# Blue Highways: A Journey Into America Study Guide

## Blue Highways: A Journey Into America by William Least Heat-Moon

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# Plot Summary

Blue Highways: A Journey into America is William Least Heat Moon's account of a three-month, 13,000-mile trip around the United States. William sets out in his van to follow back roads of America, "blue highways" because they are colored blue on road maps. Throughout his trip William encounters diverse people, explores natural wonders and finds out more about himself in the process.

William Least Heat Moon, whose given English name is William Trogdon, reaches a crisis point in his life when he loses his college teaching job and learns that his estranged wife is dating another man. Debating about what to do and what direction his life should take in light of these two events, William quietly decides to take a journey around the United States in hopes of discovering not only a little bit about his country but also about himself. William outfits his Ford van, which he calls Ghost Dancing, and set out on his journey from his Columbia, Missouri, home in March of 1978.

Headed east, William visits Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina before turning southward into Georgia for a quick tour of the Southeast. During this initial leg of the journey William is excited to see new people and learn about their lives. He lingers on back roads looking for obscurely-named towns just for the amusement. As William's trip takes him in a southwesterly direction he learns from people in Georgia and Alabama that the Civil Rights movement of ten years before has not dramatically changed the lives of the black people living in those states.

Throughout Louisiana and Texas, William meets people who live and play hard and enjoys listening to stories about their lives. For the first time on his trip, William begins to feel a sense of loneliness and wonders if he should return home, but he perseveres hoping that something new will reveal itself and hopefully take the edge off his personal pain. William connects with his Native American heritage throughout the trip through the western states and does not find the vastness of the territory comforting in spite of his ancestral connections.

The Northwest does little to ease William's angst due to driving in unrelenting rain, but William acknowledges the beauty of the land and the history of the Lewis and Clark expedition whose path he follows at some points. William is all too happy to reach Michigan, cross into Canada briefly and then into New England before heading into New York where he visits an old friend. Fueled by the contact with his friend, William continues his trip southward into New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia. Ultimately, William crosses the Ohio River, drives past the cornfields of Indiana and heads home with knowledge of people and places he has seen and a little more knowledge of himself.

# Section 1, Eastward, Chapters 1-19

## Section 1, Eastward, Chapters 1-19 Summary and Analysis

Blue Highways: A Journey into America is William Least Heat Moon's account of a three-month, 13,000-mile driving trip around the United States. William sets out in his van to follow back roads of America, those called blue highways because of the way they are marked on road maps. Throughout his trip William encounters diverse people, explores natural wonders and finds out more about himself in the process.

In February of 1978, William learns that he has lost his college teaching job and that his wife, from whom he has been separated, is dating another man. In an attempt to stop making sense of a world that has shattered, William decides to take a road trip in his van to discover fresh vistas. William's Native American heritage urges him to get closer to the earth and he names his truck Ghost Dancing after ancient resurrection rituals of the Plains Indians. William leaves his Columbia, Missouri, home on March 20 and heads east on Interstate 70 toward Kentucky where he stops in Frankfort, Lexington, Danville, and smaller towns in the bluegrass area. In Shelbyville, William meets three men, Bob Andriot, Tony Hardin and Kirk Littlefield engaged in rebuilding an historic building.

From there, William heads to Tennessee where he encounters one of his favorite-named places on his trip, Nameless. William also shares his guide for selecting a good place to eat: the more calendars hanging on a café wall, the better the food. In Nameless, Tennessee, a town of 90 people, William encounters Thurmond, Marilyn, Virginia and Hilda Watts, proprietors of the only store for miles around. The Wattses share local lore and food with William before sending him off with an invitation to return.

It is a cold Easter morning when William awakens in Cookeville, Tennessee, and moves across the Cumberland Plateau strip mining area and then back into the Appalachian Mountains. William's driving skills are tested as he tries to navigate snowy roads in the mountainous terrain before stopping for the night. William has been on the road for only a week and begins to question the logic of his plan because he has encountered only cold, rainy, snowy weather and freezing nights sleeping in Ghost Dancing. William does not turn back, however, and continues eastward into North Carolina marking one thousand miles into his journey.

The life that William has enjoyed has come to an abrupt end and he feels the need to change his scenery and hopefully his outlook. "A man who couldn't make things go right, could at least go. He could quit trying to get out of the way of life" (Chapter 1, Page 3). Drawing on his Native American heritage and connection to the earth William plans to explore and discover his life's path from this point on. It is symbolic that William names his van Ghost Dancing, based on the ghost dances performed by Plains Indians in the late 1800s. These dances were an attempt to bring back the old ways of life to

counter the new life encroaching on the Native Americans. William longs for his old life, and even though he knows it cannot return, his trip in Ghost Dancing is a symbolic gesture mimicking his ancestors and their hopes of bringing back their former way of life.

# Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapters 1-18

## Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapters 1-18 Summary and Analysis

Nearing North Carolina, William realizes he will have a chance to explore some of his Caucasian relatives dating back to a miller who had lived in the Piedmont area in the eighteenth century. As William eases into North Carolina he deftly navigates around Winston-Salem and Greensboro until he reaches Chapel Hill in hopes of uncovering information about his ancestors. William is especially interested in locating the grave of the miller whose tombstone is somewhere in the Carolina hills.

William locates an old man named Noel Jones who leads William back into the woods near an area called Sandy Creek in search of the tombstone. The only evidence William finds is a brass plaque indicating that the grave had been located across a creek. William realizes that land developments have long since erased the final resting place of the old miller. William spends a fitful night in the woods listening to the strange sounds while trying to sleep in Ghost Dancing.

The next morning William buys supplies at Siler City and winds his way through countless small towns until he arrives at Greenville, North Carolina, where he spends the night on the campus of East Carolina University. The next morning William leaves Greenville and heads toward the Outer Banks of the North Carolina coast to explore traces of some of America's earliest citizens including Virginia Dare, reported to be the first white child born in America. Lunching on fresh fish and taking in the scenery of the Atlantic coast, William finds himself in Wanchese on the tip of Roanoke Island. William is approached by a fisherman who needs help and William loads crates of crabs for a few hours.

William drives further along the coast and ends his day in Wallace, North Carolina, wishing for a café or tavern and finding neither. William enters South Carolina driving past tobacco fields and pine forests through the Up Country of the Piedmont Plateau where the little towns seem stalled in time. Ninety Six, South Carolina proves to be an interesting spot filled with Revolutionary War history. A state park worker named Rocky Durham gives William a tour of Star Fort named for its star-point structure built by the patriots in defense against Cherokee Indians.

William reaches Georgia and feasts on massive amounts of food at Swamp Guinea's Fish Lodge and then tries to walk off his dinner on the campus of the University of Georgia in Athens. Near Conyers, Georgia, William stumbles onto a monastery where he spends the next night and engages in provoking spiritual conversation with one of the monks, Brother Patrick Duffy.

