him for days on end, without regard to the Allstons. Joe feels trapped, stuck between his beliefs and those of the people around him.

Marian accuses Joe of transferring his frustrations with his son on Peck, so Joe wrote out his story with his son for Marian to read, but never gave the letter to her. In this letter, the reader discovers that Curtis was a lot like Peck, unwilling to respect his father or his father's opinions. This led to Curtis' untimely death, stealing from Joe and his wife the right to know their child and to have grandchildren. This has left Joe feeling lost, without an anchor, perhaps explaining his need to hold on to Marian as the daughter he never had. It also explains to some extent Joe's quick dislike of Peck. However, the reader feels as though Peck has earned some of this dislike himself.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

On the morning of the Fourth of July, Joe finds himself hunting a gopher. However, rather than finding a gopher, he unearths a large snake that has already eaten the gopher. Joe has a drink afterward to calm his nerves and this causes a fight between him and Ruth, who believes that there is a time for drinking and early morning is not that time. Late in the afternoon, Marian walks over to join them before going on to the LoPrestis' party. They sit on the porch in the heat and talk. Marian suggests to Joe that pain can sometimes be a pleasurable thing. Joe argues, but Marian is set in her opinion. Before they can end the discussion, Fran LoPresti calls. Fran is unhappy with Peck's growing camp and suggests to Joe that he ask them to move on.

Joe, Ruth, and Marian walk to the LoPresti party. Fran wants Joe to offer his opinion of a sculpture she has made from various discarded items, but Joe dislikes it and does not want to offer a false opinion. Joe avoids Fran most of the day, drinking heavily and participating in various childish pranks with other guests of the party. Late in the day, Joe finds himself standing before the sculpture with another drunk guest. They both make unkind remarks about it and Fran happens to overhear. The children join the party then and dinner is served. Joe sobers up a little and watches for an opportunity to speak to Fran alone. Joe sees Fran go around the side of the house and follows, but happens to find her arguing with Julie, embarrassing them and making the rift between him and Fran worse.

Joe walks home to retrieve the car in order to drive Marian home after the fireworks. When he returns, Joe is blocked in by a firetruck, so he drives through the fields to Marian's house. Once there, Marian invites Joe and Ruth inside. Marian tells them that she learned the day before that her cancer has returned. The doctor has given her three months to live at the most. When asked about treatments, Marian tells them they would not help and they would harm the baby, so she has refused. Joe is upset, insisting she must fight this, but Marian has made her decision. Ruth and Joe leave.

Peck is having a loud party in his camp. Joe walks down there to tell them to be quiet, concerned that Marian needs peace and quiet to deal with her devastating news. When Joe arrives, the party goers are rude to him and Peck acts somewhat defiant. Joe tells them to be quiet and then tells Peck that he must leave his property in a week's time.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The gopher shows up again in this chapter, but this time it has been eaten by a larger, more dangerous predator. The symbolism of this becomes clear late in the chapter when Marian announces that her cancer has returned and she has only a matter of months to live. Marian has chosen not to have treatment, in fear of what treatment



would do to her six-month-old fetus. Joe finds this absurd, arguing that Marian's life is more important, an argument that Marian does not even consider, but will most likely be visited again. In his devastation, Joe goes to argue with Peck about the sound level of his party. This argument does not go well and Joe kicks Peck out, something he should have done months ago but put off because he knew both Ruth and Marian liked Peck. However, Marian is in danger now and Joe feels as though he must protect her and this is all that is in his power to do.

Fran LoPresti is a friend of the Allstons and she respects Joe's opinion. However, Fran is crushed when she overhears Joe making fun of her sculpture and this effectively ends their relationship. However, before this occurs, Fran suggests that Peck's camp is becoming a nuisance in the neighborhood. Fran never mentions her daughter's participation in that camp, suggesting to the reader she is not aware of it. However, the reader is aware of some tension between mother and daughter, suggesting this conflict will come to a head when Fran does learn of her daughter's involvement with Peck and his friends.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Joe goes to the airport to pick up John and tries to convince him to force Marian to get some treatment and to abort the baby. John refuses to discuss it with Joe, instead suggesting that it is Marian's decision. John and Marian go away for a weekend to discuss the situation and return with the same conclusion, that no intervention will be utilized. During that time, Peck comes to see Joe and makes an argument against being evicted. However, Joe insists that he must leave. Peck is gone within a few days, taking everything but his trash and the items in his shed. Joe walks down to the treehouse and disconnects the electricity so that the open line inside will not hurt anyone.

