Cross Creek Study Guide

Cross Creek by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The delightful Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings provides her readers with a deep-dish slice of life in a southern community that, although imperfect, is a network of wonderful people. At the same time, Rawlings' insights into nature, its seasons, rhythms and anomalies, are acute, sensitive and heart-warming. This is a complex woman who hunts, fishes and explores with the strongest of men, and who decorates her home, cooks, entertains, writes, and enjoys the luxuries of fine living, albeit in a shabby old farmhouse.

Rawlings takes her readers inside the community at Cross Creek to meet the powerfully wise Martha Mickens and her family. She tenderly acquaints us with Old Boss Brice, Tom Glisson and all her neighbors, as well as her servants, her friends and acquaintances with whom she shares love, camradery, disputes and lawsuits. Much of Rawlings' tales center on her black servants who come and go, many of whom she grows to love. She shares with her readers her troubles and misunderstandings, readily admitting when she has been wrong, and firmly standing for what she believes is right. She is a firm and generous employer whose heart is softer than she might let on.

In this memoir, we share Rawlings' adventures on hunting trips, as well as her reflections on animals and her love of nature. An avid hunter and cook, she describes some surprising dishes she has prepared and for which some of the recipes are included.

She shares her involvement with, and generosity toward the "Negroes" who come and go in her life, including one who is jailed for a shooting, one who is mentally ill, several who disappoint her by being irresponsible and childlike, and some whom she grew to love, like Martha. During this interesting period of history, black southern slaves have only recently gained their freedom and Rawlings has a sharp insight into their dependence and inability to solve the newly-presented "puzzles" of living. In addition, she is not revolted by the poverty she sees around her but instead, takes a rather analytical view and helps where and when she can.

Her love and appreciation of the beauty of nature and life is apparent throughout her book. Rawlings thinks beyond the biases of her era and contemplates the meaning and nature of human life. She is a steward of the earth, with a consciousness of one's small part while we are here. This is a lovely story and a great way to experience a bit of history, as well as the beauty of Florida's Alachua County.

Cross Creek and For This is an Enchanted Land

Cross Creek and For This is an Enchanted Land Summary

"Cross Creek: Cross Creek" is a lake region in the Florida countryside. Five white families and two "colored" families live in the area. Citrus groves, birds, flowering trees, pine forests and hamaca, as well as its beauty and remoteness make the region unique. Rawlings is known in the neighborhood as "Little Miss." Black Aunt Martha Mickens seems to be the stabilizing force in the neighborhood. The place offers peace and solace in its steady, natural presence.

"For This is an Enchanted Land": Only by leaving the road can one see the enchanted orange groves, which are like mystical fairy tale places that feel like home. There is a deliberate simplicity, or "shabby" quality about the area which the community prefers. Having inherited her home and farm, Rawlings has improved it enough to live comfortably, but it is not fancy.

Rawlings is within screaming distance of Tom Glisson and Old Boss, whose groves adjoins hers. Elderly Joe Mackay, the last of an old farming family, now lives with his wife, her children and Tom Morrison in the old church. Joe's old home provides temporary housing for those in need. Rawlings and Mr. Martin clash at first; Marsh Turner has gone to Hell; The Townsend family continues to grow, baby after baby; the Mickens family is the solid base of the community, especially Martha, a strong, helpful and dominant personality.

Cross Creek and For This is an Enchanted Land Analysis

"Cross Creek": The author describes each of her neighbors briefly in this introduction. She is clearly good friends with her black neighbors, but there are subtle reminders of the era in which she lived. She describes violent quarrels and disagreements, as well as an integrity among her neighbors, admitting they are clannish. She refers to "racial memory," in reference to the human race, and has a strong affinity for the local flora and fauna.

"For This is an Enchanted Land": Rawlings makes certain we know she is aware of her personal flaws. The fact that her neighbors eventually work out the problems between them speaks to her own integrity, as well. She seems to speak in an unbiased way about her neighbors, black and white, and with a few exceptions, expresses respect and affection even for those who are impossible to like. She does not judge the Townsends

for their continuous babies. Rawlings' attitude toward her neighborhood, its orange groves, its people, good and bad, and its natural setting, is somewhat blissful. She has inherited her property and orange grove but does not seem to consider herself superior to her neighbors and has put in plenty of physical labor on her farm.

Taking Up the Slack and The Magnolia Tree

Taking Up the Slack and The Magnolia Tree Summary

"Taking up the Slack": Rawlings has farming in her blood, but it is harder than she had thought. Wise old Martha Mickens says that if you love the area you will make it, and no one ever goes hungry. Martha is the nucleus of a large family of mixed characters.

Martha helps everyone, and "takes up the slack" when people are ill or otherwise indisposed. Rawlings feels if Martha were white she would be a "natural aristocrat," since she is gracious and well-bred. Her husband no longer works. Martha is a Baptist and sings old and rare spiritual songs. She cleans Rawlings' home and is generally in service to everyone who needs her.

"The Magnolia Tree": The perfection of the magnolia tree etched against the sky is an inspiration for Rawlings. Magnolias' young only sprout up when the elders have died. Rawlings feels we do not pay attention to our relationship to the earth and that we all have our preferred places here. Her dog, Dinghy, returned to city, unable to adjust to life at Cross Creek, but her cat, Jib, thrived.

Hammock is the deep dark soil made up from the specific trees in the region, including live oak, plam, sweet gum, holly, ironwood, hickory and magnolia. This is on what the orange trees thrive. Rawlings inherited 72 acres and bought 40 more. Sixteen are worn out and will not produce, another section is wilderness, another is lake shore, another is marsh. A neighboring tower in the distance is something she would like to build when she is older.

She sees a sow and its babies in the hammock, and Rawlings senses the rhythms, cycles and continuous nature of life in this natural environment, and our small participation in it.

Taking Up the Slack and The Magnolia Tree Analysis

"Taking up the Slack": Rawlings is obviously better off financially than her neighbors, which is evidenced by the fact that she employs some of them. She also discusses her beach cabin, to which her neighbors delivered forgotten napkins to her via her farm truck.

Rawlings refers to Henry as a darky but seems sympathetic toward the women who tend to reproduce randomly and their situations. Henry knows "low-down" songs that he does not sing in front of Martha, his mother-in-law. Perhaps the devout Martha questions Rawlings' occupation as a writer.

