

Close Range: Wyoming Stories Study Guide

Close Range: Wyoming Stories by E. Annie Proulx

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The Half-Skinned Steer

The Half-Skinned Steer Summary

Mero gets a call from a relative he has never met, informing him that his brother, Rollo, has died. As Mero begins to drive cross country, from his home in Massachusetts, he recalls his childhood on the family ranch in Wyoming. Mero recalls how he and Rollo felt their father had betrayed the ranch by taking a job as a postal worker. He also recalls the time they took an anthropologist up to the caves where they had discovered Indian drawings and artifacts. What Mero recalls the most, however, is the story his father's girlfriend told him and Rollo once about a rancher who had a plate in his head that caused him to be forgetful. One day this man was skinning a steer. The man drained the steer of blood, cut out its tongue, and had it half-skinned when he was called in to dinner. The man left the steer lying in the dust while he ate. When the man returned, the steer was gone. In a minute the man caught sight of the steer walking in a distant pasture. The girlfriend told Rollo and Mero that nothing ever went right for the rancher again.

As Mero makes his way west, disaster seems to follow. First Mero is pulled over for speeding on the Interstate. Later, as Mero leaves a Des Moines amid confusing construction zones, Mero is in an accident that totals his car. Mero buys another car and continues on his journey. Finally Mero finds himself on the road to the family ranch. Mero is able to pick out familiar landmarks, but much of the area has changed. Mero has trouble finding the road that leads to the main house of the family ranch. Finally Mero believes he has found it, but halfway up the bumpy road he realizes he is on an old access road. Mero tries to drive his car in reverse back the way he came, but becomes stuck in a hole he could not see because of the snow. Mero gets out to put rocks under the tire and realizes he locked himself out of the car. Mero breaks the driver side window even though the passenger door was not locked. Mero gets the car out of the hole, but as he continues to reverse up the road, he drives off into a ditch. Mero decides to walk the ten miles down to a neighboring ranch. As Mero walks, he imagines he is being followed by a half-skinned steer.

The Half-Skinned Steer Analysis

Mero recalls his childhood on the family ranch, a place he escaped as a young man and has not returned to in more than twenty years. Mero feels that he escaped the ranch, escaped the trouble that can plague those who remained behind. As he makes his way west, Mero recalls the rocky final years of his days on the ranch, including the many women his father had in the house and the difficult relationship Mero and his brother had with their father. Mero also seems to reflect on how his brother more than likely became a man like his father, even though Rollo escaped the family ranch for a time, but was drawn back when the new owner needed someone to run it for him. It seems returning to this ranch, returning to the past and to a man's roots, is a theme of this



story. Bad luck follows Mero as he makes his trip, causing him to face tragedy within sight of the ranch. This also seems to touch on the theme of returning to one's past and to the stories and legends that surround Wyoming ranch life.



The Mud Below

The Mud Below Summary

Diamond Felts is a small man who grew up in Wyoming. Diamond Felts' mother refused to raise her children on a ranch the way she was raised, hoping her children would find a better way of life in the city. When Diamond was in high school he worked on a local ranch for a day, helping to brand the cows. Afterward, the rancher allowed the boys to ride a few of his bulls. Diamond fell in love with the feeling of the bucking bull beneath him. Diamond makes the decision to go to bull riding school in California. Diamond's mother is enraged when she learns of her son's decision and refuses to offer him any type of support.

Diamond appears to be a natural at bull riding. Diamond gets his PRCA within a month of graduation and begins making the tour of rodeos with his old high school buddy, Leecil. However, Leecil becomes burned out and decides to quit. Shortly after this, Diamond injures his knee and returns home for a short time. Diamond's mother takes him to meet an old rodeo champion who was so badly injured during a roping accident that he is mentally unable to care for himself. Diamond becomes enraged at his mother for trying to scare him away from the one thing that has ever mattered to him. Diamond returns to the rodeo circuit, partnering with another bull rider to share transportation. However, Diamond loses this partner when he forces himself on his partner's wife.

Diamond buys his own truck and continues the rodeo circuit on his own. One day a roper asks for a ride and quickly becomes Diamond's new traveling partner. This man is a Christian and he tries to talk Diamond into settling down and marrying, instead of indulging in his promiscuous ways. Diamond resists his partner's Christian morals. One day, while riding a bull, Diamond's hand becomes wrapped up in the straps and he is dragged around the arena. Diamond's shoulder is dislocated and will most likely need surgery. However, Diamond leaves that night with his partner so that his partner can make the next rodeo in time for his event. On the way Diamond calls his mother and asks who his biological father is. Diamond was told by his father, on the day his father abandoned the family, that he was not his biological child. Unfortunately, Diamond's mother will not confirm or deny this claim. Diamond returns to the truck thinking that he no longer gets the same thrill from riding the bulls. However, he thinks maybe it is still there.

The Mud Below Analysis

Diamond is a small man who discovers a thrill when he rides a bull for the first time. Diamond is a young man who has had an adversarial relationship with his mother since his father walked on the family years before. Diamond's mother is a hard, difficult woman, but she appears to have the best intentions for her two sons. Diamond's mother wants her boys to have more opportunities than she had as a young girl growing up on



a ranch. However, Diamond's mother goes about this the wrong way, making Diamond more determined to do what she does not want him to do just to prove something to her. This relationship is complicated by the fact that Diamond's father announced he was not his biological father on the day he left the family. This causes Diamond to question his mother's morality and her honesty, as well as causing Diamond to question his own identity.

Diamond lives a hard life. Diamond is a good bull rider, but the sport is dangerous and Diamond is injured multiple times, eventually feeling as though he has lost the love of the sport. However, Diamond becomes philosophical and realizes that everyone ends up in the mud at one point or another. This thought helps Diamond overcome his loss of focus and begin embracing life once again.



Job History

Job History Summary

Leeland Lee is born on a ranch in Wyoming. Leeland Lee marries Lori and takes a job pumping gas at a local gas station. The gas station fails when the new interstate is built, so Leeland joins the army. When Leeland returns from the army, he and his wife open a small ranch feed store in the same gas station where Leeland once worked.

