Animal Dreams Study Guide

Animal Dreams by Barbara Kingsolver

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Introduction

In Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* (1990), Codi Noline, a young woman unsure of her purpose in life, returns to her hometown of Grace, Arizona, to teach high school and care for her father. As the novel unfolds, Codi gradually becomes aware of important political and environmental issues. She also learns that the detached and cynical individualism that has dominated her life is not the best recipe for happiness. Her exposure to Hispanic and Native American culture shows her the value of the communal way of living, which emphasizes deep and lasting ties to family and to the earth. Although her life is blighted by the tragic death of her sister, Hallie, Codi finally finds peace in the knowledge and acceptance of who she is and where she comes from.

Animal Dreams was Kingsolver's second novel. It won high praise for its convincing portrayal of the complex, interconnected web of human life and relationships, and how this web is shaped by time, memory, and culture. The wide scope of the novel, and the way it manages to weave environmental and political issues into the narrative without sounding preachy, was also praised.

The novel contains many of the elements that characterize Kingsolver's work as a whole: a setting in the American southwest, a female protagonist whose way of living is or becomes more cooperative than competitive (which is intended as a contrast between female and male attitudes); a concern for the environment; an admiration of Native American culture, and opposition to U.S. involvement in the politics of Central America.

Animal Dreams can be placed in the tradition of "eco-feminist" literature, which began in the 1980s and includes work by authors such as Ursula Le Guin, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Alice Walker.

Author Biography

Barbara Kingsolver was born on April 5, 1955, in Annapolis, Maryland, to Virginia and Wendell R. Kingsolver. Her father was a country physician, and Kingsolver grew up in rural Kentucky, where she became aware of the poverty that many people in the area had to endure. As a child, Kingsolver was a voracious reader and wanted to become a writer although she did not believe this to be a realistic goal.

Blessed with musical talent, Kingsolver won a scholarship to study instrumental music at DePauw University in Indiana. It was at DePauw that she became interested in the social and political issues that would later inform her writing. After changing her major from music to biology, which she considered to be a more practical subject for a future career, she graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in 1977. After graduation, she traveled and worked in Europe for two years before returning to the United States. She went to live in Tucson, Arizona, where she still lives today.

Kingsolver then enrolled in a doctoral program in evolutionary biology and ecology at the University of Arizona. She completed a master's degree in 1981, terminated her academic studies, and took a job as a technical writer for the Office of Arid Lands Studies at the University of Arizona.

Pleased with becoming a professional writer, Kingsolver took on some freelance writing work and at the same time began her own fiction and nonfiction. Much of her own writing concerned political causes (such as human rights in Central and Latin America) and environmental issues. Out of her work during this period came her book, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (1989), which was sympathetic to the miners' cause.

Kingsolver's first novel was *The Bean Trees* (1988), in which a young woman escapes her limited prospects in rural Kentucky by moving to Tucson, taking in refugees from Central America, and becoming socially and politically aware. Critical response to this autobiographical novel was highly favorable.

Over the next few years, Kingsolver established herself as an important writer in a variety of genres. Her short stories were published in *Homeland and Other Stories* (1989), and this was followed by another novel, *Animal Dreams,* in 1990. Kingsolver broke new ground again in 1991 when her first volume of poetry, *Another America (Otra America),* was published. The poems appeared with Spanish translations alongside them. The novel *Pigs in Heaven* (1993) was a sequel to *The Bean Trees,* and this was followed by *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (1995). Her fourth novel, *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), set in the Belgian Congo in 1959, was a national bestseller.

Kingsolver was married to Joseph Hoffmann, a chemist, from 1985 until 1992. They have one child, Camille. In 1995, Kingsolver married Stephen Hopp, an ornithologist and animal behaviorist, with whom she has another daughter, Lily.

Plot Summary

Chapter 1

In the first chapter of *Animal Dreams,* Dr. Homer Noline gazes on his two young daughters, Cosima and Halimeda, as they sleep curled up close together. It is early November, the Night of All Souls in the Christian liturgical calendar.

Chapter 2

This chapter jumps forward in time and is narrated by Codi, the name by which Cosima is known. After a fourteen-year absence she is returning to her hometown of Grace, Arizona, to work as a schoolteacher and care for her sick father. Previously, she had been living with her boyfriend, Carlo, and her sister, Hallie, in Tucson, Arizona. Soon after Hallie left for war-torn Nicaragua to help develop agriculture, Codi decided to move also. But as she walks the streets of Grace, she feels like a stranger.

Chapter 3

This chapter is told from the point of view of Doc Homer, the name by which Dr. Homer Noline is known. Doc Homer thinks back to a time when Hallie and Codi were young children and were missing during a storm. They were rescued from a washed-open coyote burrow, nursing seven pups they wanted to save.

Chapters 4-7

In Grace, Codi stays with Emelina, her friend from high school, who has five young boys. Codi recalls the last time she saw Hallie and the close relationship they had always enjoyed. She also catches up on all that has happened in Grace over the previous fourteen years. Although the town is full of memories, she still feels like an outsider. She recalls the day her mother died, when Codi was three years old, and her own loss of a baby to a miscarriage when she was fifteen. The father was Loyd Peregrina, a part-Apache, part-Pueblo high school senior.

At a Labor Day weekend party, Codi meets Loyd, who is now a railroad engineer, and listens to a group of old men talking about how Black Mountain Mining Company is polluting the nearby river.

Chapters 8-9

Codi visits her father for the first time in two years. He is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. They communicate little, and Doc refuses to discuss his illness.

Codi begins teaching biology at the high school and also discovers the Stitch and Bitch Club, a sewing group who are holding a meeting in Emelina's house. Codi receives a letter from Hallie, mailed from southern Mexico. It is full of characteristically detailed observations. Codi and Loyd begin talking, and Loyd reveals that he had a twin brother, Leander, who died at the age of fifteen. He invites Codi to accompany him on a business trip.

Chapter 10

Doc Homer lies on his examining table in his office in the hospital basement. He is confused and can no longer distinguish between past and present. He thinks of fifteen-year-old Codi, knowing she is pregnant but having no idea of how to talk to her about it.

Chapters 11-12

Codi's trip with Loyd gets postponed, but Codi discovers that one of his interests is cockfighting. Codi sees Loyd frequently but convinces herself their relationship is only a casual one. She takes her students on a field trip to the river, which she finds to be extremely polluted. Viola tells her of Black Mountain's plan to divert the river, so as not to flout Environmental Protection Agency regulations. But, diverting the river will destroy Grace because there will be no water to nourish the orchards.

Loyd takes Codi on a trip to the Apache reservation and then to Kinishba, an eight-hundred-year-old Pueblo stone dwelling that contains two hundred small rooms - a whole village under one roof.

Chapter 13

Doc Homer is again lost in his memories, and his mind slides from the present to the past. He remembers the day Codi suffered a miscarriage. She emerged from the bathroom carrying a bundle wrapped in a black sweater. Doc Homer followed her outside and watched as she disposed of the dead baby. He did not tell her that he had observed her, or even that he knew she was pregnant.

Chapter 14

A pregnant student drops out of school, and Codi teaches her students about birth control. After hearing from a local resident about Doc Homer's failing memory, she asks to take care of him, but he insists he is fine. Codi celebrates Halloween by going trick-or-treating with Emelina's children and then joins the whole community to celebrate the Mexican Day of the Dead, in which everyone converges on the cemetery and tends family graves. Codi finds a grave marked Homero Nolina, and wonders why his name is so similar to her father's since she believes the family came from Illinois.

Chapter 15

Doc Homer is disturbed by a visit from Codi, who asks whether they have relatives in Grace. Doc Homer's mind once again plays tricks on him and drifts back to images of Codi as a child.

Chapters 16-19

Codi speaks to the Stitch and Bitch Club about the pollution of the river, and the women decide to mount a mass demonstration against Black Mountain. Codi receives a distressing letter from Hallie, describing how three girls in Nicaragua were killed by gunfire. Loyd takes Codi to watch cockfights in which his own birds participate, but after Codi protests, he agrees to give up the sport.

In December, Codi travels to Tucson with the Stitch and Bitch Club, who sell their homemade peacock pinatas to raise funds. Codi visits Carlo, who tries to persuade her to move to Colorado with him. She spends Christmas with Loyd on the Navajo reservation, where Loyd shows her an ancient village built into the cliff. In the Jemez Mountains in New Mexico, they bathe in volcanic hot springs, and Loyd takes her to visit his family in a Pueblo village. On Christmas Day, they watch Pueblo dances.

Chapter 20

Doc Homer receives a telephone call informing him that Hallie has been kidnapped in Nicaragua. He is confused and for a while does not understand what has happened.

Chapters 21-23

Distraught at Hallie's kidnapping, Codi gives her students an impassioned lecture about preserving the environment. She also confronts Doc Homer about the origins of his family, but he refuses to acknowledge the truth. Meanwhile, the campaign against Black Mountain by the Stitch and Bitch Club draws media attention.

Hearing nothing from Hallie, Codi desperately writes letters to anyone of importance. Sean Rideheart, an art dealer from Tucson, tells the Stitch and Bitch Club they can save Grace by putting it on the National Register of Historic Places.

Doc Homer's condition deteriorates, but he confesses to Codi the truth about his family. He had covered up his origins because the Nolina family had a bad reputation in the town.

In a dream, Codi learns how to let go of the haunting memory of the child she lost.

Chapters 24-26

Codi is informed that Hallie has been murdered by her kidnappers. Numbed by grief, she decides to leave Grace and rejoin Carlo. She takes a flight to Denver, but the plane has engine trouble and has to return to Tucson. Codi is relieved to get back on the ground. The shock of the flight makes her alter her plans, and she decides to remain in Grace with Loyd.

Chapter 27

Codi buries some of Hallie's things, and Doc Homer's mind goes back to her burial of her baby at the riverbed. Then he thinks that Codi is Alice, his dead wife. Although he seems unable to distinguish between Codi and Hallie, he feels a deep love for both.

Chapter 28

At least two years have elapsed. Doc Homer has died and is buried with the rest of his family. On All Souls Day in November, Viola takes Codi, who is now pregnant by Loyd, to the place where she watched her dead mother taken away by helicopter, over thirty years ago.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Two little girls, Cosima and Halimeda, sleep curled together in one bed even though there is a second unmade bed in the room. Their father, Dr. Homer Noline, watches them. In the morning, they will rumple the second bed in an attempt to make their father believe that they have slept apart. The children are tired from playing in the cemetery with their friends, helping Viola Domingos decorate the grave of an ancestor.

The father decides, while watching the girls, that he will not permit them to participate in the Day of All Souls again because, he thinks, "there are too many skeletons down there." His heart is touched by everything the children have already lost in their little lives and how close they are.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In writing about or analyzing a story, it's important to talk about its theme; in other words, what does the story mean? What point is the writer making? Any effective piece of writing, whether fiction or nonfiction, makes a point, and discovering that theme adds to the depth of meaning and enjoyment for the reader.

A good starting place in determining what the theme of a story is point of view. Through whose eyes are we seeing the action, the landscape, the characters and the dialogue? Through whose ears are we hearing the voices and the sounds? An effective writer, one whose works are read over and over by many people and whose works endure over the years, is an artist. One place where the artistic talent is often apparent is in the effective and creative use of point of view.

Barbara Kingsolver is a contemporary writer whose novels are very popular. We don't know yet whether her writing will endure over a long period of time, of course, but we do see the kind of artistry in such things as use of point of view that would indicate that this will be true.

In this story, Barbara Kingsolver uses point of view as a tool to convey meaning, and readers can see how the point of view helps us discover the author's point - the theme of the story. In the opening chapter, the narrator is speaking in the third person. In other words, the narrator is describing the little girls as "them" and their father as "he." However, readers also know what the father is thinking. As we read the story, we will see that there is only one other person whose thoughts we know, and that is Cosima (Codi), the older of the two girls. Now, we know that the theme will emerge from these two characters.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The narrator is now one of the sisters - the one that "didn't go to war," she tells us. She recalls her sister's plan to leave Tucson to work in the cotton fields around Chinandega in Nicaragua. She leaves in August, and the sister who is narrating remembers how close they have always been and how painful the separation is.

The narrator now tells of leaving Tucson also but on a Greyhound bus bound for Grace, Arizona, where the children were born and raised. She is tall, she tells us, like her father and sister.

The narrator arrives in midmorning, and she feels as if she's a stranger even though little has changed in the fourteen years she has been away. She describes a scene that includes orchards, "confetti-colored houses," and the old Black Mountain copper mine.

The narrator has left Carlo, her lover of ten years. Hallie, the younger sister, lived with them in Tucson. The narrator and Carlo met in medical school. He became an emergency room doctor. She has drifted from job to job, most recently working the night shift at a 7-Eleven.

The narrator's father is ill with Alzheimer's disease, and she has come to Grace to care for him. However, she will be living with her high-school friend, Emelina, from the class of 1972. The narrator is Cosima, the older sister, but she has shortened her name to Codi. Halimeda has always gone by Hallie.

The orchards are full of peacocks, the offspring of birds brought by nine blue-eyed Gracela sisters who came from Spain a hundred years ago to marry gold-camp miners.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter is functionally necessary because it lays the background for what is going to happen. Now readers know why Codi is coming to Grace, and we know what has happened to the other sister, Hallie. We also know that Codi's life up to now has not been satisfying and that it has been characterized by failure and a sort of limbo.

The character of the narrator is also beginning to be filled out. Though the narrator has been to medical school, her most recent job was at a 7-Eleven. She has been drifting through life, and she lacks direction. However, her family is clearly important to her and to the story. Her sister, a gardener, has been living with her and her boyfriend, and now Codi comes back to her come to care for her ill father, a reversal of the way he watched over the girls in the first chapter.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The father, the town's doctor, flashes back to an incident when the girls were small. They are out in a storm, and he goes looking for them. When he finds them, they are stranded in an arroyo because they are trying to rescue seven coyote pups. He calls Uda Dell, on the other side of the arroyo, who sends her husband on a mule to retrieve the girls. They cannot save the pups. The children cry when their father gets them home and want to know if the baby coyotes have died and if animals go to heaven.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Although Chapter 3 is very short, this incident will be remembered and referred to several times during the novel, so it is an important one. Readers are again inside the doctor's mind as he remembers this event, and this technique is called a flashback. Kingsolver uses flashbacks extensively in this novel to accomplish her purposes. It foreshadows the lives of the girls. In their early years, there is not a time when the sisters are not together. As adults, they live together in Tucson even though Codi is living with a boyfriend. Ultimately, this story is about the impact on the narrator of their ultimate separation and the death of the younger one. The incident of the baby coyotes foreshadows the motif of death that will run through the story.

The baby coyotes also foreshadow a coyote-dog mix that belongs to Loyd, the man who helps Codi work through her return to the place of her birth and childhood and come to grips with who she is and her father's role in her life. Finally, the attempt to save the babies also foreshadows the pregnancy that occurs in Codi's teenage years and the death and burial of her child, whom she also cannot save.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Readers are back in the present, and Codi is arriving at Emelina's house, where she will be living in the guesthouse while she is in Grace. Emelina has five boys ranging from six months old to a teenager, and her husband works for the railroad.