"The Magnolia Tree": Rawlings is romantic and effusive about the natural world in this chapter. She seems to have an exceptionally deep appreciation of life and especially of the life around her at Cross Creek. Her writing could be said to be overly descriptive; however, it does not lose its meaning, and she is able to transmit her experience to the reader clearly. Rawlings mentions "angry days" that she plans to spend in a tower some day, which reveals that she is not always this blissful about her life and, perhaps her inner life is much more enjoyable than the outer.

The Pound Party and The Census

The Pound Party and The Census Summary

"The Pound Party": Rawlings takes an invitation from the large Townsend family as a welcome to the area. A family of "countless" children, they invite her to a "pound party," at which she is the only guest. They play harmonica and dance, serve her crackers and peanut butter, and proceed to enjoy the cake she brought. Some of the children suffer from hookworm, for which their parents mostly refuse treatment. Rawlings makes dresses for the children if they will agree to go to school. They attend school for a while but eventually drop out. They grow up to be as active and prosperous as their neighbors, which makes Rawlings question whether it was she who could have learned from them.

"The Census": In order to get to know the area and her neighbors, Rawlings accompanies her friend Zelma, who is gathering census data in the region on horseback. They go over the eerie River Styx, around Orange Lake and through marshes, counting people. Burnt Island, a hideout for criminals, is known to have wild boars and huge rattlesnakes.

The second day they come across a poor woman playing a piano, who was of "high breeding" but had fallen on rough times when she married a scoundrel. She lives in the back woods with her gaunt children, finding ways to take care of them. Returning to Cross Creek, Zelma and Rawlings eat lunch fixed by Martha. As they are leaving, a small boy accidentally spills cold water on Rawlings' horse, which bolts with her on its back.

The Pound Party and The Census Analysis

"The Pound Party": Emphasizing the poverty in this region, Rawlings tells of a family who finds creative ways to get people to donate food to them. Her somewhat self-righteous attempts to get them clothed and educated backfires on her when she realizes they don't really want to go to school. The same thing happens when she tries to cure them of hookworm; she includes this to tell us that this family, in some odd way, chooses their lowly lifestyle, and in the end, it has not hurt them much.

"The Census": The census journey for Rawlings is an adventure that familiarizes her with the region and its people. As kind as she is, it is difficult not to detect a tone of superiority in Rawlings' tone, as she observes these unique people in their strange habitats. She does, however, admit to smugness and meddling.

The Evolution of Comfort and Antses in Tim's Breakfast

The Evolution of Comfort and Antses in Tim's Breakfast Summary

"The Evolution of Comfort": Rawlings describes her rustic plumbing, complete with outside shower, and her determination to build an indoor bathroom. She speaks sentimentally of her grandfather's outhouse, which was lined with pictures of queens. Her own outhouse has no door, and her uncle devises a system with a flag so others can know when the outhouse is occupied. Her outdoor shower is cold and not private; she resolves on a Christmas day of thirty-eight degrees that she will build an indoor bathroom.

Rawlings' carpenter friend Moe tries to make a deal for a toilet with someone whose ownership of it is dubious. When her new bathroom is done, Rawlings gives a a formal bathroom-opening party. She eventually installs a second bathroom, also built by Moe Sykes and his sons.

"Antses in Tim's Breakfast": Rawlings admits she was so overwhelmed with hard physical work it had not occurred to her how much harder others might have it. She is affected by the fact that someone has actually been living under an oak tree. The tenant house on her property is occupied by a white couple who came with the property. Tim hates his work and will not allow his wife to work for Rawlings. She did not initially realize how hard the couple struggled but took their way of life for granted as just part of their culture. Tim's wife, a soft-spoken, lovely woman, haunts Rawlings and provides the character in two of her books.

The Evolution of Comfort and Antses in Tim's Breakfast Analysis

"The Evolution of Comfort": In charmingly simple terms, Rawlings reminds us of the comforts we take for granted, such as never having to think about snakes or bats while using the indoor bathroom. She admits passing on the more luxurious fixtures due to money constraints but is terribly pleased with the outcome of having two bathrooms built indoors. She speaks modestly but not negatively, of the young men trying to envision her in the shower.

"Antses in Tim's Breakfast": Rawlings exposes her naivete about poverty, realizing, after the fact, how desperately some people live. The mosquitoes drove Tim and his wife away, as well as the poor condition of their ramshackle house. Whether this is a cause for guilt or just a reality check for Rawlings is not clear. It is ironic that this chapter

follows the "evolution" of her own comfort, since these people could no longer take their discomfort at her hands.

The Widow Slater and Catching One Young

The Widow Slater and Catching One Young Summary

"The Window Slater": The Widow Slater is a strong-willed, eccentric woman, obsessed with God's will. She once threatened a public nurse with a gun for trying to inoculate her children. Rawlings agrees that there is an intelligent force much wiser than humans but disagrees with the widow's decision about the shots.

The Widow Slater, who feels God knows best about everything, is ill with an untreated tumor, and some of her children suffer from physical maladies. Rawlings hires her to do laundry. She is a very positive woman, helpful with hard chores, generous and playful. Her daughter Alvah, who washes Rawlings dishes, saves up to buy a wind chime for Rawlings for Christmas. Slater's crippled son Rodney, is able to foretell the weather and keeps wild animals as pets. Rawlings may have based Fodderwing in her story, The Yearling, on Rodney.

Alvah, Irene and her mother eventually move to Carolina, but Slater sadly leaves her son, Snow, behind. Snow fishes for a living and camps in a shack of palmettos, living in squalor. Rawlings puts Snow to work, and the two bond closely. She eventually buys Snow a piece of land and helps him plan his house. Snow finds a bride and takes her to his home, his fondest wish.

"Catching One Young": Rawlings buys a young black servant for five dollars named Georgia. Georgia cannot learn to work or take initiative but loves butterflies. Rawlings finally pays the unteachable Georgia's father another five dollars to take her back. She "buys" another young girl named Patsy, with whom she has such a good time exploring nature, she neglects to teach her much work. Rawlings comments on the Negro imagination and sensitivity to beauty, saying "a Negro child will some day make a sad and lovely study for a poet." Patsy and other Negroes see the beauty in what is invisible.