Throughout William's travels he encounters many people with diverse backgrounds and cultural experiences but the immediate differentiator among all of them is language and dialect. During this leg of his trip through the Southeast, William hears a full range of Southern accents and even variations on words that are especially Southern. For example, he writes, "'These the old curin' barns where they dried the 'bacca. Haven't been used in years, but you can still smell the 'bacca inside.'" We walked over to one. 'Look here. That hearth cover's a Model T hood the blacksmith's touched up with his hammer. Nobody ever heard of junk then. Junk's a modrun invention'" (Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapter 2, Page 46).

# Section 3, South by Southeast, Chapters 1-14

## Section 3, South by Southeast, Chapters 1-14 Summary and Analysis

William leaves the monastery the next morning and continues his trek across Georgia crossing the Chattahoochee River and on into Alabama. William's trip takes on political and social significance when he reaches Selma and meets James Walker and Charles Davis, two young black men who inform William of the state of racial relations in the South. Not being from the South, William had expected that the racial tension between blacks and whites would have dissipated after Martin Luther King Jr.'s marches from Selma to Montgomery. Both James and Charles inform William that not much has changed and the situation for blacks is not much improved in the ten years since Martin Luther King led the marches.

As William drives through Mississippi he is struck by the number of Indian-sounding names: Yokahockana River, Chickasawhay, Tombigee River, Yazoo River and Tougaloo. William locates and drives the Natchez Trace Parkway which follows a five-hundred-mile trail called the "Path of Peace," once traveled by Indians and Ohio Valley traders. William also takes the opportunity to hike a trail into a blackwater swamp before continuing on to Clinton, the site of the old Mississippi College where he parks for the night.

William eats breakfast with a college student before returning to the Natchez Trace and drives until he stops to eat lunch at a Civil War earthworks at Vicksburg. William crosses into Louisiana and spends the evening at a bar named Eric's to experience Cajun music and food. During the night a rainstorm begins and William is stranded all the next day in Lafayette waiting out the rain before he can move on to St. Martinsville the next day, where he encounters a young black woman named Barbara Pierre who invites William to lunch at her apartment. Barbara is a well-read young woman who gives William more insight into the state of race relations in the South. William ends the day by eating at the home of a cousin in Shreveport and feels happy to be in the company of familiar faces.

This section is important because it is where the tone of William's trip changes. Up to this point, the journey has been one of American and personal history and excavation but now William faces current U.S. history in the faces of young blacks whose lives have only been minimally improved ten years after the onset of the Civil Rights movement. William yearns to hear their stories and understand their lives and is shocked by the blatant negative references and behavior of whites toward blacks in the deep South. William is not only disturbed to learn that prejudicial behavior is still overwhelming, but he also feels a kinship with the young black people because of the gross mistreatment of his own ancestors, the Native Americans.

# Section 4, South by Southwest, Chapters 1-14

## Section 4, South by Southwest, Chapters 1-14 Summary and Analysis

As William crosses into Texas he feels the pangs of loneliness made more evident by the time spent with relatives in Shreveport and the lack of communication from his estranged wife. William is intrigued by the name of Dime Box, Texas, which appears on his map and heads there to find a small town which could be the perfect set for a Western movie. After lunch at a café, William visits the town's barbershop where he meets the owner, Claud Tyler, who gives William an animated history of his life and the town of Dime Box.

William is particularly struck by the authenticity and preservation of the past in Fredericksburg, Texas, which still has an old hardware store, nineteenth-century buildings and other architectural elements untouched by progress. Outside of Fredericksburg, William picks up a hitchhiker, Porfirio Sanche, who is limping and unable to bend his right leg. He has no money and has been hitchhiking from Corpus Christi to visit a sick brother in Big Spring, Texas. Porforio is sixty-seven and has worked many jobs including ranching and driving trucks, but his health will no longer allow him to work. William enjoys Porfirio's company and regretfully lets him out at the side of the road when their destinations diverge.

William finds himself in desert country and drives for one hundred miles without seeing a single town. Finally William spots an adobe café and has dinner before continuing on to a desolate spot to spend the night. Unrelenting wind rocks Ghost Dancing all night and William heads out the next morning in a dust storm, heading along the Rio Grande River into New Mexico. William is struck by the lack of fences in the state and feels he has reached the true open range of the old West.

By the end of the day, the desert-weary William crosses into Arizona and is surprised to find an area called Portal Paradise where he parks Ghost Dancing and refreshes himself in a stream near the shade of some juniper trees. While relaxing by a campfire that night William is shocked by the appearance of a man from Tucson also driving through the area. At first William is pleased to have the company but the man's self-absorbed outlook quickly becomes tiresome, and William is glad when the man leaves William to sleep. William wakes to a brilliant morning and takes a road he should have avoided and comes precariously close to losing his life in the mountains but emerges unharmed but more than a little unnerved and appreciating the flat roads of the desert.

There is both symbolism and irony in this section of the book as the author writes about his desert experiences. Symbolically, the desert mirrors William's emotional state as he enters the dry, flat land. William is lonesome on the road at this point and is especially

depressed that he has had no communication with his estranged wife. Although driving through the desert is normally a long, lonesome experience, William's frame of mind makes the trip even more trying. It is ironic, given William's Native American heritage, that he cannot seem to enjoy the places where his ancestors had lived and is anxious to be free of the desert states.

# Section 5, West by Southwest, Chapters 1-12

## Section 5, West by Southwest, Chapters 1-12 Summary and Analysis

William crosses into Arizona, passes through Phoenix northeast toward the Hopi Indian reservation in Holbrook. William quietly drives through the Hopi village where he finds a good lunch but no one willing to have a conversation. William marvels at the resilience of the people who have the patience and resourcefulness to have lived on this barren land for centuries. When a sandstorm blows up, William takes refuge with some of the villagers in a local store but no one will speak to him, so William drives Ghost Dancing onward toward the Painted Desert.

After days of desert heat, William eschews viewing the Coral Sand Dunes in favor of heading to Cedar City, Utah, where he hopes for cooler weathers. Encountering a sign warning of an elevation of 10,000 feet with impassable roads in the winter, William moves forward thinking he is in no danger because it is May. As William continues up the incline, he encounters drastic weather, rain, snow and sleet. At the summit, the drifts of snow are higher than Ghost Dancing and at one point the road is completely blocked by a huge snow drift. William insulates himself the best he can and falls asleep fitfully hoping that he will not die in the night. The next morning, William eases Ghost Dancing down the sharply inclined road, and within a mile the pavement is dry and the weather sunny.

After his mountain experience, William drives effortlessly through the sagebrushes in Utah's flat landscape until he reaches Nevada. Driving miles and miles between ghost towns, William finally reaches the tiny town of Ely, which is known for its prostitution, a fact which is humorously pointed out to William while he waits at the gas station. At Austin, Nevada, William has a few beers at Clara's Golden Club before proceeding on to New Pass Station and then Frenchman. William finds a café where some of the local men tell him about the Navy test bombing flights in the area.

William continues his trek across Nevada, through Reno, and enters California at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. William heads Ghost Dancing toward the Sacramento Valley where he gets mired in a thick forest where he has to inch his way through. Ghost Dancing eventually emerges and William spends the night at a small state park. The next morning William meets fellow campers, "The Wandering Watkins," an amiable man, his nagging wife, and their dog White Fong. William is relieved when Mr. Watkins is summoned back to the trailer by his wife and William can be on his way.