While Codi has a medical degree, she quit practicing medicine because of a crisis trying to deliver a baby, where she lost her nerve. Codi thinks of Hallie and her mission to Nicaragua to participate in a revolution of co-op farms and literacy crusades and their lives together. Hallie had worked for the Extension Service in Tucson and is an expert gardener. Codi tries to reassure herself that Hallie will be all right. She believes that she will not survive if anything happens to her sister.

Chapter 4 Analysis

As the story moves along, readers see the relationship between Codi and Emelina becoming very much sister-like. They become very close, and now Codi is the one who is the extra person in a couple-plus-one living arrangement. Ironically, we also see Codi becoming a sort of extra mother for the boys although she has lost her opportunity to be a parent in the death of her child when she was a teenager. We can already see that this novel is about family relationships, and Codi's very positive role in this family reinforces the theme as it develops.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Emelina's husband, J.T., is detained in Texas because of an investigation of a derailment. He has worked for the railroad since the mine shut down about ten years ago. Codi will teach science classes at the local high school for a year. She tells Emelina that she thinks the relationship with Carlo is over.

Viola Domingos is Emelina's mother-in-law and lives with the family. She is a member of the Stitch and Bitch Club. Codi reflects on how closely bound she is to Hallie and how much she misses her and how their father, who came to Grace from Illinois, has always impressed upon them that they were different from the other people in this little town. His racist and classist attitudes have robbed her of any opportunity to be accepted and develop a sense of belonging in the town, important building blocks in the development of any child.

Codi and Hallie's mother died shortly after Hallie was born. Codi was three and believes that she remembers her mother being picked up by a helicopter although her father has always told her that she was not there. In truth, her mother had died before she was put in the aircraft, and it went away without her.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The Domingos family were neighbors of the Nolines when the children were growing up, and readers will see later that Viola played an important part in their lives, although Codi has been unaware of Viola's importance in her life. We see the town now through Codi's eyes. She is remembering her painful childhood here, although as readers we can see that the town does not demonstrate animosity for her. After all, her father is the town's beloved and respected only doctor and has given his life to the care of the residents.

Codi's sense of alienation as a child has been a defining factor in her failures as an adult, and in this chapter we see it developing as an important clue to the theme. Her abiding angst is the result of her not feeling at home anywhere. Her only connection has been to her sister. Her relationship with Carlo has been one of ambivalence and ambiguity with very little emotion on either side.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Codi lost a baby when she was fifteen years old. The father was Loyd Peregrina, an Apache, who was a senior; they had a total of four dates. She didn't tell him about the baby. She didn't even tell Hallie or her father. In fact, she believes that no one knows except herself.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The loss of Codi's baby is the event that was foreshadowed by the effort to save the lives of the coyote babies. The fact that Codi endured the life-scarring incident of losing a baby alone underscores the sense of alienation that Kingsolver has given to this character. It will be important as we seek to determine the theme of the story.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Emelina is organizing a fiesta for the Saturday of Labor Day weekend, a family tradition. School will begin the following Tuesday, but Codi hasn't been to the school yet and has avoided an announced teacher's meeting. She was hired on an emergency basis since she is not certified to teach.

Emelina tells Codi that Loyd Peregrina, the father of the child she lost as a teenager, who works with J. T. on the railroad, will be coming to the fiesta. Loyd has straightened himself out, says Emelina. She doesn't know of the relationship between him and Cody when they were teenagers. Meanwhile, Codi notices that the fruit trees do not look healthy. Later, she and John Tucker, Emelina's oldest son, go shopping for supplies for the fiesta, and she sees Loyd, who waves to her from his pickup truck.

The fiesta is like a high-school reunion for Codi. She knows all the people from her growing-up years in Grace. Loyd, who as an adult has become a very handsome and much-sought-after man by the ladies, is there. She tells Trish, who had been a snooty cheerleader in high school, about Hallie's work in Nicaragua, and in the telling, readers learn more about what Hallie is doing there. She is working with farmers who are being destroyed by the Contras, who are being supported by the United States government.

Codi becomes acquainted with a friendly dog at the party. Loyd speaks to her, and it turns out that the dog belongs to him. They don't speak of the past, and he indicates that he will call her.

Dosa Althea, a tiny old woman dressed in black, who is a dominant figure in Grace, is at the party and is the center of a group of women including Viola Domingos. She overhears a conversation about the cause of the illness of the trees: Black Mountain mine has been poisoning the ground with sulfuric acid in a leaching operation to get the last bit of gold from the mine.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Codi's reluctance to go to the school is to be expected. She has always avoided taking on commitments. She exemplifies an aimless, failed and wasted life.

Loyd's dog, whose name is Jack, plays an interesting role in the novel. He has a story of his own. He is a coyote/domestic dog mix and was destined to be killed along with his littermates by Loyd's violent, dysfunctional father. Loyd has rescued him, although the other seven did not survive. Again, readers hear reverberations of the attempt to save the coyote babies and the loss of Codi's own baby.

The brief statement about the dying trees gets very few words in this chapter; however, it is either foreshadowing or actually introducing a secondary theme - an environmental one. Kingsolver artistically winds this theme into several aspects of the story. Hallie is in Nicaragua giving her life to save a country's agriculture from evil vultures promoted by her own country. The orchards are dying in Grace because of pollution resulting from exploitation. In a third iteration of this theme, Loyd will introduce Codi to the pristine land on the reservation and tell her of the seizing of tribal lands to enrich greedy white people.

At this point, thinking about the setting for the story will be enlightening. All aspects of a good story work together to make a satisfying whole, as they do in *Animal Dreams.* The setting here is a small town in a fruitful area where orchards have provided abundance for several generations. It is surrounded by an arid countryside that produces very little except spectacular scenery. Loyd tells Codi that Grace was carved out of the original Apache reservation and that "They only gave the Apache this land in the first place because it looked like a piece of shit."

However, the well-being of the town is now being threatened by yet another kind of exploitation. For Codi, during her growing-up years, the town seemed arid and has not nurtured her, much like the reservation where Loyd grew up. However, we will find that Loyd has found nurture in that unfavorable environment. He has grown strong not only as a result of his family's support but also because of his learning to deal in a positive way with the negative experience of being brought up by a neglectful and abusive father. The death of his identical twin when they were teenagers as the direct result of this neglect is a defining point in his life, but he has emerged from it stronger rather than weaker. The theme of natural resources and exploitation and survival are evoked by the setting and reinforced by the various aspects of the story line.

Dosa Althea, introduced in this chapter, is a recurring character in the story. She plays an important role in Codi's search for identity.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Codi goes to visit her father, her first visit in many years to the house she grew up in. On the way, she meets Uda, the baby-sitter for the girls when they were small, who sends a pie with her for her father.

Codi's father told her that he had Alzheimer's disease two years ago on a visit to New Mexico. She was attending a research conference and invited him to come there. He asked her not to tell Hallie. His relationship with the girls is that of a remote, aloof caretaker. It is difficult for Codi to reconcile her image of him with a person who is going to lose control over his life.

When Codi arrives at her father's house today, he is in his darkroom. He does not greet her and continues to work, even though they haven't seen each other for two years. He takes pictures of objects that look like something else, such as clouds that look like animals, but he never displays the pictures. She walks around the house recalling her childhood here.

Doctor Noline has made a genetic study of inbreeding in Grace, the results of which are most apparent in the "marble" eye color typical of most inhabitants of the small town. Codi has a recurring nightmare about losing her eyesight after a "shattering pop, like glass breaking." She also suffers from insomnia.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Dr. Noline's obsession with photographic images that look like something else symbolizes his life. He has lived as if he is not from Grace, although he is actually the offspring of one of the original nine sisters who came to marry miners and populate the town, and he grew up here. He has brought the girls up denying that they have any connection to the town and its people. This disparity between reality and his created reality not only drives his life but is also the source of Codi's failure to get a grip on a life of her own. Now Dr. Noline has Alzheimer's disease, and he is increasingly unable to distinguish between past events and current ones, an ironic development in a life lived as an illusion.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Codi now must make an appearance at the school. She has unpleasant memories of her high school experience, remembering feeling out of place and unaccepted because of the orthopedic shoes her father made her wear. She is convinced that they were the reason she was unpopular, but Emelina tells her it's because the other students felt that she thought she was too good for them.

Codi will teach General Biology I and II. The contemporary appearance and behavior of the students surprise her. She introduces a human skeleton she has found in a basement as Mrs. Josephine Nash from Illinois. Codi is exhausted at the end of the day and comes home to find the Stitch and Bitch Club meeting in Emelina's house. Dosa Althea is the dominant force in the club.

Codi gets a letter from Hallie, who was in Chiapas, Mexico, near the southern border, when she wrote it. Later, Loyd comes to see her, bringing his dog, Jack. Most of the men in the little town work on the railroad, as does he. Loyd invites her to go to Whiteriver a week from Saturday, and she agrees to go.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Characterization is how an author develops the people in the story. The devices an author may choose to use vary, but an important one is dialogue, which includes the character's dialect, the meaning of the character's words and the way they are spoken. Does the character speak harshly or softly? Does he or she mean what is said? Why does this character choose these particular words? Readers have seen that Homer Noline speaks not in the local dialect but with more formal language - what one would expect of a medical doctor. However, this dialect of the doctor underscores the double life he is living. He grew up in this town and would be expected to speak like the other inhabitants, but his speech reveals the extent to which he has taken on an identity that he, himself, has created. Another aspect of a story that reveals character is what the character does - his actions. Doc Noline's overt efforts to separate his daughters from the townspeople tell volumes about what is going on inside him. He has dedicated his life to rising above his roots.

A description may also help to develop a character. For instance, readers know that Codi is tall. We don't know what color her eyes are; we do find out in a very brief mention later in the book that her hair is reddish like the Gracela sister who was her ancestor. Does she have the marble-blue eyes, the unfailingly identifiable characteristic of all the offspring of the Gracelas, though? Readers are never told because then there would be no mystery, and the mystery about her background is extremely important to the development of the plot.

A character does not have to be a single person, and in this novel The Stitch and Bitch Club is a character. The Club will play a major role in developing the secondary theme of environmental threat. They also form a microcosm of the town itself, representing its diversity and its history.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

This short chapter focuses on a flashback memory of Doc Homer. In his memory, he knows that Codi, fifteen years old, is pregnant. Recognizing this fact, he seems only to feel remorse about the loss of his wife, and no concern for his daughter's dilemma. She does not know that he knows.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This is an important vignette revealing the character of Doctor Noline and the way he has failed his children. Kingsolver uses this flashback to add flesh to this character.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Loyd is unable to make the trip to Whiteriver because he is called in to work; however, J. T. reveals to Codi that the purpose of the trip would have been to participate in cockfighting, which disturbs her.

Loyd is now coming to see Codi frequently. On one of his visits, he tells Codi about Jack's history. His mother was a coyote that Loyd rescued who then mated with Loyd's father's dog.

Codi takes her students to the river to collect water for examination under the microscope. They also bring small animals, insects and a fish, although that was not the purpose of the trip. They put their finds in an aquarium in their classroom. When samples of the water are put under a microscope, to Codi's surprise there is nothing in it. It is dead.

When tested for pH, the water is only slightly better than battery acid, an early warning sign for the demise of a river. Codi files an affidavit with the local authorities on the situation with the river, hoping to get action from the EPA, but Viola tells her the mine owners are just going to divert the river, which will meet EPA requirements. This will leave the orchards with no water at all. They are already suffering from the acidic content of the water, so either way they will die. Once the orchards are gone, the town will die, its inhabitants moving elsewhere in order to earn a living. Codi finds that the local families ceded their water rights to the company in 1939, thinking they were getting money for nothing.

Meanwhile, Loyd and Codi make another date for Whiteriver. The narrator tells of a fiesta in a restaurant run by Dosa Althea's daughters. A band plays "Chicken Scratch" music, and there is dancing in the courtyard. Codi and Emelina discuss Loyd, and Emelina suspects that Codi thinks he is not good enough for her. She tells Codi that half the women in Grace, "and not just the single ones" would "give up Sunday breakfast to go to Whiteriver" with him. Codi is embarrassed, realizing that she is behaving exactly as her father had when she and Hallie were children, acting as if they were superior to everyone else in Grace. Emelina has been feeding the baby mashed beans; he chokes on a whole bean and is not breathing. Codi rescues him and becomes a heroine in the little town. Codi sleeps with the baby in Emelina's house that night to reassure Emelina that he is all right.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Rejection of her father's prejudices has been a major focus of Codi's life, but now she is called upon to face her own prejudices. She finds that her feelings about Loyd are ambivalent at least in part because of her own prejudices regarding race and social

standing. She knows now that she will have to come face-to-face with his cockfighting, which is repugnant to her.

Saving the baby reveals yet another aspect of Codi's character. Readers have seen her as a failure in most of the things she has tried, including practicing medicine. However, in a crisis, she does not fail; rather, she is an admirable success. This foreshadows the ultimate outcome of this story - a functioning, effective Codi who is able to overcome the turmoil and torment in her life and live successfully.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

This chapter is entitled Animal Dreams. In it, Codi and Loyd at last make their trip to Whiteriver. On the way, Codi stops at the post office and picks up a letter from Hallie, who is in Nicaragua helping farmers with their crops. Hallie writes that she must ride a horse because a Jeep might set off a landmine.

On the way to Whiteriver, Codi and Loyd pass an abandoned mine, and Codi observes acres of abandoned alfalfa fields ruined by the salty irrigation water. She also finds that when gold was found in Grace, it was a part of the reservation but was taken from the Apaches, whose reservation now begins fifteen miles north. They stop in a small town on the way, and Loyd bargains for fighting roosters.

Codi and Loyd visit ancient Indian dwellings, a village of over 200 rooms under one roof. Loyd tells her that when a baby died, its bones were mortared into the thick walls. The village was built by the Pueblos, Loyd's mother's ancestors. They make love for the first time in the courtyard of the dwelling. Loyd doesn't know about the lost baby that was the result of their brief affair when she was fifteen, and she doesn't tell him.

Codi asks Loyd what Jack is dreaming about, and he says, "Chasing rabbits." They discuss animal dreams, and Loyd says they're like people. They dream about what they do when they're awake. She says, "So you think we all just have animal dreams. We can't think of anything to dream about except our ordinary lives." He answers, "Only if you have an ordinary life. If you want sweet dreams, you've got to live a sweet life."

Chapter 12 Analysis

Readers know that this is an important chapter because the title of the novel is taken from what happens here. What relationship does it have to the author's purposes and theme? The discussion about dreams is about wholeness and is echoed in the Indian approach to life. The Pueblos build homes not to last forever but to be a part of the land they rest in. They are concerned about harmony among all things.