Patsy is reclaimed by her mother and leaves to live in a turpentine camp. Rawlings learns that Patsy, who is not quite twelve, is "courting."

The Widow Slater and Catching One Young Analysis

"The Window Slater": Rawlings knows that as long as one understands the Widow Slater's narrow beliefs, one can get along with her. While painting this family as pathetic, Rawlings also lets us see their strength and generosity.

"Catching One Young": Wage-Slavery is apparently still perfectly acceptable when this book was first copyrighted in 1933. Rawlings, in her description of the terrible poverty,

makes it seem that people like her are truly a blessing to these poor blacks, who have no other work. Apparently the terms of servitude have changed, but "buying" a person still does not seem to strike a sour chord for Rawlings as it does today.

The author is very good about describing the character and nature of the poor people in her community but, ultimately, by this point in the book, the reader realizes that the story is as much about the author as it is about the folks of Cross Creek.

'Geechee and A Pig is Paid For

'Geechee and A Pig is Paid For Summary

"Geechee": 'Geechee appears on Rawlings' doorstep, a large, tattered, dark and aggressive "Negro," of whom Rawlings is quite afraid. 'Geechee, or Beatrice, is from a tribe of slaves who are particularly good servants, but violently loyal. Her only belongings are a tattered sack dress and some letters; she lost the sight in one eye during a fight for which she was jailed.

'Geechee asks Rawlings to help her get her man, Leroy, out of prison, where he is serving time for manslaughter. With Leroy paroled into her care, the author provides for the couple, but Leroy begins to make unreasonable demands and becomes threatening. When Rawlings makes him leave, 'Geechee escorts him out of town, but returns to Rawlings, much to Rawlings' joy. She only needs this "black one-eyed savage woman." 'Geechee is a loyal and protective servant but drinks alcohol to relieve her grief and depression, and one day finally disappears. Rawlings hires a Negro couple, Raymond and Kate, to help her.

Rawlings breaks her neck and skull from a fall from a horse and is put into a steel brace. Desperate for help and missing 'Geechee, she drives into town and brings 'Geechee home. 'Geechee cares for her but begins drinking again. Knowing she cannot stay, 'Geechee returns yearly for a visit with Rawlings but feels her drinking problem is hopeless.

"A Pig is Paid For": The neighbors at Cross Creek exchange labor and goods rather than money. Rawlings' property is being invaded daily by a group of pigs who are eating her petunias, chicken feed and milk. When the leader of the group begins to eat her fourth planting of petunias, she shoots him dead and invites neighbors for a barbecue. The pig's owner, Mr. Martin confronts her about shooting his pig, which she does not deny. He is mostly upset that she ate the pig; she told him about the pigs' nice diet at her home and says she will replace him, but Martin leaves, flustered.

Mr. Higgenbotham, who sells snakes, asks Rawlings to help him get a better price for his snakes, and she agrees to look into it. Later, Higgenbotham borrows six dollars from her, and repays her with a pig so she can repay Mr. Martin. If the pig "takes," or becomes pregnant, Mr. Martin will be more than repaid.

Later, she cannot properly ask Martin if the pig "took," but he is happy, and her debt is paid.

'Geechee and A Pig is Paid For Analysis

"'Geechee": The story of 'Geechee is a tragic one. Rawlings expresses her love for this person and their mutual loyalty, but 'Geechee is doomed to alcoholism because there is

obviously no treatment available. And Rawlings clearly loves her for the care and work that she performs, as well as Geechee's devotion to her. "I could have beaten her raw.." is a telling sentence - Ms. Rawlings, in all her grand selflessness, still sees blacks as animals. She does not hesitate to call her a black leopard, a savage—grotesque and ugly.

A bit self-congratulatory again, Rawlings explains how she manages to get Leroy out of prison but the effort goes unappreciated. She writes with an undertone of hopelessness for "Negroes" and does not question their seemingly inherent role as servants.

"A Pig is Paid For": Ms. Rawlings' decision to shoot the pig was made without shame, fear or guilt. Although she assures Mr. Martin she will replace his pig, she speaks plainly about it, which befuddles him. She again differentiates herself from her neighbors with her determination to grow and save the expensive petunias. It is peculiar that Higgenbotham, instead of working on her orange trees to repay her, as they had agreed, decides to pay her with a pig so she can repay her own debt. Whether this is a portrayal of loyalty among neighbors or just a quirky story is not clear, but Rawlings, as always, is the generous patron who gets the short end of the stick because she is better off.

My Friend Moe and Residue

My Friend Moe and Residue Summary

"My Friend Moe": Rawlings is friends with a man named Moe, who clearly is from an entirely different culture and tradition. Moe helps her once on a Sunday morning when her Negroes do not show up to help with the household. The farm animals are making trouble and are hungry, but the two cows refuse to come to their food, forcing her to bring it to them. Although inexperienced, Rawlings is forced to milk her cow, who kicks the bucket into her lap and kicks her in the stomach. Moe and his sons happen by and help her.

Moe's grandfather was superintendent of one of the oldest Florida orange groves, of which Rawlings now owns a part. Moe brings Rawlings an antique bed that belonged to a famous early grove owner, Major Fairbanks, which she has now promised to the Historical Society. Moe would like to have lived a better life like his mother, but his wife is slovenly and incompetent.

Rawlings was gone hunting when a freeze almost ruined a new grove she had planted, but Moe saved it as if it were his own. When his favorite daughter, Mary, becomes seriously ill, Rawlings postpones a trip to her New York editor to get help for the child. Years of bad eating, anxiety and overwork take Moe's life early; the only ones who cared about him are Rawlings and his daughter, Mary.

"Residue": Rawlings feels that wealth and prosperity are attributable to a sieve circumstance, and that the poor have been put all the way through the sieve and stand nakedly. Who we really are does not include our material things. She leaves her house and barn unlocked, and people only take things when they are needed, and usually put them back or pay in some way. A resident named Mr. Tubble, who is dependent on others, comes up missing but eventually shows up, after a drinking binge, out on the water near a tussock.

George Fairbanks, descendant of the wealthy Fairbanks, is the only one left with the name. He is cared for by Old Boss and Snow. He once married a woman who thought he was wealthy. George has a cleft palate and a severe speech impediment. He is looking for a wife and suggests a closer relationship with Rawlings, who refuses.