Symbolically William is experiencing a rite of passage at this point in his trip. A rite of passage typically means some sort of ritual where the person enters an experience and emerges a changed person. Sometimes the rituals include sending the person into

unknown territory with minimal supplies and food in order to test endurance and survival skills. This is exactly what is happening to William now as his knowledge and instincts are being tested. He is in unfamiliar territory and the road signs and map markings are not always accurate, sorely testing William's patience and optimism for continuing the journey. Something drives William forward, however, and he will emerge soon a changed person from the one who started the venture a few weeks ago.

# Section 6, North by Northwest, Chapters 1-10

## Section 6, North by Northwest, Chapters 1-10 Summary and Analysis

William muses about the nature of change as he drives through California and into Oregon. William bypasses Klamath Falls and motors on toward the Cascade Mountains where he stops for awhile to wait out a rain storm. While he waits, William reads a copy of The Sacred Pipe, an account of Oglala Sioux Indians written by Black Elk, who writes that "the blue road is the route of 'one who is distracted, who is ruled by the senses, and who lives for himself rather than for his people'" (Chapter 2, Page 227). William is shocked to see the words about blue highways, a term that he thought he had created and wonders if maybe there had been some ancestral memory beckoning him to take his blue highways journey.

By now, William has exhausted half his money and heads for the college town of Covallis, Oregon, where he buys a few groceries, parks at the Oregon State University campus and eventually drifts off to sleep. William spends two rainy days walking around Corvallis and places a call to his estranged wife, whose brusque tone tells William all he needs to know about the state of their relationship. William's mood turns as dark as the sky and he fights hard against turning toward home. William locates the popular highway U.S. 101 and after dinner at an oceanside tavern, parks Ghost Dancing by the water and falls asleep.

The next morning, William continues north on highway 101, humbled to be tracing the steps of Lewis and Clark in their Northwest Territory journey. William follows the path of the Columbia River, which offers up views of Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Adams and Mt. Hood. William has breakfast with some students at Lewis and Clark College in Portland before heading to Vancouver, Washington, and then in search of a town called Liberty Bond, which he discovers does not exist, like so many of the obscurely-named towns on the blue highways.

The loneliness and monotony of the road is abruptly broken when William spots a man hang gliding over Pitt, Washington. William catches up to the man, Alba Bartholomew, and his gliding partners, Bob Holliston and Garland Wyatt, who share some of their stories of gliding in different areas of the country.

William draws many analogies to the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Northwest Territory to his own trek for self discovery. William feels a kinship with the audacious explorers as well as the young men who risk their lives to feel the freedom of hang gliding in such majestic vistas. William also discovers that while the scenery can be breathtakingly beautiful, the real view comes from inside himself and will be with him always.

# Section 7, North by Northwest, Chapters 1-16

## Section 7, North by Northwest, Chapters 1-16 Summary and Analysis

In Moscow, Idaho, William calls a friend, Fred Tomlins, and spends the day flying in a Cessna plane so Fred can give William an aerial view of the area. From his seat William spots farmers on tractors, Appaloosa horses and the Snake River. Fred had been a pilot in Vietnam but now lives a quiet life with his wife watching game shows on TV. Leaving Moscow, William picks up a hitchhiker named Arthur O. Bakke, an elderly man walking the roadside and carrying an aluminum suitcase. As soon as Arthur climbs in the van, he begins to preach religion to William, who regrets his decision to give the old man a ride. William learns that Arthur is divorced, suffered a hip injury in a car accident and with the exception of a couple bank accounts, carries all his worldly possessions with him at all times.

William drives on to Coeur d'Alene, where Arthur makes arrangements for the two of them to spend the night with some Adventist church members. Arthur reveals that he had given his life to God after surviving a near-fatal car accident, and he has wandered ever since trying to bring the Gospel to all he meets. The next morning William and Arthur part company on the road, and William envies Arthur his simplicity of purpose but not his restlessness.

Later that night, William visits the Oil City Bar in Shelby, Idaho, for some dinner and conversation. The next morning William wakes with a bad cold probably brought on by a cold, blustery weather change. Fueled by hot coffee, William points Ghost Dancing eastward on U.S. Highway 2, and with the wind at his back, sails past countless little towns. Montana stretches on as William breezes through the grasses and wonders why a state so flat would be named "mountain." Faced with the prospect of driving through the even flatter state of North Dakota, William's enthusiasm for the road begins to wane again and he feels almost numb in the unrelenting sameness of the region. William finds dinner at a truck stop and spends the night on a street in Wolf Point.

The next day William buys groceries in Poplar, Montana, the site where Sitting Bull surrendered six years after the Battle of Little Big Horn. William continues on Highway 2 through the unrelenting sameness of North Dakota and mercifully finds a small motel in Rolla in which to end the day. The next day the water pump on Ghost Dancing breaks, and William finds a Ford dealership in Grand Forks where the pump is quickly repaired. William finds the tidy, ivy-covered town a welcome relief from the unrelenting prairie.

When William reaches Wisconsin, he stops for a swim at a small lake and is startled by a young woman coming out of the nearby woods. The girl, Stacie McDougald, has run away from her home and abusive stepfather and needs a ride to Green Bay to stay with

her grandmother. William reluctantly agrees to let Stacie ride along and is so moved by her story that he delivers her directly to her grandmother's house. After she is gone, William feels the now familiar pangs of loneliness.

William drives into Michigan and finds a dorm at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant to spend the night. Unfortunately, the dorm is also housing men from a local insurance convention and William leaves the dorm in frustration when his obnoxious roommate makes conditions intolerable for sleep. The next day William explores Michigan's thumb-shaped inlet and some of the coast before ending the day in Harbor Beach.

The author utilizes many literary devices in the book, including similes, metaphors and humor. In this section there is a good example of onomatopoeia, which means that the words sound like the sounds they make. "Pock-pock went the tarred road cracks. Pock-pock. The day remained dark, showers fell and stopped and came again, the uneven roadway collected water, the van hydroplaned every few minutes. The clamor of wind numbed my ears; the fever made me woozy. Pock-pock. First the highway held me, then it entered me, then I was the highway. Pock-pock. Pock-pock." Anyone who has ever ridden on a long stretch of highway knows that "pock-pock" is the exact sound made when a vehicle's tires pass over the ridges in the road to make the sound that William finds so mind-numbing on this stretch of his trip. William could have said that Ghost Dancing made a sound in a familiar pattern but this description is much more colorful and immediately identifiable.

# Section 8, North by Northeast, Chapters 1-12

## Section 8, North by Northeast, Chapters 1-12 Summary and Analysis

William takes a brief northward trip into Canada and then routes himself into New York and finds the home of an old friend, Scott Chisholm, and decides to stay for a couple days. William is weary of driving and is glad to have the reprieve of a visit with Scott and his family. Scott lives in a two-story log house he built himself. William helps Scott build a stone retaining wall.