Wholeness is an important aspect of the meaning of this story and will be discussed in relationship to the work's theme in the analysis following the final chapter. At that point, we will be able to add up everything we have read and discussed and come to a conclusion about the point Kingsolver is making in this story.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Homer Noline's name is not his original one. He has changed it at some time in the past. He grew up in Grace, not in Illinois. He and Alice, his wife, eloped because her family did not find him acceptable. The Nolinas, the Nolines' original name, were the offspring of the auburn-haired sister and never amounted to much. They were the black sheep of the families of the Gracela sisters.

Now Dr. Noline forces himself to remember dates to combat the creep of Alzheimer's and to help keep his mind active and working. He is also remembering when Codi lost the baby nearly twenty years ago. In a house where it was forbidden, she locked herself in the bathroom. She asked Hallie to bring her a particular sweater. Then he heard her scrubbing, and he heard the toilet flushing more than two dozen times. He saw her leave the house with a bundle that he knew was the baby. He followed her and saw where she left the bundle. He made plans to go back and cover it with stones and mark the spot. She stayed up most of the night doing homework. He gave her the painkiller he would have prescribed for her condition if she had been his patient. He thinks, "This is the full measure of love he is qualified to dispense."

Chapter 13 Analysis

For the first time the doctor acknowledges that he is not qualified to be the girls' father - that he is only a dispenser of medications. Now the mask is being removed just a bit, and readers are finding more of the truth.

Suspense is a literary device that authors use to keep readers reading and to increase the satisfaction that comes from a resolution of the tension. Human beings constantly look for resolution. They work puzzles so they may reach a state of resolution. They watch basketball games because they want to experience the suspense related to the outcome and then feel satisfied when it is resolved even if their team does not win. When Kingsolver reveals her characters piece by piece, she is using suspense to keep her readers reading and ultimately to experience the satisfaction of resolution.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

One of Codi's students is pregnant with twins and is dropping out of school. Codi reacts by announcing an unscheduled unit on birth control. The students warn her that she will be fired, but she tells them that she will be finished as soon as the year is over anyway. They are going to study the reproductive system of higher mammals.

Meanwhile, there are signs that Doc Homer is becoming unstable, but Codi finds that the women in Grace are seeing that he has plenty to eat.

The title of this part of the book is Day of the Dead, an important Mexican holiday that is an annual celebration in Grace. Codi remembers coming to the celebrations as a small child until her father prohibited the girls from coming anymore. The graves are decorated with marigolds.

Ground has been broken for the dam that will divert water from Grace. The town will sue, but it will take ten years to get action, which will be far too late to save the orchards. At the Day of the Dead celebration in the cemetery, Codi discovers a family plot with her last name, but spelled with an "a" - Nolina instead of Noline - and a grave with Homero Nolina on it. She asks Viola about it and finds that the Nolina family was, in fact, from Grace, not Illinois as she had always been told. She feels left out because her family's plot goes undecorated.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Now more is revealed about the family. There have been hints, so the revelation does not surprise us. Readers feel that we are coming closer now to resolution of this puzzle. There has been much about death in this story - the death of Codi's mother, the death of her baby, the death of the coyote babies, the death of Loyd's twin, death in Nicaragua, the Day of the Dead celebrations and the discovery of the graves of her ancestors. After the last chapter, when we are ready to draw conclusions about the overriding theme of the story, we will factor in this aspect.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Codi confronts her father about the tombstone with his name on it. He is having trouble distinguishing between the present and the past, and she doesn't get an answer. She is wearing boots, and in his struggle to distinguish between the present and the past, the cowboy boots that Uda Dell gave them when they were children and that he did not permit them to wear replace the image he sees of his older daughter today.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The protagonist in this story is Codi, and the antagonist is her father, at least as far as the major plot is concerned. Readers are only in the minds of these two characters, so this is where the plot must unfold. While there are other conflicts, these are the major ones. The plot is primarily internal; it is only external in that Codi and her father, particularly in the flashbacks, have been at odds over some major issues. The shoes that he forces the girls to wear, or in this case the boots that he refused to allow them to wear, are a central issue in the conflicts between them and seem to be the visible focus of his failed parenthood.

The desire within Codi to find a purpose that would make it possible for her to live a whole life is what the novel is about. She desperately wants to find the kind of meaning that Hallie has found, but she can't seem to find her way. She lives on in quiet desperation. Her effort to discover the truth about her origins gives her an active role - a tool, a device, for overcoming her struggle.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Codi starts asking questions and finds that her mother died due to childbirth after Hallie was born. Codi resembles her mother, whose name was Althea, not Alice, which her father called her. She is now determined to get the truth about her family from her father.

Codi is invited to speak to the Stitch and Bitch Club regarding the pH of the river. She explains the problem and its cause. They ask whether the river can recover, and she assures them that it can because the water that flows in from the mountains is pure. Rather than accept that the situation is hopeless as the men have, the women are determined to find a solution.

A letter from Hallie tells of atrocities and asks Codi to listen for news about what the U.S. government is doing in Nicaragua and to let her know what is happening. Meanwhile, Codi and Loyd have an argument about her plan to leave Grace at the end of the year. She says she doesn't know where she's going. She needs someone to tell her, and she says that she gets lost a lot.

Codi and Loyd go to a cockfight. One of the cocks dies in a fight, but one lives. There's a person designated to sew up the one that is alive but wounded, and that person is Loyd. Codi is the only woman there. She is very disturbed by what she sees, and because of the anguish she remembers at last the episode when she and Hallie tried to save the coyotes, a memory that has been suppressed until now.

Codi tells Loyd, "What I believe is that humans should have more heart than that. I can't feel good about people making a spectator sport out of puncture wounds and internal hemorrhage." Loyd responds, "My brother Leander got killed by a drunk about fifteen miles from here." Then, he tells her that he is quitting cockfighting.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The dreaded visit to a cockfight ends very emotionally, with Codi expressing her horror and Loyd facing the needless cruelty for the purpose of the entertainment of a bunch of men. Codi's struggle for wholeness is not helped by the incident, but it does jar loose the memory of the incident when she tried to save the baby coyotes. The memory advances her understanding of who she is and what's important to her.

Codi's statement to Loyd about not knowing where she is going and that she gets lost a lot gives us insight about the conflicts within her that will eventually emerge as the theme, the meaning of the story.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The Stitch and Bitch Club is making work-of-art peacock pisatas to sell on the streets of Tucson to raise money to fight the mining company. Codi persuades Emelina to go along. All pisatas are sold by day's end at much higher prices than expected, and another selling trip is planned in ten days with 500 pisatas at a fixed price of $60 apiece.

Codi and Emelina stay with Carlo in the house where he and Codi and Hallie lived. Codi and Carlo talk about the possibility of moving in together. The women appear on television, identified as the Peacock Ladies selling Southwestern art. The trip to Tucson and her old house make Codi realize how aimless her life is and how she can't seem to change that.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The secondary plot - the effort to rescue Grace from the mining company - comes to the fore in this chapter, and the meeting between Codi and Carlo remind us of her struggle to achieve meaning in her life.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The second Tucson excursion fills two chartered buses. Husbands and children get into the act, as well as Codi's high school class. Codi has written the sad story of the threat to Grace, and it is rolled into a scroll and placed in the beak of each pisata. Codi does not go to Tucson, but she and Loyd spend the next few days alone roaming the solitary countryside. This chapter describes in detail the picturesque landscape of that part of New Mexico.

Loyd and his brother were twins, which are considered bad luck in the pueblo. Loyd confesses that he has given up cockfighting for good because of what she said about it. He tells Codi how his brother died. They were too young to be on their own with no one to look after them, and they got into trouble. He died in a fight in a bar from "Puncture wounds. Internal hemorrhage." Loyd uses the same words Codi had used to object to the cockfighting.

Loyd introduces Codi to his family history and his own past. Codi is impressed that he has always had family around him. Codi fills him in on what she has done since she left Grace. She feels comfortable telling him where she's been and what she has and hasn't done.

Hallie's letters tell of severe pollution that is causing illness and death in Nicaragua, and she and Codi have a heated exchange about the differences in the way the two of them live their lives. Codi feels that Hallie's motivations to help humankind somehow make her superior and that she, Codi, is wasting her life, waiting to be rescued. She does not expect to find love or believe that she could be loved. Codi knows that she is afraid to trust because she feels that she has lost everything - first her mother then her baby.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The secondary plot comes to the fore as many of Grace's citizens pour into Tucson with the pisatas. They are going up against the polluters to save the town. This secondary conflict between the town and wealthy establishment outsiders who are destroying it reflects what is going on in Nicaragua.

Just as a moving picture may sometimes present dazzling footage of natural phenomena such as mountains and rivers even though it is not essential to the plot of the story, so a writer may sometimes do the same thing. While the beauty of the unspoiled area described in this chapter is functional in this story by providing a contrast with what is happening in Grace, it is also an opportunity for Kingsolver to exercise her picture-painting ability. She makes available through her words the experience of visiting and seeing a beautiful area of our country that readers might never be able to visit. Also, this descriptive section might entice readers to go there so that we can take

in the beauty for ourselves. This is one of the reasons to read - the opportunity to have experiences and see with our minds' eyes scenery that we might never be able to travel to see.

In the primary plot within Codi, readers are able to see more of the reasons for her aimlessness and the feeling that she is lost. As a teenager with no nurturing parent, she felt that she had lost everything in the deaths of her mother and her baby. Hallie was the only thing she cared about, and she depended on her excessively. Now she is turning to Hallie in her letters to try to find a way to get on track, to find love and to learn to trust.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Loyd and Codi end up at Santa Rosalia Pueblo for Christmas, where Loyd's family lives. Loyd's mother is there and in charge of the feast. They celebrate Christmas with the family, which begins with a big dinner for everyone. During the daytime there is a ceremony and dancing. This chapter describes in detail the ceremonial dances in the plaza.

Chapter 19 Analysis

This is a warm and charming description of a large extended family celebrating a holiday. Their acceptance of Codi warms her, and she experiences feelings she has never had before of belonging and being part of a healthy, functioning, nurturing environment. It can't be missed here that this grounding has helped Loyd to grow up whole, but it is a social group that her father has condemned and looked down on.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The doctor gets a telephone call, and a voice tells him in Spanish that his daughter has been kidnapped. He is having trouble sorting out the past from the present. Hallie has been kidnapped and taken to Honduras where the contras are camped. He asks for a phone number so he can call back, and the voice suggests that he call the U.S. president, since this country has been funding the Contras, or perhaps the Ministry of Agriculture, either of this country or Nicaragua.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Readers' knowledge of what has happened to Hallie is limited to what the mind of Doc Homer is able to take in. His mind is frustratingly cobwebby, and the frustration is at both ends of the phone line. As readers, we feel it also. We want to know more.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

After the Christmas trip, when Codi gets the word about Hallie, she goes on a rampage in her classroom about the environmental damage that people do, focusing particularly on the stone-washed jeans of one of the students. On the trip with Loyd, she has seen mining in the Jemez Mountains of the minerals used in that process, mining that will destroy the mountains. She is furious that damage to the beautiful mountains is occurring just so jeans can look as if they have already been worn when they are new. Her outburst, of course, is spurred by her pain over Hallie's kidnapping.

Codi has had dinner with her father every night since word came of Hallie's kidnapping. He has regressed since the news came. She can't get very much information from him, but he does tell her that the caller had recommended calling the president.

Codi's father cautions her about her relationship with Loyd. He says Loyd "won't elevate your life." She answers that there's nothing to elevate. She's a medical-school dropout who works in quick-marts. She says that her father doesn't even see her. He spends his time taking pictures of people and turning them into something else.

Codi accuses her father of always wanting the girls to be above everybody else. He tells her, "You were above your peers." She says she was just as trashy as anyone else. She was pregnant at fifteen. He says that he knows and that he watched her bury the baby in the riverbed.

Codi asks her father why he has lied about his background. He says he didn't lie. He was stationed in Illinois and moved back to Grace after the war. He tells her that her mother's family despised him. The auburn-haired Gracela sister married a Nolina, and that branch of the family was trash. "Why did you come back here?" she asks. She suggests that he could have started over elsewhere. He says that people think the heart is the organ that suffers emotional damage, but the tissue of a heart is tough. It's the liver that's fragile.

Codi goes back to her classroom and apologizes for her tirade, explaining about Hallie's disappearance. They get out maps and study the geography and climate of Nicaragua and Honduras. They talk about the exploitation of the poorer countries by the rich countries like the United States and the damage they do to the environment in those defenseless parts of the world. They talk about the support the United States gives to people like the Contras.

Codi takes a day off and tries to call all the phone numbers that Hallie has given her, beginning with the State Department and U.S. Department of Agriculture. Her father asks whether she has called the president of the United States. Meanwhile, letters from Hallie continue to arrive, but Codi doesn't open them, waiting for information before she

can find the courage to do so. She knows that Hallie mailed them before she was kidnapped.

Meanwhile, by mid-January, the Stitch and Bitch Club has become famous for their pisatas. People are also reading the plea for the life of Grace. Reporters are coming, and the club appoints a spokesperson. When CBS News comes to town, they insist on interviewing the Dosa in her own home, which is also the restaurant. The Dosa speaks only Spanish and uses very colorful swear-words, which the translator tries to edit out. However, she finishes the interview by telling the story of the nine Gracela sisters and how they came and married miners. They brought the peacocks with them, and the town sprang from them. By now, Codi knows that the Dosa is her grandmother, and she feels that she is being told a bedtime story thirty years late.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Just as the Stitch and Bitch Club members are collectively a character in this story, so the students in Codi's classroom are collectively a character. One or the other is mentioned individually from time to time; however, they are often described as a unit with characteristics peculiar to all. For example, Codi is surprised at how contemporary their attitudes, looks and behaviors are, and as a unit they reward her by making her the teacher of the year.

Although Codi has been denied the opportunity to be a parent, she takes a parental approach to the students, trying to meet their needs in ways that her own needs were not met. When she observes that they practice risky sex, she initiates a teaching unit to help them avoid disaster. She teaches them the need for responsible management of the environment. She interacts with them in positive ways, giving them opportunities to grow and become more thoughtful and effective adults. She engages them in community causes such as sending them to Tucson with the Peacock Ladies to work to save their town.

In the process, Codi is coming into her own. These children are the age that her own child would be if it had lived. They provide a catalyst for Codi's search for wholeness.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

There is no word of Hallie, and the women begin a letter-writing campaign to try to get some publicity going so that pressure might be brought by someone to obtain her freedom. Codi does not go to her father's house any longer. They are incapable of comforting one another. She has dreams of a Hallie who is still a child.

The Stitch and Bitch Club has become so wealthy from the pisatas that they have to open a bank account. Besides, contributions are pouring in from all over the country for their cause. They decide to use their money to get the town and its trees declared a historic preserve and seek to have it listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Such landmarks are protected from the onslaught of industry, and listing would protect it from demolition or other negative impact. The publicity that comes from harming such treasures is so great that in many cases the listing itself saves many of the landmarks. Meanwhile, Carlo has decided to move to Telluride and invites Codi to come with him.