Over the next few weeks, Joe and Ruth become regular guests at the Catlin home, forced to sit on the sidelines and watch Marian's decline. Joe tries to talk Marian into treatment one last time, but she refuses everything, even the drugs to prevent pain she will likely experience at the end. Marian does not want to die a morphine vegetable, unable to interact with those around her. Joe has no choice but to respect her wishes. Marian is gentle, even in her death, spending more time reassuring those around her than allowing them to reassure her. However, as her disease quickly progresses, Ruth begins to notice how Marian pushes Debby away. One afternoon at their home, Marian refuses to get up and look at some fish with Debby, causing Debby to cry. Later, Marian explains that she is attempting to break Debby's dependence on her so that her death will not leave Debby devastated as her own parents' deaths left her. Joe is appalled, insisting that grief will only make Debby a stronger person, as Marian herself once argued. However, Marian refuses to relent and John insists on allowing Marian to conduct her death as she sees fit.

One night in September, Fran LoPresti calls Joe to inform him that her daughter is pregnant, a result of the time she has spent with Peck and his friends. Julie refuses to say who the father is, but Fran does not care. Fran has decided to take the police to Peck's camp and have him arrested for the rape of her child. Fran turns to Marian to ask her to persuade Julie to have an abortion, causing Joe more outrage that she would intrude on Marian's illness in that way. Unfortunately, Marian is unable to persuade Julie to do anything. The police do raid Peck's camp and Peck is arrested and charged with drug possession as well as contributing to the delinquency of minors. Tom Weld punches Peck for corrupting his boy.

As the disease progresses, Marian begins to suffer pain. Eventually she is taken to the hospital where she is started on a pain management. Marian comes home with a nurse who is there to manage the pain. After a while, the pain becomes too much and everyone becomes aware that Marian will have to be admitted to the hospital for the last time. However, Marian insists on waiting for Debby to return from school. Joe and Ruth go home to await the call. While they wait, Peck calls and asks to come get his things from the shed.



## Chapter 6 Analysis

Peck is gone, but he has left parts of himself behind, including the blame on Fran's part toward Joe for allowing her daughter to meet Peck and become pregnant by him or one of his friends. This leads to a police raid on Peck's new camp that results in his arrest. The reader is surprised to see that Joe is not happy about this unfortunate end for Peck, which his attitude up to this point might have suggested he would be. However, the reader also realizes that Joe is absorbed with Marian's worsening illness and perhaps this explains his lack of interest in Peck's situation.

Marian once said that pain is like a pleasure, but now that she is facing her own death she decides to prevent the pain of the situation for her daughter by pushing her away. Marian believes that if Debby is not dependent on her, she will not grieve for her. Marian's heart is in the right place, but her actions are contrary to her personal beliefs and will not stop her child from grieving her. Joe is outraged by this, but like every other aspect of his relationship with Marian and her illness, he is helpless to control it.





# Chapter 7 and Epilogue

## Chapter 7 and Epilogue Summary

In chapter 7, Joe and Ruth rush to the Catlins to help John take Marian to the hospital. Ruth goes inside to take charge of Debby while Joe prepares John's station wagon. John and the nurse bring Marion outside and carefully lay her in the backseat with John and the nurse on either side of her. Joe drives. When they reach the bridge, Joe finds that David Weld, Julie, Peck, and another young man are blocking the road, clearly arguing about David's decision to talk to the cops about the activities in Peck's camp. Joe honks his horn. Almost simultaneously Peck loses control of his idling motorcycle and Julie's horse spooks. Julie's horse backs onto the bridge and his legs fall through the missing slats. Joe gets out and can instantly see that Julie's horse is mortally wounded. Joe hesitates, aware that they need to move the horse to clear the quickest route to the hospital, but unsure how. When John realizes what is going on, he takes an old splitting hammer left in the car from a day of cutting firewood and kills the horse. They push the horse over the side of the bridge and instruct the boys to have Julie's father come pull it out. Joe climbs back into the car, grieving the fact that Marian's last look at nature had to be this violence.