The next day near Canandaigua Lake William meets an Italian family headed by a man named Pete Marvin, whose real name is Pierangelo Masucci. Pete lives by doing light farming with his wife Pauline and his mother Filomena. After leaving Italy many years ago, Pete and Pauline refurbished a one-hundred-year-old farmhouse, a task made more amazing because Pete had been crippled as a young boy. The Masucci family shares their food with William, and he is revived by their positive outlook on life. After spending three days in the area, William says goodbye and moves on, happy to have had such a welcome break in his routine.

William makes his way into the Adirondack Mountains and takes the ferry across Lake Champlain into Vermont. After having driven the vast Western states, William marvels at the speed with which he can traverse the small state. William feels a sense of elitism as he encounters some of the Vermont towns and does not feel as comfortable in New England as he had in some of the other states. Feeling isolated, William places a call to his estranged wife and this conversation, like so many others, leads to nowhere but frustration and anger; William starts to understand that reconciliation is not possible.

By sundown, William reaches Melvin Village, New Hampshire, and meets Marion Horner Robie, the local expert on the town's history. Marion, now eighty-years-old had once run the post office, grocery, dry goods store, telephone switchboard and fire dispatch. William shares tea with Marion and learns a history lesson about the geography and the stalwart nature of New England people.

William's next stop is a visit with Tom Hunter, a farmer whose family has been in the maple syrup business for five generations. Tom shows William the family's equipment and shares stories about both the successful and challenging times of making a living from maple trees.

In this section William begins to emerge from his rite of passage, including the unrelenting heat of the desert states and the pouring rains of the Northwest. Finally, William reconnects with people he knows and explores nature and land that is more familiar to his own life in Missouri. Symbolically, it is important that William, in his

troubled state of mind, eschews both extremes of heat and rain in favor of environments and settings that show the cycle of nature and growth. Perhaps this is William's internal compass guiding him toward healing and renewal in his own parched life.

# Section 9, East by Northeast, Chapters 1-15

## Section 9, East by Northeast, Chapters 1-15 Summary and Analysis

William crosses into Maine and is once again at the Atlantic Ocean. Driving along the coastline, William sees village life in towns such as Springvale, Sanford and Kennebunk. In Cape Porpoise, William meets Tom West, a commercial fisherman, who invites William to join the next day's fishing expedition. William is at the dock at three-thirty the next morning to join the three-man crew of the Allison E, West's boat. By five a.m. the ship is in deep waters and the lights of Cape Porpoise are lost on the horizon. By eight a.m. the crew has its first catch in the net and sorts the bad from the keepers to be sold to local and regional fishmongers.

By noon, weather reports indicate a coming storm so the day's fishing will probably be cut short. By three o'clock, the Allison E is returning to shore with the crew cleaning the day's catch onboard. By five p.m., the crew has returned to dock and William returns to Ghost Dancing to cook and enjoy the fresh flounder he has taken for dinner. Because the Northeast seaboard consists mainly of major highways, William finds it difficult to find back roads that satisfy his curiosity of the true nature of the region. William had spent time in Newport, Rhode Island, while in the navy and is anxious to return to visit some of the familiar sites, but he is disheartened to find that so much has changed, and not for the better as far as William is concerned. Now the harbor side area, which once was rough territory even for a sailor, has been domesticated into quaint shops and bistros much to William's chagrin.

While in Newport, William visits Quonset Point where he was stationed during his naval service on the U.S.S. Lake Champlain. William finds the naval base deserted and a carnival operating nearby, further adding to his disbelief over the changes in the area. William is urged to move on by an officer of the Rhode Island Port Authority and that is the closest he comes to any military presence today. William parks Ghost Dancing near a beach and spends the night in peace near the bay where warships had once sailed.

The next day William follows the coastline into Connecticut headed toward Mystic, where clipper ships used to be built. William takes a ferry to New York State while listening to a local man telling stories of nuclear submarines that used to populate the waters. Landing in Long Island, William makes the mistake of calling a local man a New Yorker; the man feels more affinity with Boston, which is closer to him than Manhattan. William finds himself on an expressway zipping past the Long Island towns of Islip, Babylon, Amityville, Merrick and Oceanside. Before long, the lanes narrow and William is headed to Perth Amboy. William reaches New Jersey at nightfall and decides to take U.S. Highway 9 into the Pine Barrens, the last forested area lying between Boston and

Washington D.C. Amazed that he had begun his day in Rhode Island and is now ending it in New Jersey, William parks Ghost Dancing in Lakewood for the night.

At a diner the next morning, William is cautioned against driving through the Pine Barrens because the residents do not like strangers entering into their territory. One man even claims that the Pine Barren residents, Pineys, brought down the Hindenburg by firing potshots at it. Despite the warnings William continues toward the middle of New Jersey to find out about the Pineys and their way of life.

Along the way William stops to refresh himself at a stream and proceeds along the Delaware Bay in an attempt to locate a town called Othello to learn the origination of its name. While asking directions at a local store, William notices an elderly gentleman looking at him suspiciously and taking down Ghost Dancing's license plate number. The store owner directs William to talk to a man named Roberts Roemer, who is the expert on the town's history and a new movement called A.C.E. William drives to Roemer's home and Roemer agrees to talk to William after William has met with a man who Roemer claims is the real expert on local history. William agrees to meet with the man and accepts Roemer's dinner invitation upon his return.

William follows Roemer's directions to the man's house and soon learns that the town expert is the same elderly gentleman who had eyed William so suspiciously at the store. The old man reticently gives up the history of the area and William soon returns to Roemer's home for dinner. Roemer explains that A.C.E. stands for the Atlantic City Electric Company and that the company had set up a false real estate company to buy up most of the waterfront acreage in the region. When this had been accomplished, A.C.E. began developing the area much to the consternation of the residents who feel like they had been duped. Roemer explains that the town is older than Philadelphia and is in jeopardy of being ruined by the developments. The townspeople have rallied to prevent any further expansion.

William spends the night in Dover and continues his drive toward Delaware Bay in the morning. In Ocean City, Maryland, William meets a local man, Bob Goldsmith, who gives William a quick tour of the area before William must catch a ferry across Tangier Sound. Goldsmith urges William to visit an old woman named Miss Alice Venable Middleton on Smith Island. Miss Alice is an octogenarian retired schoolteacher who has lived on the remote island most of her life. Miss Alice provides William with tea and a brief history lesson of the region and makes arrangements for William to spend the night at a rooming house. The next morning Miss Alice takes William on a walking tour of the island before William boards the ferry back to the mainland.

William seems more at ease with himself and his trip once he returns to the Atlantic coast and spends time near the water. The water takes many forms: fishing the ocean, bathing in a stream, taking a ferry to an isolated island, and visiting Newport where he had spent time in the navy. Water typically symbolizes new life and the many forms that William encounters can represent facets of the life he is beginning. The ocean is powerful while the stream provides a calm respite. Taking the ferry to the isolated island can indicate that William is about to enter new terrain in his own life while the

disappointment at discovering that his old navy base no longer exists represents the past that is no longer relevant in William's life.