Unfortunately, people prefer to drive to the ranch feed stores in the big city, so the store fails. Leeland takes a job with a road crew. After quitting that job for an inability to get along with the foreman, Leeland begins working at a meat processing plant. Eventually Lori and Leeland take over the meat packing business and the owner retires. However, the economy takes a dive and Leeland and Lori have to give it up. Leeland begins driving a truck while his wife takes a job in a local café. When Leeland and Lori's baby gets sick, Leeland quits driving trucks and begins raising hogs with his father. Leeland's father dies and Leeland returns to driving trucks. After a while, Leeland quits driving trucks and opens a gas station. The gas station fails, so Leeland again returns to truck driving. Leeland's oldest son returns home and wants to begin raising hogs with his father. However, Lori is pregnant again. Lori miscarries in the fifth month and dies shortly afterward. The children blame Leeland. A few years later a woman buys the old café where Lori once worked and hires Leeland as a cook. Leeland's oldest son leases the old gas station to open a motorcycle repair shop and steak house.

Job History Analysis

This story is written in the active voice and discusses the many jobs one man holds in the course of his life. While the story focuses on these multiple jobs, occasional mention of world events and the mention of the man's children and spouse make the reader realize that the story is really about the life that happens while a man is trying to find ways to support his growing family. Not only this, but the ending few sentences imply to the reader that Leeland's son will follow in his father's footsteps, suggesting that this life, this lifestyle, will repeat itself over and over again in each generation. On one hand it is an inspiring story of family and one man's attempts to do what is best for his family. On the other hand, it is a sad story of one man's uneducated attempts to support his family and the perpetuation of this lifestyle in his underprivileged children.



The Blood Bay

The Blood Bay Summary

In the winter of 1886-1887, a young man is crossing Wyoming and freezes to death. The next day, three cowpunchers come across his body. One of the men is in desperate need of new boots and is happy to discover that the dead man has brand new boots on his feet. However, the body is so frozen that the cowpuncher cannot remove the boots. The cowpuncher cuts the man's legs off just above the boots and takes them with him, hoping to thaw out the boots when they stop that night. The cowpunchers are out so late they cannot make it back to the bunkhouse, so they stop at the home of a local man named Grice. Grice allows them to bunk down for the night in the small shack where Grice has brought his horses inside to protect them from the cold. Grice warns the three cowpunchers about his blood bay, telling them the horse is mean and will bite.

In the morning, the cowpuncher with the boots wakes early and remembers it is his mother's birthday. The cowpuncher discovers that the boots have thawed, so he takes the legs out, keeping the socks, and throws them into the woodpile near where he was sleeping. The cowpuncher then puts on the boots and leaves quickly to go into town and send his mother a message. When Grice wakes, he sees the dismembered legs and thinks that the cowpuncher has been eaten by his blood bay. Grice feels so bad that he gives the remaining two cowpunchers forty gold dollars plus the three and four bits he took off the cowpunchers the night before playing cards. The other cowpunchers return to town and find their companion alive and well, but do not tell him about the money they accepted for him from Grice.

The Blood Bay Analysis

The Blood Bay is set in the late nineteenth century during one of the coldest winters Wyoming has ever known. This setting comes with the understanding that cowpunchers got their supplies where they could, doing what they had to do to survive. In this story a young man who knew little about Wyoming winters froze to death on his way south through the territory. This left his brand new boots going to waste until a cowpuncher needing the boots came along. To the modern reader it may seem horrendous that the cowpuncher cut the man's legs off, but really he was only being practical. Unfortunately his host that night did not know what he had done and wrongly believes his horse, a blood bay, ate the cowpuncher. It is a humorous situation that the cowpuncher's friends do not feel the need to rectify, especially since Grice gave them all his money to make up for their loss, another practical action in this time period.



People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water

People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water Summary

Ice Dunmire came to Laramie, Wyoming to make enough money to buy some land and bring his wife and children to Wyoming. Ice worked hard and succeeded. Ice's wife came to Wyoming with their five sons, bearing four more before finally having enough and leaving. Ice's boys remain, however, helping their father work the ranch. The oldest, Jaxon, left for a time to ride the rodeo, but returned injured but willing to work. Now Jaxon sells windmills during slow periods on the ranch to help with finances. The Dunmires are well respected, involved in everything in the community.

The Tinsleys did not have as much luck as Ice when they first came to Wyoming. On the trip to their new home, Mrs. Tinsley threw their infant daughter into the river, killing her. Mrs. Tinsley was then overprotective of her remaining two children. When the daughter grew up she married a cowboy, while their son Rasmussen went off to tour the world, leaving their father alone to run their dusty ranch. After several years, the Tinsleys get a letter telling them that their son was in a horrible car accident that left him unable to communicate. Ras is sent back to them, disfigured, lame, and unable to speak. Ras continues to have an incurable need to roam. At first Mr. Tinsley drives him around the countryside, but the call of his work causes Mr. Tinsley to buy back Ras' old horse so that he can roam on his own. Within a short time the Tinsleys begin hearing rumors that Ras is approaching neighboring ranches and showing his genitals to local women.

The Dunmires hear the same rumors about Ras' behavior. In fact, the Dunmires hear that Ras is doing more than just showing his genitals and fear that he will one day force himself on an innocent women. Jaxon goes to the Tinsleys' ranch under the pretense of selling Mr. Tinsley a windmill. However, the conversation quickly turns to Ras and Jaxon warns that if Mr. Tinsley does not control his son, someone might take matters into their own hands. That night Mr. Tinsley shares this warning with Ras, but Ras only laughs. The following morning, Mrs. Tinsley notices that Ras is running a fever. Mrs. Tinsley sends him up to bed where she nurses him for several days. On the third day, Mrs. Tinsley asks her husband to bathe their son, something she does not feel comfortable doing, but feels is necessary because of the horrible smell coming from her child. A while later Mr. Tinsley comes down from Ras' room horrified at what he has seen. Mr. Tinsley tells his wife that someone removed their son's genitals with a dirty knife, causing gangrene to spread from Ras' groin to his leg.

People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water Analysis

This story is set in the 1930s. The story begins with the story of the Dunmires, how they have worked hard and been good citizens, contrasting their story with that of the Tinsleys, a family who has not worked quite as hard and does not have the connection with their children that Ice Dunmire appears to have with his sons. At first the reader



thinks that this is going to be a story of a clash between the two families, with the Dunmires coming out on top because they appear to be so hardworking and community minded. This idea seems to be underscored when Ras returns home damaged and begins acting inappropriately with the female neighbors. However, the end of the story is a surprise to these readers when they realize that the real enemies in this novel are the Dunmires.

This story ends with words of caution that make the reader study the title of the story with a new understanding. The title implies that even those who have done something wrong still deserve basic considerations. The words of warning at the end of the story suggest that everyone is capable of evil, including hard working, law abiding citizens like the Dunmires. It also suggests that perhaps a little understanding in cases like Ras' should be exercised.