Hallie's kidnapping has driven a wedge between Codi and Loyd. Doc Homer has gone out of town to get a CAT Scan, so Codi and Uda decide to clean his house while he is gone. Codi also needs to get some papers about the house for the historic preserve project. They find that he has preserved every piece of their lives, including a box full of orthopedic shoes. Uda says that she gave them cowboy outfits with guns, which he took away. They find a box of photographs of the babies of Grace, including Codi and Hallie, taken by the doctor as a part of his genetics study. Codi knows now what her dream of blindness has been about.

Chapter 22 Analysis

At this point in the book, readers see development in all the intertwined plots. The women are making advances in the struggle against the mining company. We now have hope that they may be triumphant in that conflict.

Codi is also making advances in her attempt to deal with the demons that have continually tried to defeat her. She is confronting her father about his deceptions and his racial and class prejudices, and in confrontation, she is finding strength and resolve. She also solves the mystery of her recurring nightmare of a flash of light before she loses her sight. Her father photographed her, along with all the other babies in Grace in his study of the genetics of the families. It's ironic that his children were included in the study, since he built a life based on his separateness from and superiority to all the other inhabitants of Grace.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The medicine the doctor has been taking to slow the progress of Alzheimer's has destroyed his liver, and he doesn't have long to live. Codi takes care of him in his own room in the house she grew up in. In his lucid moments, they talk about the past and about Hallie and their hope that she will come back. She asks him to take her to the place where she buried her baby.

Codi gets an invitation from the school board asking her to renew her contract. They praise her for her "innovative presentation" and "spirited development of a relevant curriculum." Furthermore, she is going to be named teacher of the year on the basis of the voting of students and teachers. Codi is stunned. For the first time in her life, she has acted in a spontaneous manner, oblivious to what others think and has won a "gold star."

Codi goes back to Loyd, and she opens the letters from Hallie. The last one is an attempt to help Codi deal with the uncertainty in her life. Hallie writes, "the very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope."

Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter is an important development of the plot. For the first time, Codi has succeeded at something. She is overcoming her demons. It appears that in the major conflict of the story, the protagonist is going to win. The reestablishment of her relationship with Loyd is another indication that Codi is going to win. Codi is not leaning on Hallie now for solutions, but the wise Hallie has sent advice that confirms that she is on the right track.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Word comes that Hallie's body has been found, and Loyd drives Codi to Tucson to sign some papers. On the way, they pass an automobile accident in which a young woman was killed, and Codi cries for her. She tells Loyd that she doesn't know what she's going to do.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The story is not over yet as to whether Codi has truly found her way. The greatest obstacle of all has emerged - the brutal death of her beloved sister, the one relationship that has sustained her for her entire life. Readers were sure in Chapter 23 that Codi was going to emerge the victor, but now we don't know. The question: have the gains been adequate to help her withstand this blow?

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Codi gets on a bus to go to Telluride, where Carlo has lined up a modeling job in a fine arts school. Mrs. Quintana (Doc Homer's assistant) and Uda will take care of her father. She feels that she can't stay in Grace because it has Hallie in it, and she can't stand the pain. "I was half her and half me," she tells Loyd.

Codi flashes back to her last weeks in Grace as the bus moves out of town. She and Loyd discuss where people go when they die. Loyd tells the myth of the Pueblos - that everyone started out underground until a badger dug a hole and let them out. When they die, they go back under. He thinks of his brother in that way. He tells her that she should not leave because there's family in Grace to absorb the loss, and he doesn't mean her father. He tells her that you don't live past it. The person you were is gone, but the half that is alive wakes up and takes over.

Emelina refuses to tell Codi goodbye, and the women from the Stitch and Bitch Club come bringing gifts. They tell her that they love her and will miss her, and they try to persuade her to stay. Viola reveals that she was caring for the girls the day the helicopter came to take her mother away. She had, in fact, taken Cody because she felt that she had a right to be there.

The women of Grace have won back the river. A vice-president of the mining company announces that mining operations will cease, and the dam will be deconstructed.

Codi's seatmate on the bus is looking at a garden catalog and talks about the slugs that kill her four o'clocks, which leads to a discussion of Hallie and her work with the Garden Hotline in Tucson. It turns out that the woman called for advice and talked to Hallie. Without intending to do so, Codi tells the woman the story of her sister's death in graphic detail.

Codi's airplane is stalled on the runway for a long time. When it finally takes off, the pilot tells them that the delay was because of a problem with one of the engines. Codi, who is already afraid of flying, panics and is comforted by a teenage girl who is fighting with her parents about the vacation they are embarking on. Before long, the pilot announces that the engine has gone out again, and they are returning to Tucson. The intense fright and the rush of adrenaline clear Codi's mind of the depression she has been in since Hallie's death. She realizes as they land that she can see color again, something that has not been possible for these past weeks. When the plane lands in Tucson, she gets off, goes to the Amtrak station and goes back to Grace.

Chapter 25 Analysis

This is a painful chapter. Codi's demons have taken over as she boards the bus to return to Carlo and the life of unresolved struggle that her experiences in Grace have chipped away at. Although she has obviously suffered from depression during the past years of trial, it has never been named as such in the story. However, here she recognizes it because it lifts when she gets the adrenaline rush that results from her fright about the safety of the flight.

Once again, readers see the force that has struggled against these demons begin to come to the fore again, and we are again hopeful that Codi will win this battle within herself for life and wholeness.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Hallie is buried in Nicaragua, a choice she expressed when she was alive, but Codi feels the need to have a funeral in Grace. She plans and conducts one under plum trees they played under as children. She brings an old afghan that Uda Dell crocheted for them after their mother died, and on it, all the people who knew Hallie place something that was hers. Codi realizes that they were not alone without family while they grew up. The whole town looked after them and cared about them.

Chapter 26 Analysis

This chapter is the climax of the action in this story. The struggle within Codi has been about her need for a nurturing family that she felt had been denied her growing up in Grace. She had a father who had no interest in nurturing and made her feel like an outsider with no connection to the place she called home. When the townspeople bring the things that belonged to Hallie, Codi realizes that they have been there all along. They knew that the children were their relatives and looked after them. She realizes that she has a family and that she has always had a family. Now she knows that the feeling of isolation from this family was only on her part. They felt connected to her all along. The internal conflicts within Codi that prevented her from becoming a fully functioning adult are resolved. The good guys have won!

Codi knows now that she did not grow up without a mother. Uda Dell mothered her. After their mother died, she crocheted the afghan that the children treasured and carried around with them as their security blanket. Viola was always there, looking out for their interests. She held Codi's hand when she took the girl to see the helicopter that was to take her mother away. Emelina stands beside her at the funeral, and it can't be missed here that Codi also has a sister in Grace.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Codi folds in the corners of the afghan and takes it to Doc Homer's house. She takes him into the garden in the back, which was Hallie's when she was growing up. She digs a hole and puts the bundle in it. She and her father, whose mind weaves back and forth between past and present, talk about their past. She tells him that she has told Loyd about the baby, that they have gone to the riverbed where she buried it and that he is sad. It hadn't occurred to her that he would be sad. She says that they might have another baby.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Denouement (pronounced day-noo-mah) is the portion of the action following the climax, which resolves the conflicts, where the story unwinds and comes to its end. This chapter begins the denouement of this story about the need for a family. The "remains" of Hallie are buried in her garden. She and her father discuss their past. Loyd has been told about the baby, and Codi is planning a future at last.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

All Souls Day arrives again, and Codi is tending and decorating the graves of the Nolina family, including her father. She reflects that the Nolina family was exhumed and moved several times but that it stayed together, at least in death.

Codi is pregnant, and Viola takes her to the site where the helicopter came to pick up her mother. Viola held her hand that day, and she holds it now as they return to the site. Codi writes letters to Hallie that are not mailed. She ponders the wonder of bearing a child and realizes that she is not that much concerned anymore with being someone else's child.

Chapter 28 Analysis

The theme of this story is the importance of family and having a sense of place in the development of a whole human being. It's impossible to think about family without thinking about parenting, and Kingsolver includes that in this story. Doc Noline, in his obsession with compensating for the failures of his own family and his self-centered focus on the loss of his wife, leaves his children with very little of the nurturing that is so necessary in the development of a child.

Readers see this theme skillfully developed by this writer as she limits our point of view to the two major characters. Through the thought processes of these two characters, we are able to explore the effects of the failure to parent. The author also opens for us the potential for nurturing by a community. Hilary Clinton's famous quote, "It takes a village to raise a child," comes to mind. In this case, the community that Codi has forsaken and does not remember as important to her turns out to be her salvation. In them, she finds all the things that a family can do for a person, either child or adult. They support, reward and forgive her. Kingsolver also gives readers another community that achieves the same goals, and that community is in the racial and social group that Codi has been taught is not acceptable - the Pueblos.

The secondary themes create their own tensions. Readers do not know whether the town can be saved until the last. We do not see any solution until a sewing and crafts women's club takes on the task and accomplishes what lawyers and judges and municipalities cannot do. Kingsolver makes a point about the environment and the threat of an uncaring and exploitative government.

In the case of Nicaragua, readers are not left with a happy ending. The Contras have won that battle, and Hallie has not only lost the battle but her valuable life. In that plot, the antagonist comes out the winner.

Just as animal dreams are what a dog does all day, so Codi comes to understand, "it's what you do that makes your soul and saves you from despair, and that being useful distinguishes happy people from sad people."

All the themes come together and make a statement about wholeness. The Pueblo Indians believe in the wholeness of the universe, and Codi becomes whole as the result of her painful journey. The salvation of the town of Grace is about wholeness. The failure in Nicaragua is about fragmentation, the enemy of wholeness. All the themes revolve around the death of someone or something. Out of Hallie's death, Codi manages to become whole. Out of his brother's death, Loyd finds wholeness. Out of struggle and injustice, the Stitch and Bitch Club make their little town whole. Out of the death of his remembrance, perhaps Doc Homer finds some sense of wholeness in his end-of-life relationship with his daughter.

In an article published in *Mother Earth News* in 2001, Kingsolver writes the following: "I create imagined lives. I write about people, mostly, and the things they contrive to do for, against, or with each other. I write about things like liberty, equality and world peace, on an extremely domestic scale."

Kingsolver also writes in that same article, "People will need wild places. Whether or not they think they do, they do. They need to experience a landscape that is timeless, whose agenda moves at the pace of speciation and ice ages. To be surrounded by a singing, mating, howling commotion of other species, all of whom love their lives as much as you do, and none of whom could possibly care less about your economic status or your day-running calendar. Wilderness puts us in our place. It reminds us that our plans are small and somewhat absurd. It reminds us why, in those cases in which our plans might influence many future generations, we ought to choose carefully."

In *Animal Dreams,* this writer is making points that are important to her about family and about natural beauty and our need of both. Not all authors write to persuade readers about their own convictions, but this one does.

Kingsolver grew up in Kentucky but now divides her time between Kentucky and Tucson, Arizona. She has a graduate degree in biology. One suspects that Hallie and Codi are semi-autobiographical and are two sides of the one Barbara.

Characters

Doña Althea

Dona Althea is one of the formidable ladies of the Stitch and Bitch Club. She is old, silver-haired, and tiny, and she always dresses in black. She is also strong-willed. Codi regards her as "fierce and miniature like a frightening breed of small dog." When the Stitch and Bitch Club fights to save the town, Dona Althea becomes their media spokeswoman and is interviewed by CBS.

Carlo

Carlo was Codi's lover in Tucson, Arizona, before she moved back to Grace. He is an emergency room doctor, and he met Codi when they were both in medical school. Shy and preferring to avoid company, Carlo never settles long in one place. He and Codi spent a few years together on Crete.

Uda Dell

Uda Dell is a widow who sometimes took care of Codi over a period of about ten years until Codi was fourteen. At first, Codi does not remember her. Uda helps Codi explore Doc Homer's attic and shares her memories of Codi as a child. Uda is also fond of Doc Homer and tries to take care of him.

Emelina Domingos

Emelina is an old high school friend of Codi, and Codi stays at her guesthouse when she returns to Grace. Emelina married immediately after her high school graduation and has five young sons. She is a practical and capable woman (she slaughters chickens herself) with an earthy sense of humor. She takes to motherhood easily and manages her large family with loving efficiency. She becomes Codi's confidante.

Juan Teobaldo Domingos

J. T. Domingos is Emelina's husband. When he and Codi were toddlers, they were next door neighbors and played together. They also went to the same high school, where J. T. was the captain of the football team. However, they were not friends. J. T. now works on the railroad and is out of town most of the time.

Viola Domingos

An active member of the Stitch and Bitch Club, Viola Domingos is J. T.'s mother. She is a widow and is close to Dona Althea. Viola is proud of her Hispanic cultural heritage and wants her son and daughter-in-law to raise their children to speak Spanish and know their own culture. At the end of the novel, Viola takes Codi to the alfalfa field where Codi as a three-year-old witnessed the helicopter taking her dead mother away.

Doc Homer

See Homer Noline

Codi Noline

See Cosima Noline

Cosima Noline

Cosima (or Codi) Noline is the sister of Hallie and the daughter of Doc Homer. It is she who narrates most of the story. Codi is tall, just under six feet. She is highly intelligent and well educated, having completed medical school. However, she dropped out of medicine near the end of her first year of residency because she lacked confidence in her abilities. Since that time she has done various research jobs, which she had little interest in, and moved around the country with her lover, Carlo. She also spent a few years on Crete.

When the novel opens, Codi is returning to her hometown of Grace, Arizona, from Tucson, where her most recent job was working the night shift at a convenience store.

Codi is close to her younger sister, Hallie, and wonders why they turned out to be so different in temperament and attitude. Hallie is confident, untroubled by doubt, but Codi feels aimless, not knowing what to do with her life. She is often introspective and indulges in self-criticism. Lacking an inner sense of direction, she goes where the wind blows. In the past, this meant that she went wherever Carlo's work as an emergency-room doctor took him. Codi doesn't believe that she fits in anywhere, and she feels timid about approaching life with any gusto. "I feel small and ridiculous and hemmed in on every side by the need to be safe," she writes in a confessional letter to Hallie.

Codi has no confidence that anyone would enjoy or seek out her company. She feels that she does not deserve love and is incapable of showing any. According to her own analysis, this negative self-image was formed early in her life, in response to the deep losses she suffered. Her mother died when she was three, and Cosima lost a baby to a miscarriage when she was fifteen. This has led her to internalize the belief that "Nothing you love will stay."

However, Codi is more competent and well liked than she realizes. She has no difficulty gaining the loyal friendship of Emelina or attracting the romantic interest of handsome Loyd Peregrina. She also turns out to be an excellent high school teacher. By the end of the novel, Codi has found her place in life. Teaching school, living with Loyd and pregnant, she is content to be part of the community in Grace.