# Section 10, Westward, Chapters 1-4

## Section 10, Westward, Chapters 1-4 Summary and Analysis

William crosses the Chesapeake Bay and stops for lunch in Annapolis before continuing on into Virginia. William stops for gas in Fredericksburg and bemoans the loss of service in this self-serve age. William stops for the night in Spotsylvania, a major Civil War site, and wonders about the men who gave their lives in such beautiful countryside.

The next day, William hikes for a short while in the Blue Ridge Mountains before moving on with the realization that his journey is almost over. By sunset, William reaches West Virginia and stops in a hayfield for the night. That night William traces his journey on a map and realizes that he has completed more than a large circle; the traced design is the same as the one the Hopis had carved into desert stone to mark their own migration.

Driving through West Virginia, William sees rundown farms and signs of hard life along Highway 33. In Sutton, William sees many signs of decline from the old men to the dilapidated buildings. William stops for lunch in an old railroad town called Gassaway, then follows the Elk River and feels as if he has stepped back in time because of the backward ways of the people and their remote towns. Toward the end of the day, William crosses the Ohio River into Gallipolis, Ohio.

William follows back roads along the Ohio River through the towns of Franklin Furnace, New Boston, Portsmouth, Friendship, Manchester and Utopia before bypassing Cincinnati and moving into Indiana. Ghost Dancing flies past corn and tobacco fields, and William stops in New Harmony to visit the remains of the Rappites, a religious sect of the 1800s. Moving on, William crosses the Wabash River and knows that he will reach Columbia by nightfall, his journey complete.

It is symbolic that William traces his journey on a map and sees that it mirrors that of the Hopi Indian migration he had seen carved in stone. "From the heartland out and around. A blue circle gone beyond itself. 'Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle,' Black Elk says. 'Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves'" (Chapter 2, Page 421). William's Native American heritage is a strong factor in his life, and he feels a sense of kinship with his ancestors who had made a similar journey, although on a more massive scale. This gives William a sense of peace that he is not the only man to have searched, and he shares a kinship with his ancestors as a culture and as men who also looked for meaning in their lives.

# Characters

## William Least Heat Moon

William Least Heat Moon, whose given English name is William Trogdon, is the narrator of the story. William receives his Native American name from his father who is called Heat Moon. William's elder brother is called Little Heat Moon, which leaves William, who comes last, to be called William Least Heat Moon. William is thirty-eight-years-old in 1978, when he takes his trip around America. William lives is Columbia, Missouri, and decides to take his American odyssey after he loses his college teaching job and learns that his estranged wife is dating other men. William hopes to find some purpose for his own life by witnessing and experiencing the lives of others who live in America. William's Native American ancestry drives his quest for personal and spiritual fulfillment, and he even names his van Ghost Dancing in honor of the ancient resurrection rituals of the Plains Indians. William is an easy-going man with a poetic soul, who quotes regularly from Walt Whitman and Great Elk, his two favorite authors who share introspective and spiritual outlooks on life. William is an adventurous person who enjoys meeting new people and is genuinely interested in their lives and their histories. William also loves nature and feels at home near the water while appreciating the special beauty of the desert, mountains and plains. At the end of his journey William does not know if he has learned what he set out to learn because he did not know what he wanted to learn, but he is sure that he has witnessed real American life through the authentic people he has encountered.

## Walt Whitman

Although not a live person in the story, Walt Whitman, the American poet is a vital part of William's American experience. Whitman was a poet and journalist in the 1800s in America and wrote mostly in free verse about topics both elevated and banal. Whitman's works tended to be controversial for his time with writings about politics, death, sexuality, and other taboo topics. Whitman's most famous work is Leaves of Grass, a book of poetry considered almost scandalous for its time. Whitman serves as inspiration for William, and William inserts excerpts of Whitman's poetry and essays throughout the book. For example, while passing through Shaker country in Kentucky, William recalls Whitman's writing on the topic.

"Come life, Shaker life,

Come life eternal;

Shake, shake out of me

All that is carnal." (Section 1, Eastward, Chapter 12, Page 24)

In this context, it is almost as if Whitman is riding in the passenger seat with William as he expounds on various facets of the trip.

## Bob Andriot, Tony Hardin, and Kirk Littlefield

William meets these three men engaged in rebuilding an historic building in Shelbyville, Kentucky.

## Thurmond, Marilyn, Virginia, and Hilda Watts

William encounters these proprietors of the only store for miles around in Nameless, Tennessee.

## North Carolina Ancestors

William attempts to locate signs of his Caucasian ancestors in North Carolina, especially a miller whose tombstone William had seen in an old family photograph.

## Rocky Durham

Rocky Durham is a National Park Service employee who guides William to the historic Star Fort in Ninety Six, South Carolina.

## Brother Patrick Duffy

Brother Patrick Duffy is a monk at The Monastery of the Holy Spirit located in Conyers, Georgia.

## James Walker and Charles Davis

James Walker and Charles Davis are two young black men who talk to William about racial relations in Selma, Alabama.

## Barbara Pierre

Barbara Pierre is an intelligent, young black woman who invites William to lunch in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, to discuss race relations in the South.

## Claud Tyler

Claud Tyler owns the barbershop in Dime Box, Texas, and provides William with a history lesson of the area.

## Porforio Sanchez

William picks up Porforio Sanchez, a sixty-seven-year-old man who is hitchhiking five hundred miles to see an ailing brother.

## Alba Bartholomew, Bob Holliston and Garland Wyatt

In Pitt, Washington, William meets Alba Bartholomew and his gliding partners, Bob Holliston and Garland Wyatt, who share some of their stories of gliding in different areas of the country.

## Arthur O. Bakke

Near Moscow, Idaho, William picks up a hitchhiker named Arthur O. Bakke, an evangelist walking the roadside and carrying an aluminum suitcase.

## Stacie McDougald

Near a lake in Wisconsin, William encounters a young woman named Stacie McDougald who has run away from her home and abusive stepfather and needs a ride to Green Bay to stay with her grandmother.

## Scott Chisholm

Scott Chisholm is an old friend of William's who lives in Cheshire, New York.

## Marion Horner Robie

William shares tea with eighty-year-old Marion Horner Robie in Melvin Village, New Hampshire.

# Objects/Places

## Ghost Dancing

Ghost Dancing is William's 1975 Ford Econoline van, which has been converted to function as a traveling home for William's trip.

## Columbia, Missouri

Columbia, Missouri is William's home and the starting point of his trip in March, 1978.

## Shelbyville, Kentucky

William stops in Shelbyville, Kentucky, and strikes up a conversation with three men, Bob Andriot, Tony Hardin and Kirk Littlefield who are rebuilding an historic building.

## Nameless, Tennessee

William finds the obscure town of Nameless hidden in the hills of Tennessee.

## Wanchese, North Carolina

William helps a local fisherman load crates of crabs during his time spent in Wanchese in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

## Ninety Six, South Carolina

William learns interesting Revolutionary War history at the state park called the Star Fort, named for its pointed structure built by patriots in defense against Cherokee Indians.

## Swamp Guinea's Fish Lodge

William devours a huge supper at Swamp Guinea's Fish Lodge, located in Oglesby, Georgia.