The Bunchgrass Edge of the World

The Bunchgrass Edge of the World Summary

The Touches live on a ranch in Wyoming. Red began the ranch after escaping Wyoming, but not finding anything better. All of Red's children left home eventually except his youngest child, Aladdin. Aladdin married and brought his wife back to the family ranch, raising two daughters there. Aladdin took over the ranch from Red, but Red continues to live with the family, pushed aside and forced to live in the old pantry. Aladdin's youngest daughter, Shan, moved away to take a package design job in Las Vegas. Ottaline, the oldest daughter, remained on the ranch, eventually working with her father in the fields.

Ottaline is a large, mildly attractive girl who dreams of a white knight coming to the ranch to rescue her from her loneliness. At night Ottaline listens to the scanner in her room that picks up cell phone conversations from all over the area. Ottaline becomes convinced that she should lose weight so that she can attract a man. Ottaline begins walking around the ranch, beginning with making circles around the ranch house and then spreading out until she finds herself walking in the old quarry where her father has abandoned all the old, broken ranch machinery. There Ottaline believes she hears an old 4030, her father's John Deere tractor, talking to her. The tractor convinces Ottaline he is in love with her and that she should fix him up. Ottaline moves the tractor into an old shed with her father's help and begins tearing it apart in preparation for repairing it.

Ottaline's father, Aladdin, becomes ill with the flu after a drunken night sleeping in his truck. Since the livestock dealer is due to come by, Aladdin talks her into showing him the herd. Ottaline is nervous because she does not like the livestock dealer, so she is relieved when it turns out that the livestock dealer has sent his son. Ottaline takes him to the herd and they talk, quickly becoming infatuated with one another. In time Ottaline forgets about the tractor and marries the livestock dealer's son.

Aladdin gets a loan from the bank and buys a plane to help him supervise the large ranch. Aladdin tells everyone they must be outside watching when he flies the plane home. As Aladdin goes to land the plane, he hits the tractor that he pulled back out into the field after Ottaline lost interest in it. The plane crashes and Ottaline's father breaks his neck. Red is thrilled because he believes that Aladdin's death restores him to head of the household.

The Bunchgrass Edge of the World Analysis

Aladdin is the son of a man who explored the country before deciding to settle in Wyoming where he was born and raised. Red is a stubborn, determined man. However, his son is just as determined. One day Aladdin takes control of the ranch in a fight with his father in which Aladdin gets the best of the old man. Red is pushed out of the way,



made a villain by his daughter-in-law and banished to the pantry. However, Red finds himself the last man standing when Aladdin crashes his plane and kills himself, giving Red what he believes to be revenge, even though he is ninety years old now.

Ottaline is Aladdin's daughter, a large girl who dreams of falling in love and getting married one day. Ottaline is so lonely and depressed that she believes a tractor can talk to her. Ottaline comes to believe this tractor is the only thing that will ever love her. However, Ottaline finally meets her white knight and gets married, leaving the tractor to continue rotting in the fields. The tractor once told Ottaline that if her father ever hurt him again, he would kill him. The day the plane crashes because it got caught on the tractor leaves the reader wondering if the tractor really was alive and did kill Aladdin for abandoning him in the field once more.



Pair a Spurs

Pair a Spurs Summary

Car Scrope lives on The Coffeepot, a ranch outside of Signal, Wyoming. Car is suffering from a downturn in beef prices. Car's neighbor, Sutton Muddyman, has gotten out of cattle and now runs a dude ranch on his property. Sutton Muddyman is married to Inez, a strong woman who helps him run the dude tours.

Car was out taking his cows to the BLM lease one day when one of his men lost his jacket and another was injured when he had an epileptic fit and fell from his horse. Car decided to return to the house. Once there Car found his wife in bed with his best friend, John Wrench, with whom he had once shared all his women. Car recalls the day he called his wife, from whom he is now divorced, and begged her to return to him. When she hung up on him, Car went to her apartment and shot holes in her car. Car then went to the ranch where his old friend John Wrench lives and shot up his truck. Jeri, Car's wife, left town shortly after that and Car continues to blame Inez, convinced she talked Jeri into leaving.

Sutton Muddyman is in town one day and he happens to stop by the blacksmiths where he sees a pair of comet spurs. Muddyman decides to buy the silver inlaid spurs for his wife's birthday, using the income tax refund money they were supposed to use on bills. Two weeks later, Inez goes to Car's to discuss bringing one of their dude tours onto his land that weekend. Car suddenly forgets his hatred of Inez and begins coming on to her. Being near Inez, who is wearing the spurs, makes Car ache in all the places he had to have surgical metal put in after a car accident with Jeri. It also causes a severe headache. However, the one thing that overlays all that is the sexual desire that burns through Car whenever he is near Inez. For several weeks Car follows Inez round, trying to seduce her. When Inez tells Muddyman, he ignores her concerns. Later that same day, Inez goes out to rescue some lost dudes and is killed when her horse bucks her off, frightened by a wolf Inez attempted to rope.

Muddyman sells his ranch to a Hollywood actor who employs a Texas man to run the ranch. Mrs. Freeze, Car's foreman, bought the spurs Inez got for her birthday at auction after the sale of the ranch. Now Car has become fascinated with Mrs. Freeze, suddenly sexually attracted to her even though they have known each other for twenty years. Mrs. Freeze quits her job at The Coffeepot and takes a job with the neighboring ranch, preparing the ranch for a herd of buffalo. One day the Texas foreman goes off to see Car about some damage his cows did to Car's fence. However, the foreman is caught up in the swollen creek and drowned. The foreman, who took the spurs from Mrs. Freeze in a bribe for her job, lost his boots in his final struggles in the creek. The boots are now trapped under a fallen train trestle. Every day Car goes to the creek and sits all day, sometimes running his fingers through the water. Car plans to set a tent and live near the creek.



Pair a Spurs Analysis

This story is set in modern times and told in a third person narration that uses multiple narrators. Car Scrope runs his family ranch and was married, but the marriage ended after Car found his wife in bed with his best friend. The two men manage to get past this betrayal, but Car's wife leaves town, leaving him convinced that his neighbor's wife, Inez, talked Jeri into leaving. Car is a decent, hardworking man who loved his wife. Losing his wife has left Car depressed and lonely.