Mr. Swilley, a long-haired derelict who has frequent spastic episodes, has a dream that he will marry a rich widow, and thinks it is Rawlings. Rawlings hires him and makes up a box of food for him at Christmas, finding his home is a sheet metal box. He seems encouraged by the gift and prances like a decrepit goat. Swilley helps transport a servant's belongings, driving the farm truck, which he has never done before. He trips with Mary's things more than once spilling them on the ground, Mary shrieking. Finally, on the road back home, the truck flies out of control like a wild horse, with Swilley at the wheel. Simultaneously, the black maid, Mary, turns out to be quite mentally ill with manic

depression. Hoping it will help Mary, Rawlings pays for an operation for her, but Mary cannot remember things and is unpredictable. Rawlings lets her go. Mr. Swilley spends his last days at Rawlings' home, sitting in her yard waiting but eventually finds a woman and moves on. Rawlings remembers these as dark times.

The Bass family's integrity is described in a story about a dime owed to Rawlings when their little son needed lunch. On the other hand, Grampa Hicks makes his living stealing fuel, illegally renting boats and making moonshine. Mr. Marsh Turner, a musician of "high caste," drinks regularly, trashes his house, spends the weekends in jail and goes home to fix the furniture he has broken. His farm animals are intrusive and destructive, but he comes to Rawlings, very drunk, and promises her that the next time they come into her yard, they are hers. After a drunken episode, when he tries to hand his shotgun over to the Sheriff in the same way, Turner is shot and killed.

My Friend Moe and Residue Analysis

"My Friend Moe": The author explains all the reasons she is friends with Moe, and most of them include all the things he has done for her. Moe respects the fact that her property was once owned by the Fairbanks family, and shows her respect and affection. She, in turn, goes out of her way to help his ill daughter, postponing a trip to New York and getting her suit wet.

"Residue": It is interesting to note that this chapter is entitled "Residue," a word which is used in the first section regarding a human's true worth. These are certainly a colorful bunch of characters but, again, Rawlings sense of superiority oozes slightly into her writing. She does have compassion, but she also wants us to know that, and carefully notes her good deeds toward these unfortunate folks. It is curious that she begins this chapter with a philosophical thought about rich people and poor people, and how poor people are only the cleaned, naked version of the rich. She tries to be generous with her words and heart, but she still comes off as a bit haughty and superior.

Toady-Frogs, Lizards, Antses and Varmints

Toady-Frogs, Lizards, Antses and Varmints Summary

The author is delighted with everything about the celestial breed of little green frogs that come in June and sing choruses. She can see them as Chinese aristocrats in humble form. A residual fear of them from old England is associated with witchcraft. Their willingness to swallow buckshot, which has been proven by friends, makes the Widow Slater fear the frogs. But the prolific large frogs provide food in the form of frog legs, for which hunters are well paid. Fred Thomkins, local constable, takes Rawlings out at night to teach her to catch frogs. They return with only two frogs and Rawlings finds skinning them embarrassing and eating them unpleasant.

Unattractive red lizards are falsely believed to be poisonous. Gray lizards live everywhere and are not afraid of people. Chameleons are friendly but detached. Rawlings is "confident in the brittle intelligence of these tiny replicas of dragons."

Rawlings notes that good and evil are just relative to what harms or helps us. The industrious, organized ants only function as such for themselves, and she desires to exterminate them. Aphids destroy new leaves, but ants create on a scale that can destroy a crop of oranges. Rawlings gets Japanese ladybugs from the university, which feed on the scale. Ants seem to know where new seeds are going to be planted and putting grits down only provides more food for them. Rawlings admits that ants may just deflate her ego because they ignore humans and always find ways to get to sweets and meat. She tells of black children and their acceptance of "antses" on food. Black stinging ants eat only dead tissue, but their bite is potent.

Termites had all but demolished Rawlings's old house, which she renovated for more light. It takes termites about twenty years to eat the bottom of a house if it's fat pine. Rawlings is letting the termites eat away at her house seeing it as a race against time.

Martha helps Rawlings define varmint as any wild thing that is predatory or not domestic, which can apply to people as well. The last panther has disappeared from the Big Scrub, but Fred Thompson tells a tale of encountering its ghost, which turned out to be a wild cat that stared him down even in death. An old man at Micanopy sells de-scented skunks for pets. Rawlings and her friend Dessie once confronted skunks in her chicken coop, their aroma filling the coop.

Rawlings had a pet Raccoon named Racket who chose his targets before he urinated. Unlike other raccoons, he washes nothing and likes dirt; when punished, he bites. Racket gets her dog into trouble, knows how to unlatch all the screen doors, as well as the refrigerator. He will not sleep with Rawlings but sneaks in and bites her ear while she sleeps. Rawlings nursed Racket from a bottle and he preferred milk over food. He

weaned himself by downing an alcoholic drink. Swaggering and proud, he ate real food thereafter.

Toady-Frogs, Lizards, Antses and Varmints Analysis

This is a relatively long chapter about the creatures Rawlings lives with and around, and it interspersed with commentary about other things, such as the section about remodeling her home, and epithets people use against others in the area.

Rawlings's close observations of nature are delightful and funny, as she attributes human personality traits to creatures such as ants and her incorrigible raccoon, Racket. She gives her readers a more intimate look at the region in which she lives, which is unique in its ecology and wildlife. She attempts to assign personality traits to the creatures and provides a delightful slant on the curiosities of nature. Her love of the sounds of frogs and her appreciation of their beauty is remarkable and refreshing, not to mention her tale of Racket, the mischievous and alcohol-loving raccoon.

The Ancient Enmity

The Ancient Enmity Summary

Rawlings believes the fear of snakes is not inherent in humans but rather, learned. She is quite afraid of them until she holds one and sees its beauty. She skins it and learns later it was a poisonous coral snake.

During an emotional time of her life, Rawlings is numb enough to go out with a herpetologist friend to. As her friend, Ross, catches and bags snakes, she becomes ill from fear. Ross asks her to hold a water snake, and she is comforted by its living, breathing mortality. Due to the rattlers' limited vision, they only strike what moves about them, which allows Rawlings to feel freer and less afraid.