In the epilogue, several months have passed since Marian's death. Joe has kept busy these months working in his garden. As he works, Joe thinks about the purpose of Marian's life and the reason why Jim Peck found his way to their property. Joe thinks over the entire year and wonders how things might have been different. Joe sees that the LoPrestis have befriended their daughter again through her pregnancy and is happy for them. However, Joe cannot understand why their grandchild is growing happily in Julie's belly, but Marian's was stillborn. It all seems so unfair to Joe. Despite this, Joe believes that his life is better for having known Marian and that his grief will only make his spirit richer.

## Chapter 7 and Epilogue Analysis

Peck has come back to get the last of his things that are stashed in the poorly built shed. By picking this day and this hour to collect his things, Peck creates a roadblock to Marian's last day in a world outside the hospital. To make matters worse, Julie's horse gets spooked and has to be killed. Ironically, it is Marian's gentle husband who is forced to kill the horse in order to get his wife in the hospital to smooth her path to death. Joe blames Peck for this episode and hates that Marian, who is a lover of nature, has to see something so violent her last day among her beloved nature. Finally, the death of her beloved horse is a profound moment for Julie LoPresti, who has acted like a spoiled child, much like Peck, for the majority of the novel. Perhaps this is part of the reason Julie is able to build a new relationship with her parents in the following four months.



Marian has died, Joe's friends the LoPrestis will not speak to him, and Weld is building a housing development on the land directly across from Joe's house. Everything has changed since Peck first entered Joe's life. Joe thinks about his and realizes it has been a painful, dark year, but he would not change a moment of it because everything that happened brought Marian into his life and he would not change that for anything. This shows some growth on Joe's part, showing the reader that this brief love affair with this young woman had more of an impact on Joe than thirty-seven years with his recalcitrant son did.



# Characters

## Joseph Allston

Joseph Allston, or Joe, is a retired book editor from Manhattan. Joe and his wife have retired to the countryside in California in order to find some peace and quiet after the death of their only child, Curtis. Joe had a difficult relationship with his son and found himself constantly at odds with him throughout his adolescents and adulthood. As a result, Joe was not close to his son at the time of his death. Joe feels a great deal of guilt because of the death of his son, wondering if he could have done something different to prevent his child's poor behavior and death.

Joe and his wife bought a piece of property that once belonged to the ranch of a close neighbor. From the moment they began building their home, Joe and his wife found themselves at odds with this neighbor because he was reluctant to change his fence line even though he had sold a large section of the land to a land developer. Later, Joe will become annoyed when this same neighbor plans a housing development on his remaining property, removing the sense of isolation Joe and his wife were seeking when they came to this area.

After moving into the house, Joe and his wife began taking daily walks through their property and some of the neighboring property. One day when returning from one of these walks, Joe and Ruth come across a young man who is meditating on the back of his motorcycle. Joe instantly dislikes this young man because his opinions regarding what he calls the establishment are rooted in untruths and purposeful misinterpretation. However, Joe allows the man to stay on his property because of his wife. This becomes a problem over time, however, causing trouble for all the neighbors, including the woman dying of cancer next door that Joe has come to think of as a daughter. Joe finds himself finally putting his foot down and standing up for his own ideals against the wishes of his wife, resolving the situation but not before it has one final impact on his beloved neighbor.

## Ruth Allston

Ruth Allston is Joe's wife. Ruth is a gentle woman who leads with her heart before her head. Ruth adored her only child, Curtis, and often took his side against Joe even when Curtis treated her poorly as a result. Ruth often took Curtis back into the home after he made mistakes that left him unable to support himself even though Joe was against coddling the boy in that fashion. Later, when they meet Jim Peck, Ruth sees in him the son she lost. Ruth makes the argument to Joe that they should allow him shelter because someone like them might have once provided the same shelter to their own son during his many years of wandering.



Ruth is often the voice of reason in contrast to Joe's emotional and occasionally logical arguments against people like Jim Peck and predators such as gophers. Ruth is all heart, a gentle woman who keeps Joe from going too crazy with his negative view of the world. When Marian comes into their lives, Ruth welcomes her with open arms and is pleased to see Joe's open reaction to her as well. Ruth is the rock by which Joe anchors himself, keeping him sane and serene in a world quickly becoming negative.