Halimeda Noline

Hallie is the younger sister of Codi and the daughter of Doc Homer. She does not appear directly in the novel but is revealed through Codi's memories of her and her letters from Nicaragua, from which Codi quotes extensively.

Like Codi, Hallie is tall, over six feet. She and Codi are extremely close, although Hallie is Codi's opposite. She is purposeful and knows exactly what she wants to do in life, giving herself totally to causes she believes in. She feels other people's pain as if it was her own and wants to do something to alleviate it. She first becomes aware of the political situation in Central America by taking in refugees while she is living in Tucson. Then she travels to Nicaragua to help the development of agriculture, caring nothing about the danger she will be encountering (there is an armed conflict going on).

Although she has a serious attitude toward life, Hallie possesses a lighter side. She is playful, vivacious, and popular, and she knows how to enjoy herself. "She could moonwalk like Michael Jackson," Codi observes. Codi has a boundless admiration for Hallie. She contrasts Hallie's clarity of mind and purpose with her own indecisiveness. According to Codi, Hallie just charges ahead in life, doing the right thing to save the world.

Hallie vehemently denies that she is doing anything as grandiose as saving the world. She explains her far more modest goal in a letter to Codi:

The very least you can do in your life is to figure out
what you hope for. And the most you can do is live
inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but
live right in it, under its roof. What I want is so simple
I almost can't say it: elementary kindness.
Enough to eat, enough to go around. The possibility
that kids might one day grow up to be neither the destroyers
nor the destroyed.

Hallie has always been lucky. She has walked away from car wrecks and bike wrecks, and refers to herself as "the luckiest person alive." But Hallie's luck runs out in Nicaragua, where she is kidnapped by the Nicaraguan rebels, the contras, who eventually shoot her in the head and leave her body by a roadside.

Hallie Noline

See Halimeda Noline

Homer Noline

Doc Homer, whose full name is Dr. Homer Noline, is the father of Codi and Hallie. For many years he has been Grace's only physician, but at the age of sixty-six, he is showing signs of the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. He forgets easily, and his mind often cannot distinguish between past and present.

Doc Homer is proud of his independence and self-sufficiency and of the fact that he is like no one else. He lives his life with a careful, well-ordered routine. He has always tended to pursue certain notions to the point of obsession, such as requiring Codi and Hallie as children to wear orthopedic shoes so they would not develop fallen arches.

Emotionally, Doc Homer is withdrawn and does not easily reveal his feelings to people, not even his daughters. One reason for this is the devastating loss he suffered when his wife Alice died a few days after giving birth to Hallie. Driven into himself, Doc Homer has never been able to outwardly show his affection for his daughters, although it is clear from his internal monologues that he loves them deeply. However, he is a difficult man to have a conversation with, even when he is lucid and in full possession of his faculties. If he does not wish to discuss something with Codi, he simply acts as if the subject had not been raised.

His hobby is a kind of eccentric photography in which he creates pictures of things that do not look like what they are - landscapes that look like clouds, for example. On the surface, this seems an odd thing to do, and yet it seems appropriate for Doc Homer because part of his life is based on deception. He has spent a lifetime covering up the fact that he is descended on his father's side from the Nolinas family, which was regarded as trash by the inhabitants of Grace. Although he married a woman from a more respectable family (her family opposed the marriage), he felt he had to escape the stigma of his name, so he joined the army and settled in Illinois with his wife. When he returned to Grace, he changed his name to Noline and pretended he was from Illinois, a myth that his two daughters automatically accepted.

Loyd Peregrina

Loyd Peregrina is a mixture of Apache, Pueblo, and Navajo blood. He briefly dated Codi when they were both in high school, where he had a reputation as a ladies' man (he is strikingly handsome) and a heavy drinker. It was Loyd who got Codi pregnant when she was fifteen, although Codi never told him. Loyd remained in Grace and now works on the railroad. He meets Codi again when she returns to Grace. Their relationship begins in a casual fashion, and Codi is wary of becoming involved with him, but eventually their friendship grows into mutual love. Codi gradually learns that Loyd is a far more

admirable man than she would have expected him to be from her memories of their earlier relationship. Loyd himself admits that in high school he was a "jerk," and he regrets having hurt a lot of people.

Loyd is an expert in cockfighting and owns a number of fighting birds. He takes Codi to a cockfight but agrees to give up the sport when Codi and his mother ask him to. Loyd is well grounded in Native American myth and culture. He takes Codi to Native American sacred places and explains their significance to her. It is Loyd who is instrumental in giving Codi a sense of the importance of community and an identity rooted in traditional values and cultural heritage.

Loyd had a twin brother, Leander, who was killed in a bar fight at the age of fifteen. Although they were close (like Codi and Hallie), the loss of his brother did not have the long-term devastating effect on Loyd that the loss of her child did for Codi at the same age. Loyd has a loving extended family, including his mother, sisters, aunt and a niece, and he is secure in the beliefs and traditions of his Native American culture. This gives him an emotional balance that Codi lacks.

Shawn Rideheart

Amusing and charming, Shawn Rideheart is an art dealer from Tucson who tells the ladies of the Stitch and Bitch Club that they can save their town by placing it on the National Register of Historic Places.

Themes

Culture Clash

Underlying the plot in *Animal Dreams* is the notion of a clash between two different cultures, white and Native American. The focus for this is environmental degradation. The ravages of modern industrial society are represented by the Black Mountain Mining Company. Codi thinks of the mine, with its "pile of dead tailings," as "a mountain cannibalizing its own guts and soon to destroy the living trees and home lives of Grace. It was such an American story." A similar process is going on in the Jemez mountains in New Mexico, which are being mined for pumice. Pumice is required for the manufacture of the "distressed," or stone-washed, denim jeans that are very popular with the young. Codi launches into a tirade against the practice in her classroom:

They wash them in a big machine with this special
kind of gravel they get out of volcanic mountains.
The prettiest mountains you ever saw in your life.
But they're fragile, like a big pile of sugar. Levi
Strauss or whoever goes in there with bulldozers and
chainsaws and cuts down the trees and rips the mountainside
to hell, so that all of us lucky Americans can
wear jeans that look like somebody threw them in the
garbage before we got them.

In contrast to this practice of ripping natural substances out of the ground, making them into something unnatural, and then returning the waste products to the earth in an indigestible form□all in the name of economic progress and profit□ Kingsolver presents the very different attitude that Native Americans have toward the earth. At first the difference puzzles Codi. She asks Loyd how it can be that a canyon on Navajo tribal land has remained productive for over a thousand years, but Grace is being destroyed after only a century. The difference, as she later learns, is that Native Americans respect the earth as a living being and seek with humility to maintain the ecological balance that the earth needs. They acknowledge that they do not own the earth but try to be responsible guests. This gives Codi a new perspective on her own culture:

To people who think of themselves as God's houseguests,
American enterprise must seem arrogant beyond
belief. Or stupid. A nation of amnesiacs, proceeding
as if there were no other day but today.
Assuming the land could also forget what had been
done to it.

Kingsolver is herself an environmentalist, and she commented on this difference between the two cultures in an interview with Lisa See for *Publishers Weekly:*

We are only as healthy as our food chain and the environment. The Pueblo corn dances say the same things, only spiritually. Whereas in our culture, we think we're it. The Earth was put here as a garden for us to conquer and use. That way of thought was productive for years, but it's beginning to do us in now.

Individualism and Community

The clash between cultures highlights the contrast between individualism and community. The Black Mountain Mining Company relentlessly pursues its own interests despite responsibilities it has to the human community that is adversely affected by mining activities. This theme also operates at a much more personal level, in the life of Codi. When she first arrives in Grace, she feels isolated and detached, and this has been the pattern of her life. Since her mother died when she was three, and her father has been emotionally unavailable, she has lacked the warm family support that would nourish her life. After dropping out of a medical career, she wanders from one job to the next, and one location to the next, never feeling that she has a purpose in life. She acknowledges that she is not good at "nesting," at making a home for herself somewhere. At the beginning of the novel, Codi is essentially rootless.

Codi's aimlessness is in marked contrast to the social activism of her sister, Hallie. Hallie feels strongly about righting the wrongs of the world and boldly goes off to Nicaragua to put her ideals into practice. She never doubts herself or the value of what she is doing. She has no difficulty in identifying with something larger than herself.

But the character who most clearly represents the value of communal life as opposed to the isolation of the individual is Loyd. It is Loyd, with his supportive family and his appreciation of the living essence of Native American culture, who helps steer Codi in the right direction. Eventually, she recovers her sense of belonging. Whereas she never had any confidence in her ability to be a doctor, she slowly discovers that she has a gift for teaching. This links her to her community, a link that is also fostered by her work with the Stitch and Bitch Club to save the town. Furthermore, Codi discovers that far from being outsiders from Illinois□as Doc Homer had taught her□her family has a heritage going back to the early settlers of Grace.

All these things combine to give Codi a sense that she is larger than the boundaries of her own small self. This is particularly apparent in chapter twenty-six, "The Fifty Mothers," when all the women of the town come to the funeral that Codi arranges for her murdered sister and share their memories of her. Codi's grief is great, but she learns that even that can be bearable when there are others to lend their support: "Loyd was standing on one side of me, and Emelina on the other, and whenever I thought I might fall or just cease to exist, the pressure of their shoulders held me there." Finally, she acknowledges that all the women present are in effect her relatives. She remembers

"each one of these fifty mothers who'd been standing at the edges of my childhood, ready to make whatever contribution was needed at the time."

Style

Setting

The novel is set mostly in the fictional town of Grace, Arizona, although some scenes take place in the Santa Rosalia Pueblo, also fictional, in New Mexico. Codi's first sight of Grace on her return gives a good picture of its almost idyllic beauty:

> The view from here was orchards: pecan, plum, apple. . . . The trees filled the whole valley floor to the sides of the canyon. Confetti-colored houses perched on the slopes at its edges with their backs to the canyon wall.

An abundance of wild peacocks strut around the orchards, and the whole town exists under a "shamelessly unpolluted sky." The only flaw in the landscape is a man-made one, the old copper mine: "On the cliff overlooking the valley, the smelter's one brick smokestack pointed obscenely to heaven."

Economically, Grace survives by means of its orchards and the railroad, which provides employment for the town's men. Culturally, it is a mixture of Anglo (white) and Mexican American, with a Native American presence there as well. The Baptist Grocery in Grace's small commercial district is an indication of the former Anglo influence, but the predominant flavor of the Grace to which Codi returns is Hispanic. Spanish is still spoken a lot in people's homes, most of the citizens have Hispanic names, Mexican folk and religious customs such as the Day of the Dead (the Mexican equivalent of All Soul's Day) are celebrated, and the close family structures are matriarchal rather than patriarchal.

Like Grace, the Santa Rosalia Pueblo, where Loyd takes Codi at Christmas, is notable for its natural beauty and also for its antiquity and the sense of the sacred it transmits. This is how Codi describes Spider Rock, for example:

> The canyon walls rose straight up on either side of us, ranging from sunset orange to deep rust, mottled with purple. The sandstone had been carved by ice ages and polished by desert eons of sandpaper winds. The place did not so much inspire religion as it seemed to be religion itself.

As they travel further in the canyon, Codi observes that ancient pictures have been carved in the rock, of antelopes, snakes and ducks, and some human figures as well. This human adornment of nature is in marked contrast to the human intervention that has altered the landscape of Grace, producing ugly, polluting mines.

Structure and Point of View

The novel is divided into twenty-eight chapters, most of which are narrated in the first person, by Codi. Each of Codi's chapters is prefaced by her full name, Cosima. The other chapters are told from Doc Homer's point of view, by a third person narrator who has insight into Doc Homer's mind but no one else's.

In Codi's portion of the narration, Kingsolver makes use of flashbacks to Codi's childhood, including significant moments in her relationship with Hallie and Doc Homer. Kingsolver also makes use of Codi's dreams, particularly a recurring one in which Codi suddenly goes blind and seems to lose herself altogether.

Doc Homer's chapters, which are prefaced by his full first name, Homero, are all short, most of them no more than two pages in length. Unlike Codi's chapters, these narrations are told in the present tense, even though many of the events described took place many years in the past. The significance of this narrative technique is that Doc Homer's failing mind cannot tell the difference between past and present. Traumatic events from the past co-exist in his mind with things that are happening in the present moment.

Image and Metaphor

In the first chapter, Kingsolver uses a powerful image to set the scene for one of the questions the novel seeks to address, which is, why can two people from the same family, exposed to the same influences as children, become so different as adults? Doc Homer gazes at his two young children, Codi and Hallie, as they lie sleeping. They are completely intertwined, almost as one person. It is not possible to see where one body stops and the other begins. When one breathes, they both move; "Their long hair falls together across the sheet, the colors blending, the curled strands curving gently around the straight." The image illustrates the closeness between the two sisters, while foreshadowing the central question.

The same chapter reveals Kingsolver's use of metaphor to create thematic links between the different elements of her plot. Doc Homer feels that a river separates him from his children, and the term is used metaphorically. Thematically, the river image as a metaphor for separation is connected to the riverbed on which Codi later disposes of her baby, and this is in turn linked to the river that is being polluted by Black Mountain Mining□yet another unnatural occurrence, one that separates the human community from the world of nature.

Historical Context

The United States and Nicaragua in the 1980s

Hallie's impassioned letters to Codi about the political situation in Nicaragua reflect a major foreign policy issue of the times. Throughout the 1980s, U.S. policy toward Nicaragua was in the forefront of public debate.

The origins of the controversy go back to 1979 when the Nicaraguan dictator General Anastasio Somoza was overthrown by an insurgency led by Marxist Sandinista guerrillas. Relations between Nicaragua and the U.S., which had supported Somoza, quickly deteriorated. When President Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, he forcefully advocated the cause of the Nicaraguan rebels known as the contras. The justification for the policy was to prevent the Sandinistas from promoting communist revolutions throughout Central America. In support of his views, Reagan produced evidence that the Sandinistas were sending arms to leftist rebels in El Salvador.

Reagan's policy ran into stiff opposition from many Democratic lawmakers who feared it would lead to American troops being sent to Nicaragua. In 1984, Congress voted to cut off U.S. aid to the contras. This was in the wake of excesses by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which included the blowing up of Nicaraguan oil depots and the mining of Nicaraguan harbors by Latin American commandos under the direction of CIA agents. The latter actions were declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Congress voted to restore humanitarian aid to the contras in 1985, and in 1986, Congress approved $100 million in military and other aid. The United States also imposed a trade embargo on Nicaragua in 1985 and urged international financial institutions not to approve loans to the Sandinista government.

The result of the U.S. measures was a slump in the Nicaraguan economy. In 1988, inflation skyrocketed, and unemployment was 21 percent.

Peace talks between the warring parties began in 1987. In 1989, a peace agreement, endorsed by five Central American countries, was signed. Under the plan, the contras would be disbanded in exchange for free elections in Nicaragua. Those elections were held in 1990, and the Sandinistas were defeated by a coalition of opposition groups led by Violeta de Chamorro, who became president. As a result of the peace agreement and the election, U.S.-Nicaraguan relations were normalized.