A large kingsnake who lives at the gate of her property is almost friendly and allows Rawlings and her cat Jib to touch him. Black snakes are not so friendly and move extremely fast. Chicken snakes are a nuisance and eat duck and chicken eggs just before they hatch. Rawlings has only seen gentlemanly rattlers at the edges of her property, but cottonmouth moccasins, who are "revolting," "fat and greasy," come right into her yard.

Rawlings senses the poetic rhythm of the movement of the snakes but still does not welcome them. She tells of a small cottonmouth in her bathroom, which she kills with a Sears Roebuck catalog and a copy of her own book, The Yearling. Her servant tells her it "sho' do come in handy to write books...".

The Ancient Enmity Analysis

15. Rawlings' determination to be a real and brave country woman causes her to go beyond her emotional boundaries and learn about the things she fears. She realizes her fear is mostly of horror. She has dealt with her fears of most tangible things, but the rattlesnakes "represented the last outpost of physical fear." Her passage about fatalism is interesting, in that she feels we encounter opportunities based on our adjustment, or lack thereof, to our circumstances. In these passages, that are off-plot to a certain degree, reveal the depth of her thinking and the self-examination that allows her to be an honest author.

Black Shadows

Black Shadows Summary

Rawlings exposes the stereotypes assigned to African Americans, such as those who say they are carefree, gay, childish and untruthful. She feels that these are the only ways in which the black people can adapt to the injustice of their position in this country. She feels the black servant has only two weapons: he can make life miserable for his employer, and he can walk out; he can do these things even if there is a bond of affection. Rawlings feels that, at this time in history, the "Negroes" are not able to embrace the responsibilities that come with being free.

She tells of returning from a trip to a house, dirty, empty of food and alcohol, uncared for in any way, animals gone, and two servants who had done nothing but drain her of her belongings, while still being paid. She dismisses Raymond but keeps Kate on because her brother was coming for a visit from Alaska. Kate blames Raymond for the mess, which Rawlings feels is customary in slave psychology.

Kate's brother comes and all seems well, with Kate on the job. However upon their return from a deer hunt, the house is a mess, the cow not milked or watered, the dog locked inside without food, and dirty dishes scattered on the floor. Her brother arms Rawlings and himself with guns, and they find Kate in bed with her boyfriend as well as Raymond. Her brother forces them off the premises. Rawlings enjoyed his protection during this incident but was sad to lose her servants.

Martha comes to the rescue, as well as her daughter, Adrenna, who is frightened of Rawlings, as well as her own ineptness. Adrenna decides to try to attract a man who she can be a partner with and who will be a good servant for Rawlings, but each one leaves for different reasons. Rawlings agrees to hire Sherman Samson, who seems perfect, and offers him a high rate of pay and a wedding to Adrenna. Samson's claims of grove experience turn out to be false, but he is a good, if expensive, gardener. She pays him well, but he neglects the grove and Adrenna does the milking, while he enjoys the rose garden he has talked Rawlings into funding.

Samson gets shot and is not expected to live. He had been feuding with a son-in-law of Martha's named Henry. It is unclear why Henry shot Samson but it probably involves Adrenna. Samson lives, although his hands are injured. The people of the area want Henry back, as does Rawlings. Rawlings tries but cannot like Samson, and does not know why, even though he has forgiven Henry for shooting him. Rawlings helps Henry's wife, Sissie with money. Henry is released from jail, but Rawlings does not like this injustice, even though she'd like to see him free. She has him arrested again, but by the time the trial is held, Adrenna wants to be rid of him, and the case is dismissed for lack of evidence. Rawlings tells the witnesses that if something like this comes up again, she will do the shooting.

Martha returns to a permanent place in Rawlings's tenant house. Adrenna elopes, and Little Will marries someone who does not want to work. Rawlings finally has Idella, the perfect maid. Adrenna comes for a visit with a four-month old baby she claims was not really hers. Rawlings senses that Martha's master plan is that Rawlings will pay for an operation Adrenna needs, and that Adrenna and little Betty Jean will eventually take their place in Rawlings' household. Rawlings feels Martha will "have a finger in my pie from beyond the grave."

Black Shadows Analysis

The author provides some interesting examples of the inter-dependence of blacks and whites during this era in history. Regardless of their emancipation, African Americans are still subject to inferior and poor conditions, and white Americans have still not recognized their worth as anything but servants. Rawlings is open-minded enough to understand why the "Negroes" behave the way they do but exasperated in her dealings with them. Rawlings admits she loves Adrenna, and she is hurt when Kate steals from her. Of course, she could not hire white servants because there are too many blacks who need work and who are born and bred to be servants. It is an interesting time, as African Americans begin to learn about the "puzzle of living," in a period of history that is best left behind.

The title of this chapter is ironic, as the mishaps and sad endings of so many "Negroes" have shadowed the Creek.

Our Daily Bread

Our Daily Bread Summary

Rawlings, whose mother and grandmother were famous cooks, can take criticism of her literary works, but she cannot take indifference toward her cooking. Florida foods are unique. She repeats a tale of Governor Grant having been a fan of rattlesnake meat. Rawlings discusses the differences among corn bread, corn pone and hush puppies, all eaten in the south. Biscuits, considered the higher caste, must be offered to guests but in the South but are harder and less delicate. For baking yeast bread, Rawlings prefers good old cast iron and live coals, such as used on camping trips, as compared to modern aluminum cookers. She blissfully recalls baking biscuits on a fishing trip and eating them with fish and strong coffee.

White bacon, or salt pork, is a staple in the south, along with cornpone. Floridians eat mustard greens and chitlins, the taste for which divides families. Local poke weed is used for salad or trimmed and cooked like asparagus. Rawlings likes to prepare okra and hollandaise sauce and provides her recipes for both. "Hearts of palm" are the hearts of young palm trees. The choyote, which grows on a vine, is served with cheese sauce.

Because Cross Creek is above the frost line, they are not able to grow avocados or tropical fruits like mango. Rawlings speaks of the sweet delicacies of mango and papaya and comments on other fruits she has enjoyed. She recalls her doctor sneaking mangoes to her while she was hospitalized on a low fiber diet.

Rawlings likes canned Cuban, seeded guavas which she gets in Tampa's Cuban quarter. Passion fruit jelly tastes like a "medieval poison." Jellies made of roselle seed pods and may-haw or hawthorne are local treats that are "rare and ethereal." Other fruits such as the pawpaw are eaten by "varmints." Scuppernog grapes are transplants from Carolina and Georgia. There are different varieties of bananas available in the area, as well as the mysterious pomegranate.