## The Monastery of the Holy Spirit

William spends some time with the monks at The Monastery of the Holy Spirit located in Conyers, Georgia.

## Selma, Alabama

William befriends two young black men in Selma, who discuss the nature of racial relations in the Deep South in the 1970s.

## Dime Box, Texas

William gets a haircut and a history lesson at Claud Tyler's barbershop in Dime Box, Texas.

## Hacklebarney

Hacklebarney is an imaginary town that people from Missouri believe is just around the next curve but never appears.

## U.S. Highway 101

William drives north on U.S. Highway 101 in Oregon following portions of the path of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

## Pitt, Washington

William meets local hang gliders in Pitt, Washington, who speak to him about their adventures and the courage necessary to begin and keep up with the sport.

## Moscow, Idaho

William meets his friend, Fred Tomlins, in Moscow, Idaho, where Fred takes William for a plane ride.

## Kalispell, Montana

William picks up Arthur O. Bakke, an elderly hitchhiker, near Kalispell, Montana.

## Cheshire, New York

William visits an old friend, Scott Chisholm, and stays for a couple days in Cheshire, New York, where he also meets Pete, Pauline and Filomena Masucci.

## Melvin Village, New Hampshire

William has tea with Marion Horner Robie in Melvin Village, New Hampshire.

## Greenwich, New Jersey

William has dinner at the home of Roberts Roemer to discuss the preservation efforts of central New Jersey.

## Smith Island, Maryland

William visits octogenarian, Alice Venable Middleton, on Smith Island off the coast of Maryland.

# Themes

## Self Discovery

William's journey begins because of personal loss. He has reached a point where everything familiar in his life has vanished. Realizing that he can either fall to pieces or look outward, he chooses the outward view. Although he has no preconceived notion of what to look for or what he will find, William takes a positive step in hopes that he can learn not only some things of interest about other people but also about himself. During his trip, William relies on the silent help of Walt Whitman and Black Elk, his two favorite authors whose writings William calls to mind to help him wrestle with emotions as well as to appreciate that life is sometimes nothingness and that is as natural as abundance. On his trip, William discovers that there are so many types of people and so many ways to live that he forgets his own loneliness for awhile and just looks outward. William is also buoyed by the resilience and determination of some of the people he meets. Although he never casts judgment on those he meets, William does not understand some behaviors and remains true to his own code of loyalty, adventure and living with authenticity. At the end of his journey, William admits that he does not know if he has learned anything about himself or his situation because he did not have any predetermined criteria for learning. However, the reader can assume that William has gleaned some wisdom from his encounters and from time spent in silent introspection.

## Man vs. Nature

Throughout much literature, the classic theme of man vs. nature exhibits to challenge a character in order to test his endurance. William very deliberately chooses a journey that will put him in close contact with natural elements when he decides to take only back roads on his trip. By staying off freeways and avoiding metropolitan areas, William will come face-to-face with natural elements through all parts of the country. William even eschews hotel rooms in favor of sleeping in his van, where William experiences a rustic existence with weather-related challenges. Throughout the trip, William encounters blistering heat, slashing rain, a blinding snowstorm, a storm on the Atlantic Ocean and more weather-related incidents. William encounters all types of terrain: mountains, deserts, prairies, plains, lakes and more. He is able to traverse these terrains without much difficulty in spite of fatigue and loneliness from the journey. With Walt Whitman and Black Elk literary companions, William relies on their comforting words about staying on one's path and letting nature run its course. Characteristic of a classic literature hero, William perseveres; never turning back and remaining hopeful that the challenges will ease and let him pass without incident.

## Love, Hate, Life and Death

In spite of the cultural differences exhibited by the people and areas where William travels, there are always the pervasive themes of love, hate, life and death. William encounters people who love each other and America even though they may express it differently from what William knows. Unfortunately, there is also hate, especially in the stories of people in the South. The black people there still suffer prejudice and injustices because of their skin color, and William tries hard to understand the black experience during his limited time in that region. Everywhere William travels, he sees signs of life; both in the spirited people and in the earth coming back to life in his Spring journey. Death is also an important element in the trip as William encounters much history, his own and others, and tries to understand war and the battlefields that dot America's countryside. William also looks at death when looking at the faces of some of the ill and elderly people he encounters along the way, but he is lifted by their spirits and gratitude for the lives they have had. Love, hate, life and death are universal themes throughout most literature because they are the core components of human life, which William has expressed masterfully in his story.

# Style

## Perspective

This nonfiction book is written in the first person narrative perspective. This means that the person telling the story is the author himself, and he delivers his views and relates events according to his own perception of them. The author does not supply any insight into the motives, feelings or actions of any other people and can only relate instances about these people from his own point of view. When there are conversations detailed, the author simply relates what the other person says, and although the author may guess at the other person's thoughts, he cannot share them with the reader. Because the nature of the book is a nonfiction account of a person's philosophy on different topics, there is little room for any other points of view. This relaying of personal thoughts is punctuated at times by the retelling of events or incidents to add some dimension to the book, though everything is still from the author's own experiences and perspective. While this technique can be viewed as limiting, the author is able to provide much detail on his own thoughts and emotions which would not otherwise be available to the reader and is in complete alignment with the nature of the work.

## Tone

The tone of the book is very informal and engaging almost as if the reader is having a one-on-one conversation with the author. The language is informal and casual to define the author's personality and energy. There are a few slang usages of words but they are in context with the dialogue and appropriate for the work. The narrative is also very high energy with a laid back, yet intelligent, wit revealing the author's own personal style of speaking. The story is told in an unhurried style to mirror the author's pace during his journey. There is also a strong undercurrent of authenticity and sincerity throughout the book, which makes the story believable. The author also inserts excerpts from the writings of Walt Whitman and Great Elk to add both American poetry and Native American spirituality into the writing. Because William is an educated man, and clearly well read, his observations of the people and circumstances he encounters along the way are always insightful and viewed with maturity and wisdom. William lets the reader into his mind to know what he is thinking, which is necessary because there are no other notable people with which William interacts so the book has limited opportunities for William to share his thoughts other than letting the reader have glimpses into his mind.

## Structure

The book is structured in ten parts, with each one defining the particular geographic locations for specific legs of the journey. For example, Part 1 is titled Eastward to indicate William's direction from his starting point in Missouri, ending with his first

thousand miles at North Carolina. Within each section there are several small chapters which the author uses to define different locations or conversations with people he has met. To further punctuate the chapters, the author inserts passages from Walt Whitman and Great Elk, two of his favorite authors. These passages serve as further validation of William's point in the journey, either to describe the scenery or William's frame of mind at various points in the trip. The author also punctuates what could be long, dry narratives of geographic locations with the conversations of the colorful people he meets along the way.