During the eight-year civil war, the contras were sometimes accused of atrocities. Hallie refers to these atrocities in her letters to Codi, and it is apparent that Hallie vehemently opposes the U.S. policy of supporting the contras. The incident referred to in one of Hallie's letters□in which a helicopter piloted by U.S. National Guardsmen is shot down by the Sandinistas, who take one man prisoner □is loosely based on a real incident that

occurred in 1986. At the time when U.S. military aid to the contras was banned, a U.S. cargo plane carrying arms supplies to the contras was shot down. The one survivor of the crash, an American citizen, was charged by Nicaragua with terrorism. He was sentenced to thirty years imprisonment but was later released as part of a prisoner exchange agreement. The CIA denied any involvement in the incident, and just as in the novel, the American government claimed that the helicopter pilot was an ex-mercenary and a drug runner, with no ties to the government.

Hallie, who in the novel is killed by the contras, also has a real life model, a young man named Ben Linder. Linder was a hydroelectric engineer from Portland, Oregon, who traveled to Nicaragua for the same purpose as Hallie, to help the Nicaraguan farmers. He was killed by the contras. When Kingsolver dedicated *Animal Dreams* to Linder, she was making it clear that her own views on the contras, and U.S. policy in the region, were close to those expressed by Hallie.

Eco-Feminism

During the 1980s, a new subgenre began to emerge in American literature, and it was sometimes known as eco-feminism. Paul Gray, in his review of *Animal Dreams* in *Time,* sketched the basic elements of eco-feminist literature:

> Women, relying on intuition and one another, mobilize to save the planet, or their immediate neighborhoods, from the ravages□war, pollution, racism, etc.□wrought by white males. This reformation of human nature usually entails the adoption of older, often Native American, ways.

Gray points out that Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985) contains most of the elements of the form.

Eco-feminists believe in the sacredness and interconnectedness of all forms of life. They oppose patriarchal attitudes, which they believe lead to exploitation of the earth's resources without concern for long-term consequences. Many eco-feminists see a link between the way society treats animals and the natural environment and the way it treats women.

Eco-feminist themes are clearly present in *Animal Dreams.* It is the women of Grace, not the men, who organize to save the town from industrial pollution. (In an amusing scene in which Codi addresses a special meeting of the Stitch and Bitch Club, it is clear that the men are more interested in staying at home and watching the Miss America Pageant on television than in becoming social activists.) The Native American social organization that is presented in such a positive light is matriarchal: "The women are kind of the center of things up here," Loyd says of the Santa Rosalia Pueblo. Hallie's concern for the environment is apparent throughout, and Codi, in addition to her emerging environmental awareness, is horrified by cruelty to animals.

Critical Overview

When first published in 1990, *Animal Dreams* received a highly positive response from reviewers. Many admired the subtle, interlocking complexities of plot and theme, the vividly described southwestern setting, the satisfying development of character, and Kingsolver's compassion and humor. Lisa See, in *Publishers Weekly,* said that Kingsolver had "taken all of her previous themes□Native Americans, U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, environmental issues, parental relationships, women's taking charge of their own lives□tossed them into a literary pot and created a perfectly constructed novel."

Paul Gray, in *Time,* described the novel as "an entertaining distillation of eco-feminist materials." Although he regarded Codi as too "preachy" at times, he also commented that "There is enough fun in this novel, though, to balance its rather hectoring tone."

High praise came from Carolyn Cooke in the *Nation:*

> *Animal Dreams* . . . is dense and vivid, and makes ever tighter circles around the question of what it means to be alive, how to live rightly and sweetly even as we feel the confining boundaries of the skin, the closing walls of past and present, with memory like a badly wired lamp, spitting sparks and shorting out.

Cooke especially admired the portrait of Doc Homer, in which "Kingsolver brilliantly delineates the quality of a dissolving but wholly practical mind." Although Cooke suggested that the paradisal symbolism of Grace was "heavy-handed," she added that Kingsolver "redeems herself with her clear and original voice, her smart, plucky women, her eye for the nuances of personality and the depth of her social and moral concerns. Kingsolver can help you learn how to live."

For Jane Smiley, in the *New York Times Book Review,* Kingsolver "demonstrates a special gift for the vivid evocation of landscape and of her characters' state of mind." Smiley did comment, however, that Kingsolver was only partially successful in shaping all the issues she covered into a "larger vision." In choosing to concentrate on exploring Codi's despair, rather than the more dramatic plots, such as Hallie's adventures in Nicaragua and the campaign against the Black Mountain mining company,

> Ms. Kingsolver . . . frequently undermines the suspense and the weight of her book. First-person narration can be tricky, and Ms. Kingsolver falls into its trap: Codi comes across too often as a whiner, observant of others but invariably more concerned with her own state of mind.

Rosellen Brown in the *Massachusetts Review* admired the narrative voice of Codi ("amused and amusing, capable of intricate and engaging detail") and declared that *Animal Dreams* was "a rich book, generous in its perceptions and judgments," although she faulted Kingsolver's "tendency to idealize her characters," noticeable especially in Loyd Peregrina and other Native American or Hispanic characters. No such caveats were offered by the reviewer for the *Antioch Review,* who wrote that "Kingsolver has a wonderful way of blending historical facts and myths (Indian lore) with presentday concerns and insights into how children react to the world around them."

Animal Dreams won a PEN fiction prize and the Edward Abbey Ecofiction Award in 1991. Since then, it has been the subject of two articles in scholarly journals that explore Kingsolver's sense of place and community and her environmental themes. And in 1999, Mary Jean DeMarr explored the themes and characters of the novel, and gave it a brief feminist reading, in her book, *Barbara Kingsolver: A Critical Companion.*

In its range of concerns, from the need to engage in political issues and to protect the environment, to the healing value of family and community, *Animal Dreams* is typical of the themes that are important to Kingsolver as a writer. The novel continues to win new readers and critical respect, as Kingsolver's reputation as one of America's most significant contemporary writers continues to grow.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles and reviews about contemporary American fiction. In the following essay, he discusses the search for identity in Kingsolver's novel.

The unifying theme in all the different strands of plot that make up *Animal Dreams* is Codi Noline's recovery of wholeness in her own psyche and in her relationship with her environment, both human and natural. This takes her on an exploration of the nature of memory and its problematic relationship to truth and self-identity, a theme in which her father, Doc Homer, is deeply involved also. Ultimately, Codi learns that the search for individual identity is by itself not enough to grant her the peace, security, and sense of belonging she craves; she must also understand the relationship between human culture and the natural world.

The framework within which Kingsolver traces this journey is in the form of a circle. The novel begins and ends on All Soul's Day, which takes place in the first week of November; it is the Roman Catholic day of commemoration of the dead. This is significant for Codi because in her life the dead cast a long shadow; the scars left by the early loss of her mother and her miscarriage at the age of fifteen prevent her from living fully in the present. Deceptions engineered by her father about their family origins have had a similarly deleterious effect on Codi's life. In this novel, there are skeletons from the past that need to be confronted and exorcised.

For Codi, however, the very act of remembering the past is fraught with ambiguity. Memory is a minefield. Looking back, the mind distorts, forgets, invents, plays tricks. Codi remembers things that according to others she could not have witnessed, and yet she does not remember other events that are recalled clearly by her sister and by other townsfolk. As she says, "Memory is a complicated thing, a relative to truth but not its twin." Nonetheless, Codi is compelled to delve into the past to find out whether recalling and understanding it can relieve the acute aimlessness and rootlessness that afflict her. Otherwise, she fears she will never possess a solid sense of her own identity.

Indeed, as Codi describes herself during the course of the novel, it is almost as if she is with the dead herself. Like a specter, she lacks definition and substance. She comments that she cannot remember half of what happened to her before the age of fifteen. She knows little about her origins, other than that her family came from Illinois (and even that piece of information later proves to be only a half-truth). "I guess I'm nothing," she says to Loyd, "The Nothing Tribe." This is in contrast to the surety with which Loyd knows his own background. Similarly, Codi laments in a letter to Hallie, "My life is a pitiful, mechanical thing without a past, like a little wind-up car, ready to run in any direction somebody points me in." The word mechanical is significant; Codi's life lacks conscious, organic connection to its roots in family and community, and to nature itself.

It is clear from the extreme language Codi uses to describe herself that she is in mental disarray; there is an emptiness at her core that leaves her perhaps only one traumatic

event away from complete disintegration. Subconsciously, she knows and fears this. She has a recurring nightmare in which she suddenly goes blind, and she realizes midway through the novel that this dream is not about losing her vision but about losing "the whole of myself, whatever that was. What you lose in blindness is the space around you, the place where you are, and without that you might not exist. You could be nowhere at all."

This fear of nonexistence, of being nothing and existing nowhere, is what drives Codi to recover her memories of the past, hoping they will help her establish just who she is. With this in mind, she questions the women of the town who knew her when she was a child, and there are one or two moments of cathartic release when she is almost overwhelmed by memories as they come flooding back.

But to find the vital ingredient that will in part end her alienation from the society in which she was born and raised, Codi must penetrate the distortions that have been erected by her father, Doc Homer. As urgently as Codi needs to delve into the past, Doc Homer has over the years felt compelled to cover it up.

Doc Homer is a curious character. One of his hobbies is photography, but he does not record things simply as they are. He takes a photograph of one thing and then tinkers with it to make it look like something else□clouds are made to look like animals, for example, or a clump of five cacti comes to resemble a human hand. When Codi first visits him, he is working on an elaborate procedure to make a photograph of two old men sitting on a stone wall look like a stone wall with two extra rocks balanced on top. Later, it transpires that this is Doc Homer's way of preserving his memories. He takes a memory from the past and tries to revive it by concocting a "photograph" of something else that reminds him of it. For example, he photographs a shadow of a cactus because it reminds him of an extremely unusual aerial view of a river in a desert he saw many years ago in wartime. So he tries to construct out of the photograph an illusion that will resemble and call up in his mind that particular river.

Codi does not know what the point of this activity is although she acknowledges there is "a great deal of art" involved in the process. It is ironic that Doc Homer tries so hard in this unorthodox fashion to preserve certain images from the past, whilst so earnestly trying to obscure another, more pertinent fact: he is descended from the Nolinas family, which had such a bad reputation in the town. Perhaps, like all of us, Doc Homer wants to preserve the acceptable memories and screen out the unacceptable ones, but it is curious that both approaches involve a falsification. Doc Homer's photographs look like one thing but are in fact something else. It is clear that they are a metaphor for the idea that the personal histories that humans construct for themselves are more related to their own psychic needs than to anything that may have actually happened in their lives.

The novel implies that this may not of itself be a bad thing. In fact, a similar realization forms a vital part of Codi's final act of self-acceptance. She has always been puzzled by the fact that she remembers the moment when her mother, at the time of her death, was taken away by helicopter. The incident took place when Codi was only three, and others tell her that she was not there, so she could not possibly remember it. However, when

Viola takes her to the field at the crest of the canyon where the incident happened, Codi remembers it vividly. Viola tells her it does not matter whether she was actually there or not: "No, if you remember something, then it's true. . . . In the long run, that's what you've got."

This understanding gives Codi comfort and release. Her memory is vindicated and doubt is removed. This is the final incident in the novel, and it takes place, like the first chapter, on All Soul's Day. The wheel has turned full circle. Instead of the fate of her mother being a source of pain to her, Codi now remembers the helicopter, with her mother in it, rising "like a soul," a phrase which suggests ascension to heaven, a religious notion that Codi, who tends to believe that death is final, has not for a moment entertained before.

This, however, is only part of the truth that Codi discovers during the course of the novel. She also learns that to be complete humans must not only understand their personal heritage, they must also align themselves and their communities with the laws, structures, and processes that operate in the natural world. The elusive secret of peace of mind lies in the mysterious congruence between the human and the natural worlds.

This point is made clear when Codi, accompanied by Loyd, examines the ancient dwellings at the Santa Rosalia Pueblo. She observes that although they are the products of human hands, they can barely be distinguished from nature itself:

> The walls were shaped to fit the curved hole in the cliff, and the building blocks were cut from the same red rock that served as their foundation. I thought of what Loyd had told me about Pueblo architecture, whose object was to build a structure the earth could embrace. This looked more than embraced. It reminded me of cliff-swallow nests, or mud-dauber nests, or crystal gardens sprung from their own matrix: the perfect constructions of nature.

On an earlier visit to another Pueblo sacred place, Codi makes a similar observation as she looks at the stones that make up the building: "There was something familiar about the way they fit together. . . . They looked just like cells under a microscope." She remarks that the dwelling does not even look as if it was built: "It looks like something alive that just *grew* there." Yet within this completely natural-looking structure, an entire human culture flourished.

What these images symbolize is a harmony between human civilization and nature that is the secret of the fuller, more expansive life that often eludes the individual self, preoccupied as it is with trying to alleviate the pain lodged in the vault of memory. It is significant that the patterns discernible in these natural buildings share the same structures as the cellular structure of the human physiology, something that runs far deeper than the transitory content of the individual mind.

There is more than a hint of this search for a harmony with nature that would relieve the human experience of pain in Doc Homer's odd hobby. It is as if in his photographs he is trying to merge the human with the natural□the men, for example, become indistinguishable from the stone wall□or to point out that there are forms in nature that are orderly and have the power to give the soul rest. Memories that may be disturbing can be quieted by being absorbed into images of nature's serene permanence.

When Codi finally understands the threefold secret of living□her own family origins and memories; her place in the community of Grace; and the human as a reflection of the natural□she can at last discover who she really is. And she does not have far to look. She points out early in the novel that her full name, Cosima, means order in the cosmos. Most of her life she has regarded this as a joke since she knows how little it resembles the life she has been leading. But by the end, when she is in a committed relationship with Loyd, pregnant with his baby, productive in her community, and knowing how to live in the embrace of nature, she is truly Cosima, a part of the great harmonious whole, taking simple pleasure in being alive.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Animal Dreams,* in *Novels for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following interview, conducted in December 1995, Kingsolver discusses her background and interaction with other cultures and how her experiences and her political beliefs inform her works.

In a chapter in her new book of wide-ranging essays, *High Tide in Tucson,* Barbara Kingsolver describes a trip to Phoenix's Heard Museum with her daughter, Camille, who was five years old at the time. One of her hopes for the visit, she writes, is that Camille will shed the notion that Native Americans are "people that lived a long time ago," an idea she picked up from the dominant culture even though it contradicted her own experience with Tohono O'odham and Yaqui playmates. Thanks to the museum's mission of appreciation for modern Native American life as well as history, Camille gleans some understanding of Native American reality outside spaghetti westerns. Indians, she tells her mother as they leave the museum, are "people who love the Earth, and like to sing and dance and make a lot of pretty stuff to use." Then she adds, "And I think they like soda pop. Those guys selling the fry bread were drinking a lot of Cokes."