When Inez begins wearing spurs with silver on them, Car is suddenly attracted to her. This attraction is only when Car is around her while she is wearing the spurs. When Inez is not around, Car continues to hate her. Later, when Mrs. Freeze has the spurs, Car begins to feel the same attraction toward her. Still later, when the spurs are stuck under a trestle's debris, Car is attracted to the creek. Suddenly the reader realizes that it is the silver that Car is attracted to. Something in the silver causes the medical metal in Car's body, placed there after a terrible car accident, causing him to be attracted to anyone or anything wearing the spurs, kind of like the way two magnets can be attracted to one another.



A Lonely Coast

A Lonely Coast Summary

Four women live in a small Wyoming town. All four have had trouble with men. The narrator was married and ran a ranch with her husband. However, when the narrator caught her husband having sex with their fifteen year old temporary ranch hand, she left him. The narrator works in a bar as a bartender. The three other women are lonely women who work hard, several of whom have children they care for. These women often look in the personal ads for men they might date. Josanna Skiles, a woman who works as a Japanese chef and reportedly shot her lover years before, has met Elk Nelson through these personal ads.

One night the narrator observes Elk coming into the bar and flirting with another of Josanna's friends, Palma. When Josanna comes into the bar, she is in a bad mood because she has just been fired from her job for reasons she claims she does not know. Rumors say that Josanna was killed for doing cocaine in the kitchen of the restaurant, but no one knows for sure if this is true. The narrator is sure that Josanna has seen Elk with Palma, but she makes no reference toward it. Josanna, Elk, Palma, Ruth and a male friend, Barry, all decide to drive to Casper to hit the bars there. On the way to Casper a truck cuts Elk off as he is attempting to pass another truck hauling a horse trailer. Elk hits the horse trailer, but does not stop. Instead, Elk chases after the truck that cut him off, with the horse trailer following behind. Elk forces the truck off the road and gets into a fight with the driver. The man driving the horse trailer pulls up and takes a gun out. No one knows for sure what happened next, but the horse trailer guy ends up with a bullet in the throat. Elk and Josanna are both dead. The narrator thinks that Josanna shot Elk for cheating on her, taking advantage of the chaos of the moment.

A Lonely Coast Analysis

This story is told in the first person point of view. The narrator is never named. The narrator tells both her own story and the story of Josanna, a woman who once shot a lover for cheating and has most likely done it again. Josanna is a strong woman who is tired of being used and abused. The narrator seems to understand this. In fact, the narrator has also found herself betrayed by her own husband. This fact makes the narrator sympathetic toward Josanna, perhaps even silently cheering her on for killing Elk. Perhaps the narrator has even considered doing such a thing to her own husband. These women live a difficult life in Wyoming, where there are few people and fewer available, honest men.



The Governors of Wyoming

The Governors of Wyoming Summary

Renti and Roany pick up Wade Walls in town because Roany's husband has gone out of town unexpectedly. Wade Walls is a friend of Roany's husband, Shy, who has come to cause trouble with the local cattle ranchers. Wade believes that cows are ruining the west by overgrazing the land and trampling rare plants. Wade and Shy have worked together for many years attempting to sabotage the local cattle industry. Roany and Wade get into an argument about eating meat after Wade learns that Roany has steak in the freezer. Roany insists that this meat is okay because it is buffalo meat, not cow meat.

Shy returns from his trip, telling his wife he was at a protest against ranchers killing prairie dogs. However, Shy was really in a small cabin with a young girl he paid to have sex with. Shy has had a fascination with young girls ever since a brief encounter with a thirteen year old girl when he was twelve. Roany goes up to bed, leaving Shy and Wade alone. They go out to a neighbor's property and begin cutting fences. Shy and Wade are unaware that Shy's neighbor is aware that someone has been sabotaging local cattle ranchers and has decided to sleep outside that night. One of the men fires a shot near Shy and Wade, causing a rock to imbed itself in Shy's hip. As the ranchers approach, Shy asks Wade for help, but Wade runs off, leaving him to face his neighbors alone.

The Governors of Wyoming Analysis

This story is told in the third person point of view with multiple narrators. Wade and Shy are two idealist who believe they are working toward the good of the west. However, these two are not part of any organization and are not doing anything to promote change except causing property damage to cattle ranchers. Shy is a naive young man who believes in Wade, unaware that Wade's motivation is based in the fact that his father worked in a meat processing plant where he contracted a rare form of cancer and died. Shy believes he is doing something great, something that will change the world. Instead, Shy is only causing property damage. Not only this, but Shy is about to be caught causing property damage to the ranch belonging to his own cousin. Shy suddenly realizes there is little difference between him and the corrupt governor's whose pictures his grandfather hung in the family home.



55 Miles to the Gas Pump

55 Miles to the Gas Pump Summary

Rancher Croom drinks his own homemade beer and rides out to a place he knows where he falls off a cliff. At the ranch house, Mrs. Croom cuts a hole in the roof so that she can see inside the attic that her husband has kept locked up for twelve years. Mrs. Croom looks inside and sees bodies of women, many of whom she recognizes from missing posters and newspaper articles she has seen over the years. All the women are badly beaten, some covered in paint, one covered in newspapers.

55 Miles to the Gas Pump Analysis

This story is very short, less than two pages long. This story suggests that Rancher Croom, a man who lives on an isolated Wyoming ranch and brews his own beer, is also a serial killer. Mrs. Cross has become curious about the attic after twelve years of being told to stay away and makes a hole in the roof to see inside. Mrs. Croom discovers her husband's sick pastime. The story ends with the suggestion that everyone has to find their own entertainment when they live out in the middle of nowhere, suggesting that Rancher Croom was just trying to keep himself entertained. It is a depraved idea that suggests boredom can make psychopaths out of anyone.



Brokeback Mountain

Brokeback Mountain Summary

Ennis del Mar was raised by his older brother and sister after his parents were killed in a car accident. The older siblings kept the family farm going as long as they could, but it finally went under. Ennis is now seventeen and looking for work through the Farm and Ranch Employment. Ennis is matched up with Jack Twist, a young man who grew up on a farm in Lightning Flat toward the Montana border. Joe Aquirre sends the two young men up onto Brokeback to watch over his sheep. The Forest Service requires that the boys stay in one of their designated campsites, but Aquirre wants Jack to stay with the sheep at night to ensure that the wolves do not get them. However, after a few days of this, Jack is unhappy. Ennis agrees to switch with him.