Rawlings serves exotic and bizarre meats, such as alligator, rattlesnake, turtle and turtle eggs. She provides Ed Hopkins' recipe for fish chowder and describes her experiences of catching and preparing crab. She made blackbird pies until learning it was illegal to kill them. She has killed and eaten limpkin, a brown crane, and once cooked raccoon without removing its musk sack. Oppossum must be penned and fed before it is edible; bear meat is sweet at the end of winter; she has tried cooking wild cat liver. Rawlings can no longer kill animals to write about; she has never killed a deer and dreads the day when her conscience will dominate her palate. She enjoys quail, dove and duck and gives us her methods for a full roasted duck dinner, which she claims is deadly.

Fatty Blake held a two-county, free dinner of squirrel pilau and Brunswick stew. Fatty's dinner was preceded by a religious service and passing of the hat; the pilau has forty

squirrels and a hen in it. One guest protested that it was touted as a free meal, but was a Georgia prayer meeting instead, and that he would not eat the pilau with squirrels' heads in it like the Georgia crackers would eat.

Our Daily Bread Analysis

This is an overly-long chapter that is fascinating but would bog down any reader not interested in food and strange recipes. It is certainly a piece of Florida history and reveals how much of the available wildlife was used for food, but it is more an expose of Rawlings' own ventures into local eccentricities, as well as her touting of herself as an accomplished chef.

She is a hunter and is willing to try anything, which would make this chapter interesting in itself; however, it is jammed with unnecessary detail. What is more interesting in this chapter are the few notes she has thrown in, such as, "Only a nigger young un kin beat the varmints to the pawpaws," and lump sugar is "a kind of sugar, used by a few white folks and no niggers a-tall." She seems to have no problem including these funny anecdotes which, in this time of history, are absolutely inappropriate. The story of the big pilau feed is interesting, too, and Rawlings includes stories of hunting, fishing and crabbing with her different friends in the area.

Spring at the Creek and Summer

Spring at the Creek and Summer Summary

Spring: Rawlings is frightened by time and likes to become lost in time and space, forgetting about the season she is in. She is comforted to know the seasons will go on, but it is she who is mortal. The test of true beauty is the ability to survive close knowledge. Although Florida's season changes are not obvious to outsiders, they are to those who live there. She describes the blossoming and flowering of various native plants and trees, the nesting of birds and sounds of birds, including the chuck-will's-widow that sings, "Chip hell out of the red oak." Game birds seem to know when hunting season is over.

She describes the birds who live in her yard, their mating, breeding and seasonal habits. She is sure mallards actually enjoy their lives, and she sets them free from their cage. Ducks like to be in their pen in the evening and wait to be escorted in. Drakes have noisy and obnoxious mating habits, pecking at the women, but during summer they lose their color and arrogance. Rawlings oversees the births of a new clutch of ducks, keeping them safe until they can fend for themselves.

A dominant male redbird controls other breeds and protects his family. Rawlings attributes human behavior to the bird and his mate. She decides a pair of doves she has watched are honeymooning. Martha thinks the dove released by Noah went unpaid, and his words are, "No-ah, pay me!" Rawlings has observed herons, cranes, eagles and egrets. One visiting great white heron actually ate from a little boy's hand. Rawlings felt she had heard a whooping crane but learned it was the sound of bitterns. Whooping cranes, now protected, are returning. She was excited when an ivory-billed woodpecker visited her yard.

Rawlings keeps cows only for culinary purposes but tells a sweet story of Dora giving birth to a calf and her friend Ivey carrying it to shelter. She does not mind the neighboring pigs eating from her yard, but they uproot the cows' pasture. Little Will tells her that her fence was cut in the night, but she wonders if things have just been too quiet in the neighborhood for a while.

Ferdinand, a bull she got when he was a nice youngster, is now huge and aggressive with the two cows. Her servant, Will, having left for the day, left Rawlings to milk both cows and keep the bull at bay, with the help of Martha and Idella. Although Martha is very angry at Will, she is extremely happy when she sees him coming down the road the next morning.

Summer: After the busy Spring, nature suggests relaxation and indolence. Rawlings leaves the oranges in her yard unpicked for insects and chickens. She notes that Negroes do their work more slowly, and they sing at night. The mockingbirds sing the songs of nightingales, who have now disappeared. Rawlings describes many species of

birds in motion at this time. The area has lots of wildflowers, including phylox, gallberry, blueberry, and other beautiful wild-growing plants. The bay tree, a miniature magnolia, blooms at the peak of summer.

Rains usually start in June and last until mid-August and affect the orange crops. Rawlings recalls Adrenna being afraid of tracks around the tenant house and attributing events and noises to ghosts, as she attempts to conjure up the right man. The day is cloudy, hot and wet with thunder and lightning, and Rawlings may be suffering from depression. The fresh new morning seems to cheer her.

Convict gangs come through clearing the ditches, singing along the highway. She recalls her car getting stuck in soft sand, and the overseer instructing the work crew to lift her out. She and her friend Fred later eat dinner at the convict camp. Rawlings uses this opportunity to give us her opinion of what convicts owe society and how much good service they could provide.

The author shares a story about buying gold to save for a trip and having to find it later. She recalls one summer when the area is at war against the Mediterranean fruit fly. The rich land, once owned by the Spanish, is now in danger of being stripped by a small bug, which thrives on wild grapes in the woods. A cold snap finally eliminates the fruit flies.

Rawlings likes the summer fox hunt, wherein hunters follow the bloodhounds in a truck. Rawlings also describes driving home from a bear hunt in the summer in a thick summer fog, typical for the area. The other hunters had her wait in a tree for the bear, which did not show. Extremely fatigued, Rawlings falls asleep while driving and wakens to find herself crashing through the woods at a high speed. After getting the damaged car to run again, she hits the deep fog and has trouble staying awake but finally gets home, the fog a lingering nightmare.

She makes friends with a neighbor's working dog, who appreciates her affection and loyally waits for her to play and walk together. Rawlings gets a new puppy and, has to reject the "catch-dog," whose feelings are obviously hurt. She is ashamed for having used him for her loneliness, but he now acts as though he does not know her, either.