## **Marian Catlin**

Marian Catlin is a young mother who has recently battled breast cancer. Marian believes in nature and makes the argument that nature should be allowed to grow as it pleases rather than bringing in plants that would die without human interference. Marian is open, loving, and accepting of all people no matter what their beliefs or actions. Marian adores Joe, and she seems to enjoy the arguments they often have over Jim Peck and his kind as well as the gophers that are destroying Joe's garden.

Marian has a young daughter and she wants to provide her with a sibling with whom she can spend time. Marian becomes pregnant quickly after her fight with breast cancer. However, during the sixth month of the pregnancy, Marian's cancer returns. Marian refuses to have treatments for the cancer because it would cause harm to the baby. Instead, Marian bravely faces her death, accepting that it is inevitable despite the arguments of the Allstons that she should have the baby delivered early in order to fight the disease. In the end Marian dies in the hospital, struggling with the horrible pain of her spreading disease. The baby Marian carries dies shortly after birth.

## **John and Debby Catlin**

John is Marian's husband. John is an ethologist, a mix between an experimental psychologist and a veterinarian. John spends a lot of time traveling in order to observe the behaviors of animals. This leaves Marian alone quite often, opening the door for Joe and Ruth to become something like guardians to her, especially when her cancer returns. Joe pesters John frequently about the treatments Marian is ignoring, but John sticks by his wife's choices, allowing her to handle her death the way she wants to.

Debby is John and Marian's child. Debby is six years old and very close to her mother. Debby is fascinated with Jim Peck's treehouse and goes there often with her friend, Julie. Debby also gets a horse during her mother's illness in an attempt to make her less of a burden to her mother. Marian worries that Debby will be scared by her death because they are so close, so during her illness she begins pushing her daughter away, forcing her to rely more on her father. This is a painful decision for both Marian and Debby that Joe believes goes against all she believes, but once again John insists that Marian should be allowed to handle her death the way she wants.



## Jim Peck

Jim Peck is a graduate student at a local university. Peck believes that society is overly involved in individuals lives and that society has become too dependent on modern conveniences. Peck asks the Allstons to allow him to live on their property in a tent so that he might get in touch with the simpler aspects of life. Joe laughs, however, because Peck plans on using a motorcycle, a chemical toilet, and other modern conveniences during his break from society.

Despite Joe's requests that Peck respect his property and not damage the area or leave it trashed, Peck builds an elaborate treehouse and begins leaving his trash all over the area. Peck also keeps access to the area locked up. Peck steals electricity and water from the Allstons and throws large parties that include drugs and sex with minors. On the night that Joe learns Marian's cancer has returned, he finds Peck having an especially noisy party. Joe goes to ask them to be quiet and dislikes the lack of respect shown to him. Joe tells Peck he has to move. A short time later, another neighbor has the police raid Peck's new camp and he is arrested for drugs and contributing to the delinquency of minors.

## Lucio and Fran LoPresti

Lucio and Fran LoPresti are neighbors of the Allstons. The LoPrestis and the Allstons are friendly until the Fourth of July during which Marian learns she is dying. Joe and his wife, as well as Marian, attend the LoPresti's party. Fran, an amateur sculpture, wants Joe's opinion of her new sculpture. Joe avoids her throughout the party, unwilling to give an honest opinion of the sculpture that appears to be a female representation of Fran's feelings for her teen daughter. However, Joe becomes drunk and approaches the work of art with another drunk party guest. They begin making fun of the sculpture and Fran overhears. This causes a permanent rift in the relationship between the LoPrestis and the Allstons.

## Julie LoPresti

Julie is Lucio and Fran's daughter. Julie is a rebellious teenager who seems to feel as though her parents are oppressive and unfair. Julie loves to ride horses and she spends a great deal of her time riding her gelding. A short time after Jim Peck has moved into his treehouse, Julie happens to come riding by and she is impressed by both the house and Peck. Soon after Julie becomes a frequent visitor of the treehouse. Shortly after the LoPresti's Fourth of July party, Fran calls Joe to blame him for the fact that Julie has become pregnant as a result of spending time with Peck and his friends. Fran leads the police to Peck's new camp and has him arrested. However, the pregnancy appears to bring mother and daughter closer together in the end.