The boys work well together for several weeks. At night they often have dinner together and talk long into the night. One night they decide it is too late for Ennis to go to the sheep, so Jack talks him into staying in camp. Ennis insists on sleeping on the ground near the fire, but he becomes so cold his shivering wakes Jack. Jack talks Ennis into joining him in the tent. The two men lay close together so that Ennis could be warmed by Jack's body heat. This closeness leads to a sexual encounter. The two men do not talk about this encounter, but find themselves spending more and more time in camp together. When the winter is over, both men go off to their separate lives, making no plans to meet again. However, Ennis is made physically ill by this decision.

Ennis marries his fiancée, Alma and they quickly have two daughters. Four years pass. Ennis gets a postcard from Jack, informing him that he is coming to town. The two men meet and spend the weekend in a motel room. Jack tries to convince Ennis to buy a ranch with him, but Ennis remembers a time when his father showed him the mutilated body of a homosexual man who lived near their farm. Ennis does not want that to happen to him or Jack, so he insists that they hide their relationship, meeting only in remote places a few times a year.

Years pass. Ennis and Alma's marriage falls apart. Alma remarries and invites Ennis to Thanksgiving dinner one year. Alma tells Ennis that she knows that when Ennis went fishing with Jack they never did any fishing. This makes Ennis so angry that he leaves, refusing to see Alma or his daughters again until his daughters are old enough to come to their own conclusions about their father. However, Ennis continues to meet with Jack, often camping with him for days on end.

During one camping trip with Jack, Ennis refuses to meet Jack for a planned trip in November because he has to work. Ennis explains that when they were younger, he would quit his jobs if he could not get time off to see Jack. However, Ennis is older now and there are fewer jobs available to him. Jack becomes angry and wishes aloud he could stop loving Ennis. This hits Ennis so hard he falls to his knees. However, there is nothing more to say, so Ennis leaves. A few months later, Ennis learns that Jack died.



Ennis calls Jack's widow and learns he was pumping up a tire on the side of the road and tire blew, causing Jack to fall onto his back and drown in his own blood. Ennis wonders if it was the tire or the tire iron.

Ennis visits Jack's parents to ask if he can take Jack's ashes up to Brokeback Mountain. Jack's father refuses, making it clear that he knows about Ennis' relationship with Jack. Jack's mother, however, allows Ennis to go into Jack's bedroom. Inside the closet Jack finds Jack's shirt, the one he wore their last day on Brokeback, hanging on a hanger with Ennis' shirt, the same he wore on Brokeback. Ennis takes the shirts and makes a shrine of sorts of them in his small trailer. Ennis often dreams of Jack.

Brokeback Mountain Analysis

This short story is a love story. Told from Ennis' point of view, this story tells how Ennis and Jack met on Brokeback Mountain, both hired to watch over sheep for the summer. The two men begin a love affair that neither expected nor wanted. Ennis was engaged when he met Jack. Ennis goes through with the wedding, but his separation from Jack is so devastating that Ennis is physically ill. Over the years, Ennis continues to see Jack, even though he continues to be with women when not around Jack. Ennis is clearly in love with Jack. In fact, the reader gets the impression that Ennis' love for Jack transcends gender. There is more to this love affair than sex, than physical love. Ennis feels connected to Jack in a way that many people rarely find. However, this relationship makes Ennis question his own morality, his own sexuality, and his own safety. Ennis refuses to spend his life with Jack because of fear of bigotry against homosexuals. This leaves Ennis alone and lonely most of his life, finding happiness only on the occasions when he is able to be with Jack.

Jack, on the other hand, appears to be a man who is comfortable in his sexuality. Although Jack too marries a woman, it appears this marriage is mostly for economic reasons. Jack claims to not be attracted to other men, but the reader learns that Jack was having an affair with a man in his hometown whom he schemed to settle down with in a fit of anger after leaving Ennis. It is this affair, and the knowledge of it, that most likely led to Jack's death at the young age of thirty-eight. Despite Jack's sexuality, there is no doubt in the mind of the reader that Jack was just as deeply in love with Ennis as Ennis was with him. It is this depth of desire, this depth of emotion, that makes this a unique love story and a powerful one that will stay with the reader for a long time.



Characters

Mero appears in *The Half-Skinned Steer*

Mero is an old man who was raised on a ranch in Wyoming. Mero had a brother who also lived with him on the ranch. Mero and his brother, Rollo, believed their father was giving up on the ranch when he began working for the post office. This caused the boys to fight their father at every turn, at times turning their attention to one of the many girlfriends their father had in the house. Mero eventually left the ranch, making a life for himself in Massachusetts.

Mero has learned that his brother, Rollo, has passed away. At this same time, Mero learns that Rollo sold the ranch, but returned to run it when it was bought by a businessman in Australia who turned it into a type of zoo for Australian animals. Mero jumps in his car to make the trip back to Wyoming, determined to make it in time for his brother's funeral, four days away. Mero has multiple problems on the trip, suggesting to the reader that there is a curse on him that is suggested by a story one of his father's girlfriends told him years ago. It also suggests that perhaps one cannot go back home again.

Diamond Felts appears in *The Mud Below*

Diamond Felts is a bull rider in the rodeo. Diamond was raised by a mother who refused to allow her sons to live the ranch lifestyle, only to find her son living as a bull rider. Diamond's mother is deeply disappointed in Diamond's lifestyle choices, afraid he will be badly injured one day. The reader wonders, however, if the mother's concern is more about Diamond or about the idea of being forced to care for him after an injury.

Diamond has struggled all his life with his identity. Diamond was told once that the man he thought was his father is not. Diamond is also a very small man, much shorter than the average man. This causes Diamond to live a reckless lifestyle that includes forcing himself on women who are much bigger than himself. It makes Diamond feel powerful. Perhaps this need to feel powerful also has something to do with his choice of professions. In the end, Diamond begins to lose the thrill he gets from riding bulls, but a phone call to his mother in an attempt to get her to confess to his true patronage seems to help.

Leeland Lee appears in *Job History*

Leeland Lee is a man who was raised on a failing hog farm and grew up to have a steady string of endless jobs himself. Several times Leeland tries to run his own business, but each of these fails. Leeland attempts to raise hogs with his father, but this also fails when his father allows the business to become deeply indebted without telling



his son. Leeland also drives trucks and works in a meat packing business. However, none of these jobs seem to fit and Leeland ends up working as a chef in a café.

Leeland's life goes on behind the scenes as he moves from job to job. Leeland marries, has several children, and worries about the significant events taking place all over the world. Leeland is a typical man, a man who fights hard to support his family despite a lack of education or opportunity. Leeland appears to be a loser to some readers, but to others he is an inspiration based on the fact that he never stopped trying.