# Quotes

"The result: on March 19, the last night of winter, I again lay awake in the tangled bed, this time doubting the madness of just walking out on things, doubting the whole plan that would begin at daybreak—to set out on a long (equivalent to half the circumference of the earth), circular trip over the back roads of the United States. Following a circle would give a purpose—to come around again—where taking a straight line would not. And I was going to do it by living out of the back end of a truck. But how to begin a beginning?" Section 1, Eastward, Chapter 1, Page 3

"I drove on east. I thought how Bob Andriot was rebuilding a past he could see and smell, one he could shape with his hands. He was using it to build something new. I envied him that." Section 1, Eastward, Chapter 6, Page 14

"But franchisers don't sell many of their thirty-three billion hamburgers per year in blue highway towns where chophouses must draw customers through continuing quality rather than national advertising. I had nothing to lose but the chains, and I hoped to find down the county roads Ma in her beanery and Pap over his barbecue pit, both still serving slow food from the same place they did thirty years ago. Where-you-from-buddy restaurants." Section 1, Eastward, Chapter 8, Page 16

"Highway as analog: social engineers draw blueprints to straighten treacherous and inefficient switchbacks of men with old, curvy notions; taboo engineers lay out federally approved culverts to drain the overflow of passions; mind engineers bulldoze ups and downs to make men levelheaded. Whitman: 'O public road, you express me better than I can express myself.'" Section 1, Eastward, Chapter 18, Page 39

"Govnor comes out and shoots you personally if you say against tobacco in this state. I smoked thirty-odd years. Did my duty and got a right to talk. Truth is you cain't buy a real, true cigarette anymores. That's why they name them that way—tryin' to convince you what ain't there. Real. True. Nothin' to it. They cut them long, they cut them skinny, they paint them red and green and stuff them with menthol and camphor and eucalyptus. What the hell, they's makin' toys. I'll lay you one of them brightleaf boys up in Winston-Salem is drawin' up a cigarette you gotta plug in the wall. Nosir, your timber's comin' down to make toys." Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapter 7, Page 54

"Maybe she was right that tourists want half-timbered facades and stained-plastic windows; maybe they want an Elizabethan town even when the real Manteo had been clapboard and shingles. Progress, retrogression—the Duchess knew best. But for me, I headed toward the town that hadn't seen neon light." Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapter 9, Page 59

"I wished for a corner tavern with neon and a wooden bar, but I would have settled for a concrete block beerjoint. I grumbled at a hypocrisy that encouraged people to drink in

the back ends of pickups. I wanted to go into the churches and hard cuss the congregations as if they were gourd seeds." Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapter 13, Page 62

"Dusty little clouds went puffing over powdery tobacco fields in the hot wind, the pine needles looked dry and bleached, and the buds in the deciduous trees afforded no shade. A horse stood up to its belly in a pond of rust-colored water. For me, there was nothing to do but go on into the sun. I'd forgotten to refill the water jugs and had only a few swallows of warm, stale water left from yesterday. I hoped for a soda fountain or rootbeer stand, but the road was dry fields and sunglare, and it went on and on." Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapter 14, Page 71

"The monks filed noiselessly into the great, open sanctum and sat facing each other from both sides of the choir. At a signal I didn't perceive, they all stood to begin the antiphonal chanting of plainsong. Only younger ones and I looked at the hymnals. The sixty-five monks filled the church with a fine and deep tone of the cantus planus, and the setting sun warmed the stained glass. It could have been the year 1278." Section 2, East by Southeast, Chapter 17, Page 85

"'Changed?' He looked at the tall man. 'I'll tell you change.' He turned to me, his sunburn reddening. 'Here's change: a monument to the boll weevil in Enterprise, Alabama, because it broke King Cotton's back so beans and corn could take over. Here's change: Atlanta Klan rally, Klan as in KufuckingKlux, year or to ago. Little ad in the Constitution advertising the rally. At the bottom it says, 'Bring your own robe.' Organization changed from furnishing the stinking bedsheets.'" Section 3, South by Southeast, Chapter 2, Page 95

"'I'm tellin' you sickin' dogs and poundin' the niggers was a lack of ignorance. We shoulda paid no mind. Then the cameras woulda stayed in the bags. That's what ruined us—photographers and reporters. Like with the Klan. Some Grand Genie comes crawlin' outa his rotten stump, and there go the cameras and the tongue-cluckin' over the poor South.' He stared into the dark mirror. 'Used to be everbody stayed in their place. That's what's got all mixed round. I'm sick of talkin' about it.'" Section 3, South by Southeast, Chapter 3, Page 99

"On the way back to the agency, she said, 'I'll tell you something that took me a long time to figure out—but I know how to end race problems.' 'Is this a joke?' 'Might as well be. Find a way to make people get bored with hating instead of helping. Simple.' She laughed. 'That's what it boils down to.'" Section 3, South by Southeast, Chapter 13, Page 126

"William Carlos Williams: 'Memory is a kind of accomplishment.' Maybe. And maybe too, in the end, it's the only thing one can call truly his own. Memory is each man's own last measure, and for some, the only achievement.'" Section 4, South by Southwest, Chapter 1, Page 135

"City people don't think anything important happens in a place like Dime Box. And usually it doesn't, unless you call conflict important. Or love or babies or dying." Section 4, South by Southwest, Chapter 2, Page 141

"'In see Great Var against see Germans, you remember vee Americans fight vis see Poles and Roossians against see evil,' he said. 'Here vas me, a poor boy from Dime Box, Texas, talking vis see foreign soldiers in sair langvage. See city boys—Chicago and Cleveland—even say vas amazed. Vee Slavs all understand each ozzer. Ohh! Vee haff some good times, me and soze Slavs! Vee play cards, not see dominoes, and vee trink see slivovitz. Sat vas a var!'" Section 4, South by Southwest, Chapter 4, Page 145

"I was in one of the strangest pieces of topography I'd ever seen, a place, until now, completely beyond my imaginings. What is it in man that for a long while lies unknown and unseen only one day to emerge and push him into a new land of the eye, a new region of the mind, a place he has never dreamed of? Maybe it's like the force in spores lying quietly under asphalt until the day they push a soft, bulbous mushroom head right through the pavement. There's nothing you can do to stop it." Section 4, South by Southwest, Chapter 12, Page 166

"Nothing has done more to take a sense of civic identity, a feeling of community, from small-town America than the loss of old hotels to the motel business. The hotel was once where things coalesced, where you could meet both townspeople and travelers. Not so in a motel. No matter how you build it, the motel remains a haunt of the quick and dirty, where the only locals are Chamber of Commerce boys every fourth Thursday. Who ever heard the returning traveler exclaim over one of the great motels of the world he stayed in? Motels can be big, but never grand." Section 5, West by Southwest, Chapter 1, Page 179

"For miles at the highway edges sat little cardboard and scrapwood ramadas, each with a windblasted sign advertising jewelry and cedar beads. In another era, white men came in wagons to trade beads to Indians; now they came in stationwagons and bought beads. History may repeat, but sometimes things get turned around in the process." Section 5, West by Southwest, Chapter 2, Page 183

"'But you get to know yourself out here—you have to. And you get to know the others around because we all have to look after each other. Out here, sooner or later, all of us need help. Look out for yourself, look out for each other. The law of the land.' She came around the counter to sit down. 'I think it's the distance between us that keeps us close. Everything here is important because there isn't much of it—except weather and dust. Once you see that, you're not lonely.'" Section 5, West by Southwest, Chapter 9, Page 209