## Tom Weld

Tom Weld is the neighbor of the Allstons who originally owns all the property where the Allston, Catlin, and LoPresti homes now sit. Weld is a lazy man who does not like to do more work than necessary, so he is often selling or using his land in ways to generate cash that does not require a lot of effort on his part. When the Allstons first begin building their home, Weld refuses to change his fences so that the horses he boards on his property are allowed to roam the Allston property freely, often getting into the half-built home. The Welds also have a dog that they do not control and is allowed to roam freely on the LoPresti property, killing their chickens. Later, Weld will begin renovating his land for a housing development, taking away the country feel of the area.

## David Weld

David Weld is Tom Weld's son. David is more productive than his father, willing to help the Allstons and Catlins build a corral for Debby's new horse. David begins hanging around with Jim Peck and his friends soon after, possibly more to spend time with Julie LoPresti than out of respect for Peck's beliefs and lifestyle. When Fran LoPresti takes the police to Peck's new camp, David is there. Tom Weld hits Peck for introducing his son to drugs and sex. Later, David turns on Peck and his friends, telling the police all he knows about the camp.

## Curtis Allston

Curtis Allston is Joe and Ruth's only child. Curtis begins acting out in his adolescence. As an adult, Curtis has trouble settling on a career or a path in life. Curtis often returns to his parents when a job is lost or he fails at a business venture. Eventually Curtis comes to California to return to school, but his parents quickly learn that he quit after one semester and joined a gang of surfers. Within months, Joe gets the call he has dreaded all of Curtis' life, that his son has drowned. Curtis is a lot like Jim Peck and perhaps explains why Joe allows Peck to remain on his property even though he dislikes the situation.



# Objects/Places

## Mailbox

Jim Peck puts up a mailbox at the entrance to the Allston property without consulting Joe first. The mail that comes to Peck is usually junk and he leaves it on the ground, forcing Joe to burn it every day.

## Swing

John puts up a swing for his daughter Debby to use, but the swing tires out Marian quickly as Debby insists on being pushed constantly.

## Shed

Jim Peck builds an ugly shed at the top of the Allston road to house his motorcycle during the winter. Joe is unhappy with this shed because Peck did not ask permission to build it.

## Corral

Joe Allston, John Catlin, and David Weld build a corral on the Allston property in order to house a new horse for six-year-old Debby to ride.

## Sculpture

Fran LoPresti creates a sculpture out of junk, including a typewriter and hammer, that resembles a woman. Joe Allston believes the ugly sculpture symbolizes the relationship between Fran and her daughter. Joe's drunken comment about this sculpture at a party causes a rift in the relationship between him and the LoPrestis.

## Well Pump

The Allstons get water from a well on their land. The water is pumped to the house. Jim Peck wires into the electricity from the well pump to provide electricity to his treehouse. Jim Peck also runs a water pipe from the well to his treehouse, breaking two promises he made to the Allstons before moving in.



## Bridge

There is a bridge on the road leading from the Allston house that sits on Weld's property. Rather than continue his fence alongside the bridge, Weld removes every other board from the bridge to discourage the horses from crossing it. This causes a hazard for the cars passing over and is a primary reason why Julie LoPresti's horse gets caught on the bridge the day Joe is driving Marian to the hospital to die.

## Julie's Horse

Julie LoPresti owns a horse that she adores and rides often, usually bareback. This horse is killed after it falls through the missing slats in the bridge.

## Jim Peck's Treehouse

Jim Peck builds a treehouse in an area of the Allston property that is difficult to get to. Peck builds a bridge to the base of the tree that he raises and lowers to prevent people from entering his treehouse when he is not around.

## Thomas Cottage

The Catlins move into the Thomas cottage and befriend the Allstons.

## Allston House

The Allstons build a house on property that once belonged to the Weld ranch but was sold to a local developer. The Allstons have a large amount of property behind their house and it is on this property that Jim Peck builds his treehouse.

## LoPresti Home

The LoPrestis also buy property that once belonged to the Welds. Lucio LoPresti builds their house himself, working on it for years before finally completing it.