Rassmusen appears in People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water

Ras is a young man raised on a struggling ranch in Wyoming. Ras has always been fascinated with travel, therefore it is no surprise when he leaves home as soon as he is able and begins traveling the country. Unfortunately, Ras is in a terrible accident that brings him back home and keeps him confined to the immediate area. Ras begins riding his horse all over the countryside, often staying away for days at a time. Eventually Ras' parents hear that he has been acting inappropriately with local females. Despite this, the parents love Ras. Ras does not seem to care about his parents' embarrassment or any danger he might be in. However, it is the parents who are devastated when they discover someone has taken the law into their own hands and punished Ras for his behavior. Ras is a confused, angry young man, but he did not deserve his painful end.

Ottaline appears in The Bunchgrass Edge of the World

Ottaline is a large, powerful woman who lives with her parents on their ranch. Ottaline is deeply lonely, afraid she will never find a man to love her. Ottaline blames herself for her shortcomings, convinced that if she could lose weight she might be able to find love. Despite the fact that Ottaline's mother attempts to convince her to believe in herself and accept who she is, Ottaline attempts to lose weight. During this halfhearted attempt, Ottaline finds a tractor she believes is in love with her. The reader wonders, just as Ottaline does, if she is going insane.

Ottaline meets a young man who is just as round and lonely as she. Ottaline quickly falls in love with and marries this young man. This romance ends Ottaline's relationship with the tractor and it is banished back out into the fields of the ranch. The reader wonders if the tractor continued to speak to Ottaline after she met her husband, but is left with the impression that Ottaline did not return to the tractor, no longer in need of the tractor's distraction. Instead, Ottaline settles into a life that is very much like her own mother's.



Car Scrope appears in Pair a Spurs

Car Scrope is a young man who has suffered through the destruction of his marriage and the loneliness that often comes after divorce. Car continues to live on the ranch he has lived on his entire life, despite his emotional loneliness, only to find happiness in a surprising place. Car has had a lot of medical metal placed in his body as the result of a terrible accident that occurred the night he found his wife in bed with his best friend. This metal reacts to silver on a set of spurs in a way that leaves Car in deep pain, but also extremely sexually aroused.

Car never comes to realize it is the spurs causing his pain and his arousal. Car is so depressed by the loss of his wife that he is only happy to find a reason to get out of bed in the morning, even if the movement is terribly painful. This suggests that Car was so deeply lonely that he is willing to do about anything to feel this alive again.

Josanna Skiles appears in A Lonely Coast

Josanna is a middle aged woman living in a small town in Wyoming where she works as a Japanese chef. Josanna has a reputation for shooting a man who betrayed her, a reputation that is supported by the gun she carries in her car at all times. When Josanna begins an affair with a man who often cheats on her and often treats her badly, people wonder why she puts up with this man. This appears to go against Josanna's personality. However, people are not surprised when this man is found dead with Josanna beside him, her gun under her body.

Wade Walls appears in The Governors of Wyoming

Wade Walls is a young man who is against cattle in the West. Wade wrote a book about his opinions and convinces Shy Hamp to help him stop cattle ranchers in Wyoming. Shy believes Wade is motivated by his love for the land and his concern that the cattle is destroying the natural fauna of the state. Wade claims to want to return Wyoming to the way God meant for it to be. However, Wade's true motivation is the fact that his father contracted a rare form of cancer while working in a meat packing plant. Wade turns out to be a coward, leaving Shy to take the blame for fences they both cut.

Shyland Hamp appears in The Governors of Wyoming

Shyland 'Shy' Hamp is a young man who was raised on a ranch in Wyoming. Shy does not like the ranch and plans to go to college, to make a living in business rather than cattle. However, while Shy is a senior at the local university his entire family is killed in an avalanche. Shy does not want to run the ranch, but he does not want to sell it either. Therefore Shy gets rid of the cattle, selling some and killing the rest, then goes into business selling equine insurance. This business does not do well, however. Shy begins to feel like a kept man since his wife is the chief breadwinner, causing him to have a



brief affair with a young girl whose brother he met on the streets of an Indian reservation. Shy also adopts a dislike of cattle and begins working with Wade Walls to stop cattle ranching in Wyoming. However, the only thing this gets Shy is a rock in the hip and discovery by his own neighbors and relatives.

Ennis del Mar appears in Brokeback Mountain

Ennis is a young man who was raised on a farm and knows nothing but farm work. Ennis is not a student of the world, he is not sophisticated, but a simple man. Ennis marries a young woman when he is only eighteen and has two children almost immediately. The marriage falls apart, but Ennis was never really in love with his wife. Ennis marries because it is expected, it is what he should do. Most everything Ennis does is because it is what he should do.

Ennis meets Jack Twist while working on Brokeback Mountain the summer before he marries. Jack and Ennis begin a love affair during this summer that was neither planned nor expected. Neither man is prepared for the depth of their feelings for one another. Ennis in particular is afraid of his relationship with Jack because he has seen what cruel people can do to people who are different. Ennis cannot stand the idea of ending his relationship with Jack, but he understands prejudice and fear, understands what it means to step outside of what is expected.



Objects/Places

Cadillac appears in The Half-Skinned Steer

Mero has a Cadillac that he plans to drive to Wyoming for his brother's funeral. However, Mero wrecks the first Cadillac and has to buy another.

Gas Station appears in Job History

Leeland works at a gas station when he is young, then leases it to run a feed store, and then leases it to run a gas station and convenience store. At the end of the story, Leeland's son leases the gas station to start a motorcycle repair shop and steak house.

Boots appears in The Blood Bay

A cowpuncher cuts off the legs of a dead man in order to take his boots. When the cowpuncher takes the legs out of the boots and leaves them by the woodpile, the owner of the house where he spent the night believes that his horse has eaten the cowpuncher.

Windmills appears in People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water

Jaxon Dunmire sells windmills to make some extra money for the family ranch.

Tractor appears in The Bunchgrass Edge of the World

Ottaline believes an old John Deere tractor on her father's ranch is speaking to her. Not only this, but Ottaline believes the tractor is in love with her. This symbolizes Ottaline's loneliness. However, in the end the tractor causes the death of Ottaline's father, suggesting it is possible the tractor was real despite the rational thought that it was simply an unfortunate coincidence.

Plane appears in The Bunchgrass Edge of the World

Aladdin, Ottaline's father, buys an airplane to help him oversee his ranch. Unfortunately, Aladdin crashes the plane the first time he attempts to land it on the ranch.