Spring at the Creek and Summer Analysis

Spring: Rawlings's knack for nature writing is especially apparent in this chapter, which ends with an anecdote about Martha and her son. Rawlings is very practical and mentions that she only keeps cows for the milk, cheese and meet, but she refers to them with affection and has named them with human names. She seems surprised when the once-sweet Ferdinand turns into an aggressive and frightening bull. Her love and enthusiasm for birds is contagious, and she is a careful observer of their habits, which tells us that, although she is hard-working woman, she has had lots of time to relax and observe.

Summer: Rawlings writes a description of hot, lazy days that seem lovely and lazy. Although the weather in summer is not always nice, she makes it sound appealing and comforting. After taking the reader into the natural aspects of a Florida summer, she discusses things that have taken place in the summer, such as the incident with Adrenna, the convict gangs, the fox hunts, the bear hunt and her doomed relationship with the neighbor's dog.

One would not take Rawlings for an insensitive person, since she is practical, tough and independent, but she definitely has a soft heart, and, although she willingly admits her harshness (throwing gravel toward the dog), she also exposes her tender feelings.

Fall and Winter

Fall and Winter Summary

Fall: Florida's fall is not a palpable season as it is in other areas. The temperature holds in the eighties for weeks, the sky blue and cloudless. Everything is dying back and drying up, waiting for rain and cool, and the Negroes become depressed. Martha speaks of spells and voodoo dust. Rawlings humors Martha in her superstitious beliefs and does see some events that verify them, such as a crowing hen, and attaching good wood to bad resulting in bad luck and illness. There is a gin bottle hanging in the grove to repel hawks and a dead snake in the tree to induce rain. She admits there may be more to it but seems to have respect for these old customs.

One evil fall day is ominous with a captured praying mantis, a deadly snake sighting, a blue-tailed lizard, a cockroach, lethargic dogs, and a suspicious visitor. Rawlings and her servants take precautions against an escaped murderer in the area. Later, the wind begins to blow and the fugitive has gone in the other direction.

At one time the train whistle from the village was the only signal to those in the creek of an impending freeze and hurricanes. Hurricanes, however, have their own obvious warning signs such as green light in the sky and a great stillness and, finally, the recognizable roar of the powerful storm on its path.

After September storms is superb weather and time to harvest sugar cane. The community holds syrup boiling parties of sugar syrup, as well as peanuts (called pinders in Florida). Rawlings tells of taking her two pigs to the Butlers' peanut farm to fatten them up. Mr. Butler and his wife do not agree on life in the country — she wants to sell the farm, but he loves it. He is proud of his oranges, his peanuts, his pure water and his peanuts, but Mrs. Butler is complaining and miserable. He sends Rawlings home with boiled peanuts and has her leave the pigs with him, which she sends for later. She reads that he has died but notes that he was still living at the same address at the time of his death.

Winter: The opening of winter begins with the sounds of guns due to the hunting season holiday. It is a tidy time in the garden, since the lushness is gone. Convinced she is a Yankee, Fred Thomkins sends a couple he just met to Rawlings' house with the expectation that she will take them in so they can fish on the lake. Fred thought she would be glad to have fellow-New Yorkers with her.

Rawlings and Fred try to begin their hunt before the sun rises, hoping for deer. At dawn they shoot squirrels, which they eat for breakfast, and then they hunt quail the rest of the day from the car, letting the dog out when they come to a likely spot. Rawlings likes the hunt and the skill of the dogs but does not like shooting so much and eventually gives up hunting.

Rawlings' Aunt Wilmer goes hunting with them and runs to retrieve the poor, injured animals rather than letting the dog do it. Rawlings discusses a mystery covey of quail that has grown large since it somehow outwits hunters year after year. Rawlings' best memories of duck hunting are the sounds of the birds, eating a magnificent lunch while missing the perfect shot, and going home to wine and quail or guinea and a fire. She treasures not the kill but the hunt. She and Bob Chancey follow tracks of a deer deep into the Everglades; she watches him from a distance with orchids in her hands. Alone, she finds a clear pool with egrets and herons and watches them quietly.

Rawlings mentions a time when it lightly snowed at the Creek. Florida cold snaps only last about three days. Rawlings removed unprofitable pecan grove and replaced the trees with Valencia oranges, but that particular acreage is slightly lower and colder, and the trees don't produce well.

Rawlings waits as long as she can before harvesting oranges. She describes orange picking time as a "colorful process" and perhaps naively makes racist remarks about the pickers, comparing them with monkeys and blackbirds. She describes a time when it was crucial to get the fruit picked, and she found the workers partying in the tenant house. She happened to be cleaning her gun at the time and got a reputation for being ferocious.

Christmas time is the height of orange season and when most of the population make the most money. One 4th of July, an elderly man comes to her door and wants to know if it were Thanksgiving. She explains the 4th of July to him and goes on to discuss American history. He had no understanding of Florida's connection to the U.S., and freedom for him means emancipation of the Negroes.

Rawlings celebrates Christmas with gifts, a fire, and the mistletoe that grows in her pecan trees. She recalls a year when people in the village resented her employing black servants, since there were many whites out of work. She hires Lum and Ida, who force themselves on her. Ida is a perfect servant and friend, but Lum objects to the work and during a winter firing of the orchard, gets drunk and falls to sleep when others worked 36 hours straight. He quits before she can fire him.

Freeze warnings now come by radio instead of the train whistle. Rawlings believes in the effectiveness of fatwood firings rather than smudge pots. When it freezes, the sky is perfectly clear with no wind, sound carries through the stillness of the air and the birds don't sing. The high barometric pressure is exhilarating, and people hurry about to save and protect the farm, including Martha. Rawlings lost a crop by waiting to fire it, and the temperature dropping to 28 degrees. The "fired" orchard is beautiful and geometric but the beauty is encumbered by fear of losing it. Sometimes they lose the battle and trees and fruit freeze; the people become resigned to losing at this point and eat the frozen oranges like sherbet.

Rawlings tells of Joe, her faithful mule, who was chronically lonely. He became ill from ergot, and after many hours of walking in circles and two drenchings, he died. The circle where he'd been tethered in the cane grew a different kind of grass. Old Boss, Martha's

husband, cries over his mule's illness, and Rawlings wonders why any of us are ever cruel to one another and feels we "must hold one another close against the cosmic perils."