# Themes

## Older Generation versus the Younger Generation in the Sixties

This novel is set in the sixties, at the beginning of the hippie revolution that developed throughout the country during that century. The Allstons, well educated, wealthy retirees, find themselves faced with a young man who belongs to this revolution on their property. Joe Allston instantly recognizes this man for what he is, referring to him in his own mind as Caliban. Caliban is a figure from literature who is referred to as natural man in literature written by Robert Browning and as a monster of sorts in the Shakespeare play *The Tempest*. From this reference, the reader automatically can sense the disruption this character will create in the novel for his anti-establishment beliefs that are based less in logic and more in disrespect for social rules.

Immediately the reader can see that the older generation, Joe, is skeptical and untrusting of the younger generation, Peck. The only question is why this is. Joe had a son who was a lot like Jim Peck, a young man who could not settle on a career or a direction in life and ended up dying in a surfing accident. Joe constantly fought with his son and felt that his son failed to respect and learn from his father's experiences. Although Joe loved his son, he felt as though he were right and Curtis was wrong, and that if Curtis had figured this out, he would still be alive. It is the same sort of opinion Joe has of Jim Peck. Joe knows that Jim Peck does not like where society has brought the country and where it is taking it, but Joe feels that Peck is illogical in his arguments. This causes a tension between them that cannot be overcome.

Despite Joe's dislike of Jim Peck, Joe finds himself falling in love with and respecting Marian Catlin. Marian is also of the younger generation, but Joe's connection to her proves that he does not dislike all people of the younger generation, just the ones he does not understand. This does not mean that Joe agrees with everything Marian believes in. In fact, at the end of her life, Joe is angry with Marian for choosing her unborn child's life over her own. Joe fights with Marian to fight for her own life, but he feels that Marian gives up to bring her child into the world. At the same time, Joe feels that Marian turns her back on her own beliefs when she attempts to destroy her relationship with her six-year-old daughter in order to prevent the pain of loss for the child when she dies.

## Parental Responsibility

Joe Allston had a child who died after a lifetime of indecision and wandering. Joe often fought with Curtis, unable to force his own experiences on the child and make him act in a responsible fashion. Their relationship was fraught with tension because of the differences in their approaches to life. Therefore, when Curtis dies, Joe finds himself feeling relief that he will no longer have to bail him out of trouble, but filled with guilt as



he wonders what he might have done differently to prevent his son's turbulent life and premature death.

When Jim Peck comes to live on the Allston property, Joe finds himself struggling with his distaste of the young man's actions and his clear disrespect for anyone in a position of power, including himself. Joe finds himself placed in the father figure position once more even though he tries hard to remain neutral and uninvolved in Peck's business. When Joe finally stands up and throws Peck off his property, he discovers that Peck has placed Joe in the fatherhood role, treating him as he would his own father with whom he has a dispute over his business, a meat processing plant. Later, when a neighbor learns her daughter is pregnant because of her association with Jim Peck, Joe is blamed for Joe's behaviors as though he were his father.

Marian Catlin has a six-year-old daughter when she is diagnosed with breast cancer. Marian becomes obsessed with the idea of providing this daughter with a sibling to be a playmate. Marian becomes pregnant, but in her sixth month she learns her cancer has returned, and without treatment she only has three months to live. Marian refuses to take treatment, afraid of the damage it will cause to the fetus. At the same time, Marian begins distancing herself from her daughter, afraid that her death will cause the child irreparable emotional harm if she does not. In this way, Marian is exerting her parental duties more willingly than Joe has done with both his son and Jim Peck, but in a way that puts both her life in danger and causes emotional harm to herself and her child. It is a sense of responsibility to her children that causes Marian to act as she does, therefore parental responsibility is a theme of the novel.

## Grief

Before telling them of her diagnosis, Marian expression the opinion to the Allstons that pain is pleasurable in certain circumstances. Marian suggests that people should embrace pain because they will be better people for the experience. Marian lost her parents when she was a small child and believes that the pain she suffered then made her the person she is today. Later, the Allstons learn that Marian's breast cancer has spread to her liver and pancreas, a condition that is likely to cause a great deal of pain toward the end of her life.

As Marian struggles with her impending death, she begins pulling away from her daughter Debby in an attempt to make the girl less reliant on her. Marian believes that the grief of her death will damage her daughter irreparably. This goes against Marian's own insistence that grief for her parents made her the person she is and that pain should be embraced. It is grief for the loss of her child through her own death that makes Marian act in this way. Marian is grieving just as her friends and family will grieve for her after her death.