Comet Spurs appears in Pair a Spurs

Sutton Muddyman buys a pair of spurs for his wife that have silver comets on them. These spurs cause Muddyman's neighbor to feel extreme pain and sexual arousal whenever he is near them.

Josanna's Gun appears in A Lonely Coast

Josanna has a .44 Ruger Blackhawk that she carries in her truck at all times. It is this gun that is found under Josanna's body after the shootout on the highway and the same gun that the narrator believes Josanna used to kill Elk Nelson.

Josanna's Truck appears in A Lonely Coast

Josanna has a truck that is always breaking down. The night of her death, the latch on the truck's hood breaks, causing the hood to come open without warning.

Pictures of Governors appears in The Governors of Wyoming

In the home of Shy Hamp are pictures of the governors of Wyoming that his grandfather, a politician himself, hung.

Shirts on a Hanger appears in Brokeback Mountain

When Ennis visits Jack's parents after Jack's death, he finds two shirts that Jack and Ennis wore in their final days on Brokeback Mountain hanging together on a single hanger. These shirts symbolize Jack's love for Ennis and the ache of missing Ennis he must have felt when they were not together.

Wyoming appears in All

Wyoming is the setting of all the stories although most of the stories take place in different sections of the state.



Themes

Infidelity

Infidelity appears in many of the stories in this collection. In *The Lonely Coast*, the narrator's husband is caught with the fifteen year old temporary ranch hand. In this same story, a woman sees her lover touching another woman in a sexual manner, causing her to shoot him at the end of the story. In *Pair a Spurs*, the main character's wife is caught in bed with her husband's best friend. Infidelity also appears in *The Mud Below* and *The Governors of Wyoming*, as well as *Brokeback Mountain*. In each story the infidelity had a different impact on the characters and the plot, but each is an important theme to those particular stories.

The Lonely Coast finds a woman who has been abused by the men in her life so many times that she no longer cares about her own safety. This woman carries a gun in her car and has been rumored to have shot a previous lover for the same reasons. In the end, when the woman's lover is shot to death and she is found with her own gun under her body, it is assumed she shot her boyfriend for his infidelity. The narrator of this story, also a woman who has been betrayed, understands and maybe even admires this action. On the other hand, in *Pair a Spurs*, the man is the one who is betrayed. Car Scrope found his wife in bed with his best friend. Car is devastated by his wife's actions, so upset that he drives his car off a bridge that night, nearly killing both himself and his wife. Later Car shoots up his wife and her lovers cars in a futile attempt at revenge. Car is angry, hurt, and depressed by this event, but he finds a way to survive.

In *Brokeback Mountain* the infidelity is brought on by a love affair that began before the marriage. This infidelity is not an act of desire, but an attempt to hide the nature of the affair. Ennis wants to be with Jack, but he is afraid that if their relationship became public knowledge, he or Jack would be killed by people who are afraid of what they do not understand. Ennis' infidelity in his marriage is an act of survival, of trying to understand who he is and what he wants. However, it is infidelity just the same, making infidelity an important theme to these specific stories.

Loneliness

Loneliness is features in most of the stories, but is an important theme in *The Mud Below*, *The Bunchgrass Edge of the World*, and *The Lonely Coast*. In *The Mud Below*, Diamond is struggling to understand who he is and to find his place in the world. Diamond's father left the family when he was small, telling Diamond he is not his biological father. Diamond's mother is a hard woman who is distant and difficult with her children. Diamond has few friends and the ones he does have want him to be something he is not. Diamond struggles to find people who care about him, to find acceptance even within himself. This causes Diamond to feel a loneliness that is excruciating.



In *The Bunchgrass Edge of the World*, Ottaline is an unattractive person who has always been second best to her younger sister. Ottaline knows no one but her family, has no friends and no men to make her feel loved. Ottaline reaches out to an inanimate object to find affection because there is none in her own life. Ottaline's life turns around when she meets the man she will marry, but before this moment her loneliness is so pronounced the reader can almost see its presence inside of her. It is what motivates Ottaline and what causes the calamity that ends her father's life.

In *The Lonely Coast*, loneliness is the catalyst that leads Josanna into the calamity that will end her own life. Josanna does not want to be alone, therefore she puts up with a man who cheats on her with her own friends, a man who treats her disrespectfully. It is also loneliness that makes some of Josanna's friends allow Josanna's boyfriend to seduce them. Living in Wyoming is very lonely because there tends to be great distances between neighbors. For this reason loneliness is a theme in these and most of the stories in this collection.

Family

Many of the characters in these stories have strong family connections. In *The Half-Skinner Steer* the main character is driving cross country to attend his brother's funeral. This drive leads to disaster, but this man is still determined to pay his final respects to his brother. In *The Mud Below*, Diamond fights to find his own identity when he learns the man he thought was his father is not. *Job History* is the story of one man's life, but it is also the story about the family that one man fights to provide for.

People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water is about two families, one that works hard and is a valued addition to the community and one that might not work quite so and keeps mainly to themselves. In this story, one family injures a member of the other family, causing this man's family great pain. Ras' parents did not know him well and might not even have been happy to have him back home, but they loved him deeply and were devastated to have to watch him die. *The Bunchgrass Edge of the World* is about power struggles in one family, a struggle that leaves one poor, lonely girl desperate to find love. Family is a part of each one of these stories, in one way or another, making family an important theme to the entire collection.



Style

Point of View

Each story has its own point of view. Most of the stories are told in the third person point of view, allowing the writer to write through the eyes of multiple characters and to allow the reader to understand the motivations of each of these characters. A few of the stories, such as *The Blood Bay*, are told through an authorial voice, not really utilizing a particular character as narrator but telling the story through an all-knowing, omniscient voice. *A Lonely Coast* is written in the first person point of view, telling the story through the eyes of one, unnamed narrator.

Each story has a unique tone that utilizes a unique point of view. Although many of the stories use the third person omniscient point of view, each has its own unique set of characters with their unique motivations, allowing each story to have a confident narration. The stories that are told in an authorial voice are similar to the third person point of view, but the author's voice comes through with knowledge that the characters could not possibly have. This gives the reader information that is important to the development of the plot. Finally, *A Lonely Coast* is told in the first person point of view, an intimate point of view that offers an opinion on the actions of another character that helps the reader make assumptions about that character's actions without really knowing her real actions.