Barbara Kingsolver's work takes readers on a similar journey. It makes real the daily lives lived by people who are seldom presented with all their smarts and sorrows. Among the people we meet in Kingsolver's novels (all published by Harper- Collins) are, in *The Bean Trees,* working-class white women from Appalachia and Central Americans fleeing death squads; in *Animal Dreams,* Mexican-American grandmothers fighting to save the river that nourishes their town's orchards, a garden- pest hotline worker who joins the Sandinistas' agricultural efforts in Nicaragua, and a part-Apache train engineer with a penchant for cockfighting; and in *Pigs in Heaven,* a Cherokee lawyer who tries to resolve a conflict over a child adopted out of the tribe.

Thanks to her gift for creating characters we care about, for giving them voices that situate them firmly in time and place, and for taking them through plots that unfold inside their hearts and minds as well as out in the world, Kingsolver has been nominated three times for the ABBY award, a booksellers' prize that goes to the author they most love to recommend to customers.

She is also the author of *Homeland,* a collection of short stories (HarperCollins again); *Another America/Otra America,* a book of poems in English and Spanish (Seal Press); and *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (ILR Press), an oral history of the women in three small to towns who for eighteen months sustained a picket against the Phelps Dodge Copper Corporation despite arrests, evictions, and excoriation from some union bosses and some men in their communities who thought they should stick to making tortillas.

In early December, I spent a day with Barbara Kingsolver in Sabino Canyon on the outskirts of Tucson. Though I had only been in Arizona all of two days, I thought I had figured out the weather - hot during the day and cold at night. It was daytime, so I didn't wear many layers. Well, I didn't know from canyons. I shivered as we rode the Forest

Service tram that takes you in. Though she had hoped we would stay in the "v" of the mountains, near the running water that reminds her a tiny bit of the landscape of her childhood in Kentucky, Barbara agreed right away to hike a short distance up the slope to where the sun would reach us faster. We found a suitable rock just off the trail and plopped ourselves down to talk. Nourished by good conversation and Barbara's homemade raisin bread, I warmed up in no time.

[Q:] Some of the essays in your new book read like a kind of Feminine Mystique *for a new generation. Were you especially trying to reach women with the information in those essays? I wonder whether they've prompted some heated dining table conversations between women and the men in their lives.*

[Kingsolver:] I think so. I've heard about a few. I've heard from women who said, "I gave this to my husband with underlines." But when I'm writing I don't really think, "Who's going to read this?" I don't feel my books are mainly for women. When students ask, "Is this a chick book?" I say, "*Moby Dick* is a whale book, but I don't think only whales should read it."

You know, John Updike writes about penises and lusting after women, and he's really one of the most male writers that I read. His point of view is so deeply male. And when he's writing, does he think, "Oh, women aren't going to be able to relate to this?" I don't think it crosses his mind. So there's a role model for me, right?

I do think we can learn a much from reading the perspectives of people we are not. I can learn a lot from John Updike. I'm never going to have a penis in my whole life, so I can read John Updike and I can get some clue. I mean, that's sort of reductionist, but that male ego that's his focus, that's the eye of his storm, is very interesting. It's kind of heady to read it and get a glimpse of what it would be like to live in the eye of that storm instead of dancing around it all the time saying, "Are you OK? Are you OK?"

I grew up learning about women by reading men and becoming convinced at a pretty early age that they were getting a lot of it wrong. I felt usurped by *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* But a lot of people did it right, too. Look at *Anna Karenina;* look at Emma Bovary. So I will never say men have no right to represent women. That would be absurd. What I will say is I think our first responsibility, and also our first treasure as writers, is to represent ourselves. So women are always dead center in my novels. And my novels are about the things women most think about, like keeping our children fed, and how to manage on not very much income. I think it's important to do that, because it's not traditionally been the main stuff of literature. And it needs to be.

A lot of what I also do is tell people, "Look, you're noble. The things you do in your life, from day to day to day, which you have probably never thought of as the stuff of literature, are heroic. And if it's not you, it's your mother, or your neighbor, or your sister. And think about that. Think how wondrous that is." I think it really might be the main thing I do. And that's crossing a new street. It's looking at yourself and looking at heroism in a new way. Forget about Power Rangers, Power Mongers, Power Bombs, Power Suits, for just one minute of your life. All those icons we associate with power are

hard to leave behind. It's hard to build a new iconography of heroism, but that's kind of my bailiwick. I owe that to the people I grew up with.

Do you mean your family or your community?

Both. Just to see people survive. Survival itself, in certain circumstances, is heroic. To live through mean times without becoming mean-spirited is heroic. I saw a lot of that.

In the new book, you explore our anti-child policies on the political level, and imply we also have some anti-child practices on the family level.

Kingsolver: The "terrible twos" is an excellent example. I asked all my Latino friends, "How do you translate terrible twos?" "What?" they said. "There's no terrible twos." They didn't even know what I was talking about. Not only is it not in their language, it's not in their thinking. To define individuation from the parent as terrible is an anti-child mindset. Now, I'm not saying it's not difficult to have a two-year-old, but it's a cultural difficulty. We expect our two-year-olds to fit smoothly into adult schedules.

I think the reason that my friend Carmen was baffled when I said "terrible twos" is that the children in her household don't have to trench a clock. They're with her or there's other people in the household. There's this troupe of kids coming in and out, and always adults to take care of them. They don't have to get up, get dressed, eat breakfast, and get strapped into the car seat by 7 o'clock, which is a schedule that would make any two-year-old cranky. Think about if you had to crawl around and play with blocks all day. You'd be cranky; you'd be a terrible whatever-you-are.

And that's not the fault of the parents. Obviously many, many mothers have no choice but to bundle their kids off to daycare, so I'm not blaming them.

What I'm saying is our culture doesn't make allowances for kids; it doesn't give parental leave. Children are an aberration in late capitalism. They're also a liability, because they're not productive. So that's why capitalism treats them like toxic waste.

Where did you get the desire to learn about different cultures?

I went to school with African Americans and whites. It was a segregated town. When I went to first grade, it was an all-white school. Second grade, the kids who had gone to school in the CME church came down to our school. I remember thinking. "They must be so scared," and wanting to ask, but being afraid. Marilyn and Karen were the two African-American kids in my class. I wanted to be friends with them and I didn't know how. I was a little bit scared, not because my parents said, "Stay away," nothing like that. Just that I knew that they came from a different world, and I knew that they were outnumbered.

It impressed me, because I was also an outcast. I think one of the great pluses is that I grew up as a social outsider. And that had to do with being really skinny and really tall, and physically not blending in, which is so important in pre-adolescence and adolescence - it's sort of the main thing.

But also my family was different. My parents just expected me to do things like read books - big, good books - and one day go to college. Nobody else I knew had that sort of expectation. Nobody in my class was going to college. Everybody kind of had the plan. They'd get married and they'd have kids and they'd stay right there. There was something in my training that was telling me, "You're going to go away."

And then you lived for a while in Africa as a kid?

Yes, my dad was a physician, and he wanted to go where he could be extremely useful. So we ended up living in St. Lucia for a while in a convent hospital, and we lived in Central Africa. The people in our village had not seen white kids. I had really long hair that I could sit on, and people didn't think it was hair, because hair doesn't look like that, and they'd try to pull it off. My mom would explain to me, "They're not trying to hurt you. They just think you're wearing something weird on your head and they're trying to get you to quit showing off."

So you were an outsider?

Very much. I got a real extreme look at what it's like to be a minority. It was an enormous adventure that let me know at the age of seven that there's a great big old world out there that I don't know anything about, that I'm going to see, and that I'm going to know if I can.

Was your connection to small-town life one of the things that led you to write Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983, *about the small towns of Morenci, Ajo, and Clifton?*

Yes, even though I didn't grow up in a mining county. Nicholas County is not mining, it's agricultural. It's a tobacco town, so it's deeply depressed. Times have been tough there for as long as I've known about, and I think they're tougher still now that tobacco doesn't have the economic base it did. So, there are all these divisions. There was black and white. There was merchant and farmer. That was a very clear distinction in my school. The popular kids - the ones with new clothes every year - were the merchants' kids, the ones whose parents owned the dime store or the men's clothing store, or were the county attorney. And then all the other kids were farm kids, and they didn't get to wash their hair every night because they didn't necessarily have hot water. They had to walk through mud to get to the school bus, so they had mud on their shoes.

I was in that group, not because we were farmers but because we lived in the country, and my parents didn't believe in new clothes. They didn't value spending lots of money on superficial things, which of course really irritated me when I was fourteen. But I somehow lived through that and learned to appreciate it.

So in high school I learned about class, and I didn't even know the words. I never read Marx until I was about eighteen, but the first time I read *Grundrisse* and *Capital* I said. "I know this stuff. I grew up with this stuff." Kentucky is such a laboratory of class consciousness because you have really oppressed workers shoulder to shoulder with big capital, which is not something you see necessarily in other parts of the country.

Maybe the rust belt, maybe the auto belt, though I still don't know if it's as clear as mining bosses and the way they sort of own their workers wholesale. So it's very clear whose side everyone's on. And add to that, Nicholas County is right in between, it's sandwiched.

You see the wealth of Lexington?

It's just one county away. Nicholas County holds a really interesting geographic position between the wealth of Lexington and the poverty of Appalachia, and people define themselves depending on which way they're facing. In our county we didn't have a swimming pool, not in the whole county. And we would go to Lexington once in a while, and pass through these horse farms. And there was a horse farm where - I swear this was true - the horses had a swimming pool. It was for therapy or something. I remember driving by that every time and smashing our faces against the glass of the window and hating those horses for being so rich. It was so unfair.

One thing that comes through so much in your writing is that people, like those you grew up with in Nicholas County, can understand power. I guess some liberal people would say they know that, but they don't really believe it at a gut level.

That's really wrong. That's a huge underestimation. I think certainly in Kentucky people understand class and power relations. And that's why Kentucky - and Arizona, too - has a history of radical class action, and radical labor organizing. And that's of course what drew me to the strike.

My first national publication was in *The Progressive* and it was about the strike. I started going down there with a friend of mine, Jill Fein. We were activists and organizers and we went there in solidarity with the strikers. I figured I'd write about it, but I didn't at first have an assignment. I loved *The Progressive,* so I wrote a query. We wrote the article together and they published it and it was an enormous thrill when it arrived. Seeing it in print was even more important than the check. There it was, with the photograph we'd taken of the women on the picket line. I remember just standing by the mailbox holding it in my hand and thinking, "All over the country people are reading about this." That's the power of being able to get the word out. After bone-grinding years as an activist, a door opened. I got some sense of the possibilities and of the power of this kind of writing. It was really a turning point for me.

Some people criticize your work as being too political. They try to erect a huge wall between art and politics. There's this idea that political art is bad, and that a divider between the two can actually exist. Where does this idea come from?

I'm not sure. My personal theory is it has a lot to do with McCarthyism. Because if you go back before the 1950s you find great political writers like Steinbeck, Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, Henry Thoreau. And then that stopped; things just sort of ground to a halt in the 1950s.

I don't know whether it's cause or effect. I don't know whether it was because of McCarthyism, or whether there was some evil humus in this country from which sprang

Joe McCarthy and people who supported him and this idea that art and politics should separate themselves. For whatever reason, it's with us now and we haven't recovered from that time.

What can we do about it?

It's being done to us. Artists are losing the minuscule amount of support that we had. The NEA, I heard Christopher Reeve say when he was in town years ago, gives out each year less money than the money for military band uniforms. So, there wasn't an enormous amount of public or federal support for artists to begin with, and it's dwindling. And there's a hue and cry, and artists are looking around and saying, "Why doesn't the public support us?"

Well, I have a clue about that. Look to some of the poorest countries in Latin America. They revere their poets. Their poets do not starve. They elect their poets to public office. Their poets are talking about important stuff. Their poets have their finger on the pulse of the human-rights situation, the core of economic oppression, where it's going and where it's coming from. They write about power relations and the common good. They write about all of this stuff that in the United States many artists avert their faces from as being too political. Well, if we write and paint and film things that people understand to be vital to their lives, we'll get public support. Any artistic commission that has Jesse Helms on it is scary. Censorship of any kind is scary. But I don't think we're really talking about censorship here. I think we're taking about a responsiveness of artists to their public that's sort of waning.

It's waning, but it has the potential to come back?

I think if artists can speak of things that matter, then they will be supported. I feel like I say stuff that people really don't want to hear. I write about child abuse, and about sexism and racism and illegal immigration laws, and I think, "Nobody's going to read about this," and yet, they do. I think that you can say difficult things, but do it artfully, and you'll be heard.

And the critics may say, "Oh, this is too political," but people are reading the books.

The gatekeepers of art are the ones who are saying this is too political. I don't hear that from many people. One letter in 100, or even less, will say. "I don't think you should be writing about this stuff."

I think we also have in this country a rare phenomenon in which people are very uneducated about art. I think the average African in Africa, let's say the average citizen of Cameroon, understands more about the art of Cameroon than the average Tucsonian understands about the art of Tucson. Understanding and appreciating art is something you learn from other people who do it, and historically it's been part of oral tradition. You appreciate stories because you sit around in groups where people tell them. You appreciate dance because you participate. You grow up seeing other people moved to tears by the events, and you learn what that's about.

Do you think the people who criticize your work are people who already know about the issues and have decided they're on the other side? Or are they people who have so much of their personal and professional identities invested in the idea that they don't take stands that they feel threatened by the fact that your characters do?

Both. Usually when people say, "You're too political," what they mean is, "I don't agree with you." In *High Tide in Tucson,* I wrote about that anecdote at the mall, where the managers decided that the people passing out yellow ribbons and We Kick Butt bumper stickers were not political, and the people who were passing out anti-war propaganda were political. That's come to be a significant definition of the word political in this country, and it's something I don't agree with. The people who have panned my work as being political are people who are not on my side, so I feel kind of proud of that.

Do you think the popularity of your fiction speaks to people's hunger for the acknowledgment of the political in their lives, in addition to the fact that they're drawn in by the great stories and great characters?

Yes. I don't think it's necessarily things people would define as political, although sometimes it is, explicitly. I hear from activists who say, "We've been trying and trying to tell people about Nicaragua and finally what a relief to pick up a book that does it, a real book that people are reading."

You've said a novel can move people in a way a newspaper article can't, because it gets in their heart and because they can't switch to the sports pages. But your new book is nonfiction. Did you want to speak in your own voice instead of through your characters?

I've been writing essays all along, but to write a book of them that all added up to something was really wonderful. This is a really scary thing to say, but it has worried me at times that my work is so popular. Sometimes I think, "Are they just reading the love story and didn't notice the part about Guatemala?" I think people do, on some level, understand the politics of my fiction. Even if only to be awakened to the possibility that the government is doing something not right in Central America and maybe they'll be more open to reading stuff that's more explicitly about that subject. Or sort of an attitude about the environment, or an attitude about women that comes through. You can hear on the left sometimes an elitism of unpopularity. I don't know how many times I've heard people say, "Well, I write, but my work will never be popular because it's so political," and I think, "Well, am I chopped liver? Are you saying that I sold out, or what?"