Joe Allston and his wife, Ruth, have lost their only child and have adopted Marian as the daughter they never had. When they learn of Marian's diagnosis, they spend as much time as possible at her side. At the end, they are with Marian and her family, supporting

them in every way they can. Afterward, they are left alone with their grief, coping as best as they can. Joe has learned a great deal through his association with Marian and embraces the idea that although his grief for Marian is overwhelming, it is an experience that makes him a fuller and better human being, therefore he does not regret meeting or loving Marian.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The novel is written through the eyes of Joe Allston, a retired book editor who finds himself struggling with two relationships with two people of the younger generation, leaving him a better, stronger person in the end. The novel is written as though it is a diary of sorts, chronicling an important time in the life of Joe Allston, a time that summarizes who he is as a person. Due to this style, the author often makes comments about the action of the plot from a future point, suggesting things he might have done different or how events might have unfolded had he not acting in a specific way.

The point of view in this novel is interesting because it is not only a first person point of view, but it also offers an authorial point of view that includes comments on the plot that would not normally appear in a work of fiction. The point of view works for this plot because it is an intimate point of view that supports the highly personal plot of this novel that chronicles a turning point in the life of one man. This book is not only a statement on the political climate of the sixties, but is a personal story that aptly describes how personal relationships shape the opinions of individuals rather than the rules of an oppressive society.

## Setting

The novel is set in a rural area in southern California. The area was once a large ranch, but the owners of the ranch have sold off their land piece by piece until multiple, smaller ranches or farms have grown up around it. The area is described as a quiet area unimpeded by the multiple home regions that have grown up in other areas of the state. The main characters have chosen to live in this place because it offers a seclusion that allows them to enjoy the freedom that comes with retirement. The time period in which this novel is set is the early sixties, a time in which there was the beginning of a movement among the younger generation to shun society as a whole and live by their own rules. This movement comes to the rural area in which the Allstons have settled in the form of Jim Peck, a young student who receives permission to camp on the Allston property in an attempt to live without the hindrance of modern conveniences.

The setting of this novel was chosen specifically for this plot because the plot begins as a statement intended to answer the question of why the older generation so dislikes the younger generation of this time. However, the novel becomes something bigger than this simple question. The plot becomes not a young versus old plot, but a question of respect and a sense of responsibility as an individual in a society. The setting provides the conflict for the novel in the person of Jim Peck, but it also provides a backdrop of peace that is in direct conflict with the emotional turmoil taking place among the main characters, Joe Allston in particular. In this way, the setting of the novel is not only

appropriate to the plot, but is essential in providing the conflict that will eventually allow emotional growth in the main character.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is educated English. The language reflects the education level and career background of the narrating character. Joe Allston is a retired book editor; therefore, he makes many references to literature and literary characters throughout the novel. Joe also often uses foreign phrases to emphasize his beliefs and arguments that are not always explained within the text. However, most of these phrases are spoken in such a context that it is easy for the reader to understand their intent even if their translation remains a mystery.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the novel because it reflects the education and career experience of the narrator. The language can be excessively formal at times, but readers should have little trouble understanding it if the novel is read slowly and with some patience. The foreign phrases within the novel also reflect the education level of the narrator, often used in a context that expresses frustration or annoyance, and are rarely translated to the satisfaction of the reader. However, their context often makes it clear what the intention might be. These phrases also reflect the education of the narrator and serves to enhance the characterizations within the plot.

## Structure

The novel contains seven chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. The prologue bears a title, but the rest of the chapters are simply set off by a number. Within each chapter there are multiple numbers dividing each chapter into sections. Each section often begins with a change in place or time. The novel is told in both exposition and dialogue, including episodes of internal monologue and one long letter writing by the narrator and intended for another character within the novel.

The novel contains two main plots. The first plot centers around Jim Peck and his treehouse built on the property belonging to the narrating character, Joe Allston. The second plot centers around Marian Catlin, her relationship to the Allstons, and her battle with cancer. There are several subplots, including the relationship between neighbor Julie LoPresti and Jim Peck's crowd. Each of these plots comes to a satisfying end at the climax of the novel, resolving their conflicts and reflecting growth in the narrating character.