Setting

All the stories take place in Wyoming. Most of the stories take place on a ranch. These ranches are often dusty, dirty places where the characters raise cows and ride horses. Some of the stories take place in cities within Wyoming. There are few of these settings, but like the ranch settings they suggest a rustic, cowboy themed area in which the characters are just as comfortable in trucks and jeans as the ranch dwellers.

The settings of these stories come from the home of the writer. The writer lives in Wyoming, although she often travels throughout the country, and her love of her home state comes through in her descriptions in these stories. Not only has this, but the settings of some of these stories also offered some history of the state that shows the writer knows her state quite well and is willing to share this knowledge with her readers. The reader feels as though they know Wyoming when done reading this collection of stories, perhaps a small part of the motivation behind the author's desire to write these stories.

Language and Meaning

The language of these stories is a unique mix of cowboy lingo and formal language. The author often drops articles and the final consonant in many words throughout her



stories, while also injecting words only highly educated people could understand. The dialogue in these stories is filled with slang and unique cowboy lingo, making some of it difficult to read. However, the author does not restrict her slang to dialogue, but also uses it in her story titles and exposition.

The language of these stories is true to the setting and the characters in the novel. The author uses a casual language that reflects the speech patterns of Wyoming cowboys, the people who populate her stories. The author also includes highly educated words, often used in strange contexts, to show that not all her cowboys are uneducated. This unique combination of language is complex, but it is true to the characters and the themes of the stories.

Structure

The novel is divided into eleven stories. Each story has a title page and some are illustrated with western drawings. Most of the stories are told in both exposition and dialogue. Some of the stories, however, are told entirely in exposition with dialogue included in passages of internal dialogue and passages of exposition.

The stories are told in multiple styles. Many of the stories are told in a straight, linear time line that includes flashbacks. However, other stories are told in a random time line, allowing the reader to see only what they need to see until the very end of the plot's development. All of the stories include only one or two simple plots that are all brought to a satisfactory conclusion by the end of the story.



Quotes

"Mero and Rollo saw the mail route as a defection from the work of the ranch, work that fell on them." *The Half-Skinned Steer*, pg. 19

"The chute door swung open and the bull squatted, leaped into the waiting silence and a paroxysm of twists, belly-rolls and spins, skipping, bucking and whirling, powerful drop, gave him the whole menu." *The Mud Below*, pg. 43

"On his truck radio he hears that hundreds of religious cult members have swallowed Kool-Aid and cyanide." *Job History*, pg. 83

"Sheets pulled out a Bowie knife and sawed through Montana's shins just above the boot tops, put the booted feet in his saddlebags, admiring the tooled leather and topstitched hearts and clubs." *The Blood Bay*, pg. 92

"We are in a new millennium and such desperate things no longer happen. If you believe that you'll believe anything." *People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water*, pg. 115

"What was there for Ottaline when the work slacked off? Stare at indigo slants of hail forty miles east, regard the tumbled clouds like mechanics' rags, count out he loves me, he loves me not, in nervous lightning crooked as branchwood through all quarters of the sky."
The Bunchgrass Edge of the World, pg. 127

"By the time he was out of the hospital and able to lift a spoon again she had moved to Signal and the divorce kettle was on high boil, nothing of hers left in the house but a half-empty box of tampons on the bathroom shelf and a pair of snow boots in the entryway." *Pair a Spurs*, pg. 160

"Friend, it's easier than you think to yield up to the dark impulse." *A Lonely Coast*, pg. 205

"When habits set fast in certain people they cannot be broken while breath is still drawn." *The Governors of Wyoming*, pg. 225

"When you live a long way out you make your own fun." *55 Miles to the Gas Pump*, pg. 250

"He might have to stay with his married daughter until he picks up another job, yet he is suffused with a sense of pleasure because Jack Twist was in his dream."
Brokeback Mountain, pg. 253



"He pressed his face into the fabric and breathed in slowly through his mouth and nose, hoping for the faintest smoke and mountain sage and salty sweet stink of Jack but there was no real scent, only the memory of it, the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain of which nothing was left but what he held in his hands." Brokeback Mountain, pg. 281



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the half-skinned steer. What is a steer? Why was it only half-skinned? What might explain how it got up and walked? What can explain the impact it had on the man who owned it? What was the man's condition? Why did he have a metal plate in his head? How might this condition have affected the events in the man's story? Why does Mero believe he sees a half-skinned steer the night he becomes stranded on the road? What does the half-skinned steer symbolize?

Discuss Diamond Felts. Why does he become a bull rider? What is the thrill he talks about feeling when he rides a bull? Why does his mother become enraged when he tells her his plan to ride bulls? Why does the mother take Diamond to meet the brain damaged roper? Is this gesture made of love or selfishness? What impact did learning his father was not his biological father have on Diamond? Was it the same impact as struggling with his short stature?

Discuss Job History. What is the point of this story? Why does Leeland have so many jobs in his lifetime? For what reason does Leeland continue taking these dead end jobs? Who is Lori? Why does she continuously help Leeland find new jobs or start new businesses? Why do none of these business survive? What does all this say about Leeland?

Discuss the theme of loneliness in *The Bunchgrass Edge of the World*. Why is Ottaline lonely? Why does her family not notice her loneliness? Why does Ottaline hear the tractor talking? Is it really talking? Why does Ottaline listen to the scanner's cellphone conversations? What does she hope to gain from this action? How does Ottaline break out of her loneliness? Is this a good thing?

Why does Car Scopes have medical metal in his body? What caused the accident that led to his injuries? Was Car attempting to kill his wife? Why? Why does Car have a reaction to the silver in Inez' spurs? Why do the spurs keep changing hands so often? What does this reaction do to Car and his lifestyle? How does it affect his relationships? What does this say about Car and his desire to find happiness?

Discuss *55 Miles to the Gas Pump*. What happens to the Rancher in the first paragraph of the story? Why? Why does his wife cut a hole in the roof of their home? What does she see? How does it make her feel? What is the message in the final sentence of the story? Is this story supposed to have a moral or is it humorous?

Discuss Ennis and Jack's relationship. How does it start? For what reason? Is Ennis in love with Alma? Why does he marry Alma after spending the summer with Jack? Why does Ennis feel sick to his stomach after leaving Jack? What is significant about their second meeting? Why does Ennis refuse to settle on a ranch with Jack? Does Ennis want to be with Jack? Does Jack want to be with Ennis? What causes the rift between them at the end of the story? How does Jack get killed? Is this murder or an accident?

What does Ennis believe? Why does Ennis make a shrine to Jack? Is he afraid someone will understand what it means? Does it matter at this point?