"Missourians sometimes speak of a place called Hacklebarney: a nonexistent town you try to get to that is forever just around the next curve or just over the next hill, a town you believe in but never get to. Maybe that's enlightenment—always a little ahead of perception." Section 5, West by Southwest, Chapter 11, Page 213

"The annals of scientific discovery are full of errors that opened new worlds: Bell was working on an apparatus to aid the deaf when he invented the telephone; Edison was tinkering with the telephone when he invented the phonograph. If a man can keep alert and imaginative, an error is a possibility, a chance at something new; to him, wandering and wondering are part of the same process, and he is most mistaken, most in error, whenever he quits exploring." Section 6, North by Northwest, Chapter 1, Page 223

"'Don't be afraid of Pop's disapproval.' Disapproval? 'You're doing what he'd give a nut to do. He goes on all the time about selling the house and quitting his job and traveling around the country. Or going back to school. He's seriously proposed I take over the house and run it for two years while he and my mother go off to school. No lie! His theory is I need to learn what he knows and he needs to learn what he says I'm throwing away. He claims if I had his life for a year I'd know what the ballgame's about. I'd do it, but my mother won't approve because she knows I'd move my girl in. You'd trade lives with a middle-aged couple? Your parents of all people?' With their buying power, sure. The economy's about to hit bottom. Don't you know kids are supposed to rebel against their parents' values? I am. They hate their life.'" Section 6, North by Northwest, Chapter 6, Page 238

"The loneliness again. Now I had only the idea of the journey to keep me going. Black Elk says it is in the dark world among the many changing shadows that men get lost. Instead of insight, maybe all a man gets is strength to wander for a while. Maybe the only gift is a chance to inquire, to know nothing for certain. An inheritance of wonder and nothing more." Section 6, North by Northwest, Chapter 9, Page 249

"A man lives in things and things are moving. He stands apart in such a temporary way it is hardly worth speaking of. If that perception dims egocentrism, that illusion of what man is, then it also enlarges his self, that multiple yet whole part which he has been, will be, is. Ego, craving distinction, belongs to the narrowness of now; but self, looking for union, belongs to the past and future, to the continuum, to the outside. Of all the visions of the Grandfathers the greatest is this: To seek the high concord, a man looks not deeper within—he reaches farther out." Section 6, North by Northwest, Chapter 9, Page 251

"Before I left home, I had told someone that part of my purpose for the trip was to be inconvenienced so I might see what would come from dislocation and disrupted custom. Answer: severe irritability." Section 7, North by Northwest, Chapter11, Page 295

"When I walked the North towns, people, wondering who the outsider was, would look at me; but as soon as I nodded they looked down, up, left, right, or turned around as if summoned by an invisible caller. 'Stranger,' Whitman says, 'if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me?' I even tried my old stratagem of taking a picture of a blank wall just to give a passerby an excuse to stop and ask what I could possibly be photographing. Nothing breaks down suspicion about a

stranger better than curiosity—except in the North; whatever works better there, I didn't discover. The effect on me was that I felt more alone than I ever had in the desert. I wished for the South where any topic is worth at least a brief exchange. And so I went across the central North, seeing many people, but not often learning where our lives crossed common ground." Section 7, North by Northwest, Chapter 13, Page 301

"Later, lying in bed, I was glad I'd stopped to see him. I had needed work and familiar faces around a dinner table; I needed stories that embarrass because they are undeniable, stories that only old friends can tell because only they know them. And it appeared then as though I wouldn't have been able to travel another mile had it not been for these people. I suppose that wasn't true, but it seemed so." Section 8, North by Northeast, Chapter 2, Page 319

"Chisholm looked at me strangely and went quiet for some time. When he spoke again it was about the dogs. Afterward, I thought I understood his silence: I had undercut the stone wall we had built, our accomplishment. The wall looked enduring, and it would serve for a while, but there would come a time when it would be a pile of rock to no end. I had undercut the biggest dream of all—the one for permanence. Maybe that's what we really felt in the stones: how man is the tool of his dreams, dreams that rise only to fall back to earth." Section 8, North by Northeast, Chapter 4, Page 328

"If you want to hear distortions and misconceptions laced with plenty of dogmatic opinion, you have a choice of three places—excluding domed governmental edifices and buildings with steeples—bars, sport arenas, and gas stations (barbershops have lost position because of electronics: you can't hear over the hair dryers). As filling stations cease to be garages and community centers, as they become nothing but expensive nozzles, they too are losing ground. But, in the past, an American traveler depended on the local grease pit boys to tell him (a) the best route to wherever; (b) the best place to eat, although librarians give better recommendations; and (c) what the townsfolk thought about whatsoever. Now, it already may be too late for a doctoral candidate to study the ways that Americans' views of each other have been shaped while waiting for the tank to fill." Section 9, East by Northeast, Chapter 7, Page 380

"When Roemer brought a second round of tonics, he said, 'The evidence of history, whether it's archives or architecture, is rare and worth preserving. It's relevant, it's useful. Here, it also happens to be beautiful. Maybe I've been influenced by the old Quakers who believed it was a moral question always to consider what you're leaving behind. Why not? It's not a bad measure of a man—what he leaves behind.'" Section 9, East by Northeast, Chapter 11, Page 395

"'I know that and it didn't take sixty-three years to figure it out. Here it is, wrapped up like a parcel. Listen to my sentence. Having the gumption to live different and the sense to let everybody else live different. That's the hardest thing, hands down.'" Section 9, East by Northeast, Chapter 14, Page 410

"In a season on the blue roads, what had I accomplished? I hadn't sailed the Atlantic in a washtub, or crossed the Gobi by goat cart, or bicycled to Cape Horn. In my own country, I had gone out, had met, had shared. I had stood witness." Section 10, Westward, Chapter 2, Page 420

"I hunched over the steering wheel as it to peer under the clouds, to see beyond. I couldn't shake the sense I was driving in another era. Maybe it was the place or maybe a slow turning in the mind about how a man cannot entirely disconnect from the past. To try to is the American impulse, but to look at the steady continuance of the past is to watch time get emptied of its bluster because time bears down less on the continuum than on the components. To be only a nub in the eternal temporary is still to have a chance to see, a chance to pry at the mystery. What is the blue road anyway but an opportunity to poke at the unseen and a hoping the unseen will poke back? Section 10, Westward, Chapter 3, Page 423

"The circle almost complete, the truck ran the road like the old horse that knows the way. If the circle had come full turn, I hadn't. I can't say, over the miles, that I had learned what I had wanted to know because I hadn't known what I wanted to know. But I did learn what I didn't know I wanted to know." Section 10, Westward, Chapter 4, Page 426

# Topics for Discussion

William took his journey thirty years ago in 1978. How would his trip be different if he were to take it today?

Do you think you would like to take a trip like William did? Explain.

Discuss the roles of Walt Whitman and Black Elk to William and his journey.

Are there any people noted in the book that you would like to meet and know better? Discuss.

What would you ask William Least Heat Moon if you could have dinner with him?

Have you ever traveled or lived in any of the areas that William visits? How similar or different were your experiences in comparison?

Do you think William's trip was successful or not? Explain.