## Quotes

"In the face of what has happened, Ruth is more resilient than I, she has take up little life-saving jobs." How Do I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say?, p. 1

"Nevertheless, Marian has invaded me, and though my mind may not have changed I will not be the same." How Do I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say?, p. 5

"The alarm went off a year ago. The touch on the lips that brought us fully awake did not happen until last March." Chap. 1, p. 11

"You'd go into your spiritual retirement in a factory-made, chemically waterproofed tent." Chap. 1, p. 22

"He was the least contemplative sanyasi I ever heard of." Chap. 1, p. 31

"As usual when I get high on my own persuasive powers, I think I am making quite a case, but when I glance at Marian Catlin I don't see any sign of conviction." Chap. 2, p. 47

"I began this rumination in the mood of an old-fashioned Christian who opens the Bible at random, hungry for a text." Chap. 3, p. 66

"It was all the California we knew, and we liked it better for the chance to share it." Chap. 4, p. 93

"So I went on picking up my daily beer cans along the lane where the freedom force threw them, and every day or so I built a little bonfire on the asphalt road by the mailboxes to get rid of the throwaway newspapers, boxholder letters, free samples, and other junk mail that began finding its way to Peck, as to other mortals, the house he announced himself in residence." Chap. 4, p. 109

"They say more people are alive today than have lived in all previous human history." Chap. 5, p. 158

"I keep wondering now, as I think back on it, what might have happened if I had explained. If I had said, 'Look, Mrs. Catling is ill, the last thing she needs is to be kept awake all night.'" Chap. 5, p. 190

"It turns out to be for me as I once told her it would be for her daughter. I shall be richer all my life for this sorrow." Chap. 7, p. 248



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss Joe Allston. What did Joe do for a living? How does the reader discover Joe's level of education? Why has Joe come to live in California? Who is Curtis? How did Curtis live his life? How does Curtis's life affect Joe? How does Curtis die? How does this life and death affect Joe? How does Curtis's death reflect in Joe's actions in regards to Jim Peck? In regards to Marian Catlin?

Discuss Jim Peck. Who is Jim Peck? Why does Peck want to live on the Allston property? Why does Joe point out that Peck rides a motorcycle and will be using manufactured camping gear to survive on his property? Why does Peck tap into Joe's electricity and water without permission? Why does Peck build a shed and do other things on Joe's property without permission? What kind of business does Peck begin while living on Joe's property? Why does this offend Joe? Why does Peck not want to move when Joe asks him to?

Discuss the LoPrestis. Who is Fran LoPresti? What kind of relationship does she have with her daughter? What does Fran create that Joe believes is meant to symbolize this relationship? What does Julie begin hanging out with Jim Peck and his friends? What type of behaviors does Julie indulge in while hanging with these people? Why does Fran take the police to Peck's new camp? What is the result? How does this impact Julie? What eventually leads to a reconciliation between mother and daughter?

Discuss Marian Catlin. Is Joe in love with Marian? Describe their relationship. Why does Marian befriend Joe even though they fight almost constantly? How does Marian feel about nature? What are Marian's opinions on pain? What action does Marian commit that makes it appear as though her opinions on pain are different than she claims them to be? Why does Marian become pregnant? Why does Marian refuse to end the pregnancy in order to treat her cancer? Would Marian have survived had she ended the pregnancy?

Discuss John Catlin. What does John do for a living? Is this profession a result of the younger generations feelings about society? If so, in what way? Why is John away from home so often? Why does John not attempt to spend more time with his wife in view of her recent battle with cancer? How does John feel about Joe Allston's involvement in his wife's cancer treatment? Why does John support Marian's opinions about her death despite a clear reluctance to agree with her methods? Should John have handled this situation differently? Explain.

What are gophers? Why does Joe kill them? Why does Marian believe nature should be left to act as it was intended? What argument does Joe give to the contrary? On whose side are you? Explain. How does this argument about nature relate to Joe's relationship with Jim Peck? With Marian? With his son, Curtis? What is your opinion in this argument? How does your opinion reflect modern society?



Discuss the sixties. What is unique about the sixties? What movement takes place among the younger generation during the sixties? How does the older generation react? Does this novel express in a clear way the opinion of the older generation against the younger generation? Does this novel express in a clear way the opinion of the younger generation? Does this novel change your opinion of the sixties generation? Explain.