I felt that I did at this point in my life have a chance to be more direct. Everything in *High Tide in Tucson* I think I've said before behind the mask of fiction, but this time I stepped out from behind the mask and said, "I, Barbara Kingsolver, believe this." And it sold more in the first four months than all six of my other books combined in their first four months.

So you're probably reaching people who haven't heard about these issues from your perspective before.

I have to think so. I can't get over that I get to do this. It also comes with a certain responsibility. You know you get handed in your life this chance to go all over the country and talk and talk and talk, and answer and answer and answer questions, and go on *McNeil/Lehrer* and national shows. I would much rather not do that. I would much rather stay home and bake bread and write another book. That's what I do. That's what I love. And I do have my limits. I'll do it for a few months after a book comes out, and try to make the most of that time.

The reason that I do it at all is that I can still remember how recently it was that I was cranking out leaflets about the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Plant, or whatever was the crisis of the week in Tucson, Arizona. And I don't mean to demean these crises; they are all very real.

It's very hard to criticize this country, our domestic or our foreign policy, or our attitude, or our Americanism. And so, given the chance to do that, given this strange moment that I have, little old socialist me, to go talk to David Gergen and be in everybody's living room, I have to do it. And I have to do it right. I have to say the important stuff, not just smile and nod and say, "Oh, yes, I have written another book."

I don't imagine you have time to crank the mimeographs anymore.

No, and it wouldn't be a good use of my time. But I'm still involved locally. It used to be I was the one who would organize the events. Now I go to them. Or I'll go and read a poem. They put my name on the list to draw a different crowd. I find that I can be an effective activist in very different ways, but I feel like I still believe exactly the same things I did when I was twenty.

It seems to me that as disparate as they are, all the essays in the new book fit together. What's the unifying theme?

I didn't title the book, *Barbara the Marxist Takes on Life,* but that's what it is. Let's face it. I steered clear of the M word, because people are so ignorant. Even though we're a secular state, we're deeply religious about the religion of America. We rely on so many things on faith, without having to have any evidence. Like this belief about how anyone can make it in America if you're smart and you work hard. Well, for how many generations now has that been untrue? In some families, a lot. And in almost all families, my generation is not as well off as our parents, even though we worked just as hard, and more of us got more of an education than they did. It's staggering to me to read statistics of how many people in this country live in poverty: 20 percent of kids, right? Yet turn on the television and you still see rich people idolized. Popular culture reflects a population that still identifies with the ruling class.

You weave your scientific training into your writing, which is pretty unusual.

There's this whole realm of natural history metaphors and symbols you can use if you know about them that gives a kind of freshness to your writing, because most writers haven't studied science. People think it's sort of funny that I went to graduate school as a biologist and then became a novelist, but the process is so similar. What I learned is

how to formulate or identify a new question that hasn't been asked before, and then to set about solving it, to do original research to find the way to an answer. And that's what I do when I write a book. It's very similar. I think I might be a lot more process-oriented than a lot of writers are. I've never talked with another writer about process who does it exactly the same way I do it. It used to make me certain I was doing it wrong. Now I just figure it's as good as any way. It works for me.

In the essays you let on that there have been days when you didn't think you could keep going, when you questioned your abilities as a writer.

I still have them. Beginning a book is really hard. I'm trying to begin one now and I just keep throwing stuff away and thinking, "Can I do this? I don't think I'm smart enough." But it has to be hard. You have to have a reverence for the undertaking. And I think reverence implies a certain lack of self-esteem, doesn't it?

If you're reverent towards something, you feel . . .

Lowly. You feel daunted and unworthy. But in this age of glorifying the individual and self-esteem, I think there's something healthy about being daunted. Cockiness doesn't lend itself to good writing. It really doesn't.

How was your recent book tour?

This book tour just took me from city to city to city, into hotel rooms out of whose windows I would look and see the same skyline. One of the things that was psychologically and emotionally tiring was that it was all city, and I was surrounded continually by people who took their city so seriously. I don't mean just their city, like, "Oh, this is Pittsburgh." But people who look around at the city and say, "This is what's real." For me, *this* is what's real. [As she said this, she gestured emphatically to the saguaro-studded canyon rising all around us.] We're just a blink in the eye of this. We haven't been around very long, and we're probably not going to persist. And it's sort of laughable that we take all of our stuff so seriously. We've had two hundred-year floods here in the last ten years, and both times the city was completely cut off, for days and days. You couldn't go anywhere. It was roaring water. And some things happened that were deeply reinforcing on the human level. For the first day you're still trying to get to work, or get to your appointments, and then slowly you give it up, and you realize that this whole schedule - all these things in our date book - are just little scratches on the surface of this old Earth, and she doesn't much care.

How do we build more awareness of that?

I think urban life is a big part of the problem. If people could just get out and look. And to just sit still and be. Ed Abbey, who was my neighbor, said something that continues to impress me in new ways. I told him I'd been to Zion, and I said, "It's enough to make you religious." And he said, "Those mountains don't inspire religion. They are religion."

In your new book, High Tide in Tucson, *in the essay,* "*The Spaces Between,*" *you write, "I'm drawn like a kid to mud into the sticky terrain of cultural difference." You say, "I want*

to know, and to write, about the places where disparate points of view rub together - the spaces between. Not just between man and woman but also North and South; white and not-white; communal and individual; spiritual and carnal."

The reason I'm attracted so much to those places and those moments is you can learn so much. You go through the world on some kind of search, and you take so much for granted. And when you run up against somebody else who's moving right beside you but looking for completely different stuff, it can stop you in your tracks, and you can start thinking, "Why am I looking for this?"

So few of us examine our motives and our mythology, the things that we believe in without question. Like humans are more important than any other species. Most people with your background and mine go through their whole lives without questioning that. I am more important than a Kirtland's warbler. Don't even think about it. And, so when you run up against somebody who says. "Of course the Kirtland's warbler is just as important as I am," that can throw you for a loop.

In *Pigs in Heaven* I wanted to choose a high-profile event in which a Native American has been adopted out of the tribe and in which that adoption is questioned and challenged. Because it brings into conflict two completely different ways of defining good, of defining value. The one is that the good is whatever is in the best interest of the child; the other is that the good is whatever is in the best interest of the tribe, the group, the community. What I really wanted to do in that book was not necessarily write about Indians. I wanted to introduce my readers to this completely different unit of good and have them believe in it by the end, have them accept in their hearts that that could be just as true as the other.

Your fiction, you've made clear, is not autobiographical, but the essays . . .

Are. It used to be people thought they knew all about me because they thought I was my characters. Now they do. I didn't really reveal anything that intimate in that book. I included a lot of details about where I live and so forth, only as kind of a springboard to issues or ideas. For example, I wrote about divorce. I didn't really write about my divorce. It seems like I did, but I didn't.

That it happened, yes.

That was sort of part of the public record already, anyway. Also, we moved right before the book came out, so people think they know all about my house, but they don't.

Including details about your life made the book more accessible?

That's the idea. It was so much like writing fiction. You use the same techniques. You create characters and you have a plot. All of the essays really are little stories that mean something, and what they end up being about is not the events but some larger ideas. It just happens that I used real people or real events or incidents in my life as the starting points. You can't just put the ideas there. You have to put clothes on them and make them walk around. I keep coming back to the term creative nonfiction to describe this

book, because it really was more creative writing than journalism. You can look at the same event fifty different ways, so the story I chose to tell from a particular event was the creative part.

The choosing how to tell it?

And, I suppose before that, deciding what it means. What can you make of someone telling you, "Love it or leave it, b-h?" That can be at the starting point of a lot of different stories.

In that same essay you came back and said that that guy could think critically.

I speculate that if I asked him, "Do you think patriotism means turning your back on evidence that your country has done immoral acts?" I think he would say, "No." Then he'd say, "Prove it." I think "my country right or wrong" is not such a common slogan as "my country always right," and "by God I want to believe that, and so don't mess with me, don't confuse me with the facts."

But it's suspect to be a writer whose purpose in part is to change the world.

Oh, yeah. And it's funny that I still shock people when they say, "Why do you write?" and I say, "Well, to change the world." It's like heresy. It's like absolute heresy for an artist to say that. That's why I say it. Seven or eight years ago I couldn't.

You couldn't?

I thought it, but I couldn't admit it because I was afraid of not being taken seriously. Now I'm pretty confident of being taken seriously. Shocking but true. And so I feel I have an obligation to tell truths like that. You like what I write? Well, get this: I'm a pinko and I want to change the world.

Source: Robin Epstein, "An Interview with Barbara Kingsolver," in *Progressive,* Vol. 12, No. 9, February 1996, pp. 33-37.

Adaptations

Animal Dreams has been recorded unabridged on ten audio cassettes, with a total playing time of 13.75 hours. The cassettes were narrated by C. J. Critt, and were published in 1990; they are available from Recorded Books, cassette no. 94253.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of the Nicaraguan contras during the 1980s. Were the contras the evil force described in *Animal Dreams,* or were they freedom fighters opposing communist tyranny as many in the United States believed?

Research the subject of industrial pollution in the United States and the methods that different communities and environmental groups have used to combat it. What methods are people using today? What is most effective? What is being done to cut down on industrial pollution currently?

Research the early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, and show how they are reflected in the character of Doc Homer.

Some reviewers have argued that the character Loyd Peregrina is too perfect□he is too good to be true□and this is a flaw in the novel. Do you agree with this verdict? Are the male characters in *Animal Dreams* presented as convincingly as the female ones?

Is Doc Homer a sympathetic character, or is he someone the reader is likely to dislike?

Which sister, Codi or Hallie, appeals to you the most and why?

What Do I Read Next?

Kingsolver's nonfiction book, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (1989), examines the leadership role played by women during the Phelps Dodge Copper Company labor dispute. The small towns described resemble Grace, and the women are the prototypes of the Stitch and Bitch Club in *Animal Dreams.*

The Bean Trees (1988), Kingsolver's first novel, follows Taylor Greer as she sets off from her native Kentucky to find a better, more rewarding life in Tucson, Arizona.

The Poisonwood Bible (1998) is Kingsolver's fourth novel and a runaway bestseller. Set in 1959 at a time of political upheaval in what was then the Belgian Congo, it follows the story of Baptist minister Nathan Price as he arrives with his family in a remote village to preach the gospel.

Waste Land: Meditations on a Ravaged Landscape (1997), by David T. Hanson, is a startling collection of aerial-view photographs of landscapes in America contaminated by industrial pollution.

Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992 (2000), by William M. Leogrande, gives a very detailed account of U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua (as well as El Salvador) during the time period covered in *Animal Dreams.*

Tracks (1988), by Louise Erdrich, recreates the tensions between white and Native American culture in North Dakota from 1912-1924. Kingsolver names Erdrich as one of her favorite writers.

Another of Kingsolver's favorite writers is Leslie Marmon Silko. In the vast *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Silko focuses on the struggles of the native populations of the American southwest to reclaim the land that the Europeans have appropriated.

"Careful What You Let in the Door," Kingsolver's essay in her collection *High Tide in Tucson* (1995), discusses her justification for sometimes including violence in her novels, and includes reference to the kidnapping and murder of Hallie in *Animal Dreams.*

Further Study

Andrews, Terry L., "Animal Dreams," in *Magill's Literary Annual,* Salem Press, 1991, pp. 38-42.

This detailed and appreciative review brings out, among other things, the fairy tale aspects of the novel. Andrews writes that Codi is a "kind of unwitting Sleeping Beauty."

Barbara Kingsolver, in Signature Series' Contemporary Southern Writers, produced by the Annenberg/CPB Projects company, 1997.

According to reviewer Jeannette E. Riley, this onehour video presents "a comprehensive discussion of Kingsolver's influences, experiences, political beliefs, and dreams for the future." It also includes Kingsolver reading from her work, including *Animal Dreams.*

Beattie, L. Elisabeth, ed., "Barbara Kingsolver," in *Conversations with Kentucky Writers,* University of Kentucky Press, 1996, pp. 151-71.

In a wide-ranging interview, Kingsolver says that she begins every novel with an important question that intrigues her and works her way toward the answer.

Berry, Donna, "An Interview with Barbara Kingsolver," in *Women Writers Speak Out,* Rutgers University Press, 1993, pp. 143-69.

In this interview, Kingsolver talks about a wide range of topics and also reveals that of all her characters Codi in *Animal Dreams* is the least like her: "she's so detached; she's so wounded and she's so cynical." Hallie, on the other hand, "is me."

De Marr, Mary Jean, *Barbara Kingsolver: A Critical Companion,* Greenwood Press, 1999.

This comprehensive and clearly written analysis of Kingsolver's work, with a chapter on each of her four novels, is suitable for beginners as well as those with prior knowledge of Kingsolver.

Epstein, Robin, "An Interview with Barbara Kingsolver," *Progressive,* Vol. 12, No. 9, February 1996, pp. 33-37.

In this interview, Kingsolver talks about her background, her politics, the relationship between politics and art, her nonfiction work, and many other topics.

Fleischner, Jennifer, *A Reader's Guide to the Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver,* Harper, 1994.

This is an informative and clearly written guide to Kingsolver's first three novels and her short stories.

Meadows, Bonnie J., "Serendipity and the Southwest: Conversation with Barbara Kingsolver," in *Bloomsbury Review,* November-December, 1990, p. 3.

Kingsolver explains that in *Animal Dreams* she "wanted to write about the way that loss of memory is the loss of self, both for a culture and an individual."

Newman, Vicky, "Compelling Ties: Landscape, Community, and Sense of Place," in *Peabody Journal of Education,* Vol. 70, No. 4, Summer 1995, pp. 105-18.

Newman explores some of the main themes in *Animal Dreams,* including the idea of community and the role of autobiography in establishing personal identity.

Ryan, Maureen, "Barbara Kingsolver's Lowfat Fiction," *Journal of America Culture,* Vol. 18, No. 4, Winter 1995, pp. 77-82.

Examining Kingsolver's first three novels, Ryan finds much to praise, particularly the fact that Kingsolver writes traditional realistic fiction, but she also argues that Kingsolver's work is ultimately unsatisfying.

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Brown, Rosellen, Review, in *Massachusetts Review,* Spring 1991, p. 138.

Cooke, Carolyn, Review, in *Nation,* Vol. 251, No. 18, November 26, 1990, p. 653.

Gray, Paul, Review, in *Time,* Vol. 136, No. 13, September 24, 1990, p. 87.

Review, in *Antioch Review,* Fall 1990, p. 546.

See, Lisa, "Barbara Kingsolver: Her Fiction Features Ordinary People Heroically Committed to Political Issues," in *Publishers Weekly,* Vol. 237, No. 35, August 31, 1990, p. 46.

Smiley, Jane, Review, in *New York Times Book Review,* September 2, 1990, p. 2.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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