Winter is a cozy time at the Creek; on cold nights Rawlings lets her dog sleep by the fire. In the morning, Martha lights her bedroom fire and brings her coffee and cream, and Rawlings wonders what she has "done to deserve such munificence."

Fall and Winter Analysis

Fall: This is an interesting chapter that makes it seem that fall in Florida is only an extension of summer, but flatter, drier and perhaps less active. It is interesting that Rawlings, although she understands that there is probably an underlying explanation for all of Martha's beliefs, cannot deny a degree of belief in them, herself.

Also interesting is that the Butlers' disagreeable relationship is uncomfortable for Rawlings, since she did not return in person to gather her pigs. Only through small bits and pieces do we learn about Rawlings' inner life and the fact that she is not always a happy camper. She had promised the Butlers to come and stay longer next time but never returned.

Winter: Rawlings seems to be discovering her deeper values as the book goes on. An avid hunter and participant in what were generally men's activities, she seems to be softening with regard to the actual killing of animals, and her sweeter, more appreciative attitudes toward nature continue to emerge. She is a woman who wants to be seen as strong and capable but who is also sensitive and introspective. She seems to be developing a sense of consciousness that is not apparent at the beginning of her book.

Hyacinth Drift

Hyacinth Drift Summary

At a time when Marjorie Rawlings is quite tormented with life, she and her friend Dessie decide to take a risky trip together up the St. John's river in Florida. They put in their boat and drft among the water hyacinths. They will have to watch for signs to get to the main channel. In marsh water as far as the eye can see, they finally come to a labyrinth of hundreds of smaller channels, and many of those on Rawlings' map no longer exist. They try to sleep in the open on bad cots in swarms of mosquitoes.

They both realize that faster-floating hyacinths indicate the river channel. This becomes their guide. They go through Puzzle Lake thinking they have crossed Lake Harney. They stop where there is an abandoned cabin. Dess carves supports for their cots; they take hot baths and spend a wonderful evening. Eventually reaching the town of Sanford, they are able to get gas with the help of a yacht owner, whose pampered wife and wistful face evoked sympathy from them.

They are now on clear water where they fish and swim but must make a decision about their route. They learn that news of their safety has been requested up the river via fishermen. Finding no shelter at Cypress swamp, they double back. It takes them two and half hours to cross Lake George, and they are on the river again. Rawlings loves being on the water and briefly recalls the painful circumstances of living. But off the water, she "found a forgotten loveliness in all things that have nothing to do with men." Rawlings realizes the only nightmare is the "masochistic human mind."

Hyacinth Drift Analysis

Hyacinth Drift: We learn at the end of this chapter that the pain Rawlings is enduring has to do with a man, probably her husband. Becoming one with the river and learning all its intimate details provides her with a different perspective on life and reminds her that there are other things more beautiful and important than what she has been going through.

It is interesting that the poor white people in the hut along the river feared and rejected her and Dess, while the black man at the dock shelter offers them fresh water. Rawlings also sympathetically portrays the fishing woman, saying, "Something about her shamed all soft, clean women." The river trip is a success in that it cleared Rawlings' mind and soul of turmoil, at least long enough for her to glimpse the beauty around her again and appreciate what she has at Cross Creek.

Who Owns Cross Creek?

Who Owns Cross Creek? Summary

Rawlings tells a funny story of Einstein discarding a French prune stuffed with an almond because he thought the chef had neglected to remove a squab's gizzard. She feels people at Cross Creek draw conclusions about the world from knowing a small portion of it so well. They feel one another's problems and are tolerant and generous. Rawlings speaks of a girl who is physically ill from "throwing away" her unborn child and needs a doctor. Rawlings gives Martha $3 to help her. When her female dog is poisoned, Rawlings assumes her neighbor Tom did the deed, and then she assumes he has cut her fences when hogs intrude. When they finally talk, she finds he has committed neither crime.

Rawlings tells of a three-way relationship in which the woman in the middle became ill, and the two men cared for the woman, and eventually went away to farm together. She quotes George Sand about nature and the harmony between God and humans.

Rawlings recognizes the dual nature and rhythms of life, and wonders of psychic things are nourished by our annihilation. Experiencing love is the experience of feeling the pulse of the the "great secret and the great answer." She feels we must love our work, whatever it is. In relationships, our disagreements are unimportant.

When magnolia blossom-thieves hit the region, Rawlings contemplates the idea of owning land. She feels no person should have rights over land unless he cares lovingly for it. People come and go, but the land and nature stays on. She feels the red-birds are the owners of Cross Creek, and that we can only borrow the earth, which responds to love and tending. We are tenants and lovers, not possessors nor masters. Cross Creek belongs to time.

Who Owns Cross Creek? Analysis

Rawlings is before her time in contemplating stewardship of the land and what it means. She tries to grasp the place of humanity in the larger cycles of nature, and can only deduce that we come and go in a rhythm that already existed and will always exist. It is our responsibility to treat our earthly home properly while we are here. She is sure that no one owns Cross Creek except nature, regardless of who pays the taxes or holds title, and that nature will continue with its cycles and seasons long after everyone there is gone.

Characters

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

The author of the book, Rawlings is known in the Cross Creek community as Little Miss. She is a complex character by her own admission. She employs the local black people, or "Negroes" as she calls them, to work on the property she has inherited, which is a small farm with an orange grove. She is clearly better educated and wealthier than anyone in the region and, although mostly tolerant, kind and non-judgmental, there are hints of condescension in her descriptions of others in the community.

Rawlings has a unique insight into the realm of nature and closely observes the patterns of behavior demonstrated by the wildlife and plant life around her. In this book, which is highly autobiographical, she carefully and beautifully describes the flora and fauna around her, as well as the personalities of people in her world. She lets us know that the people who live permanently at Cross Creek are individualists who like to live in this remote area. They are considered somewhat "fey," speaking primarily for herself. She clearly drinks freely and tries to eat luxuriously, enjoying the treats of nature around her, including beef and dairy products. She loves to fish, hunt and eat duck, squirrel, deer and other game, but as the book progresses, we see her having second thoughts about killing animals. One chapter describes her decision to shoot a pig who will not stay out of her yard; she shoots it, then has a barbecue with friends.

Having grown up in Maryland on a farm, she had experienced the hard work involved but never had to be directly responsible for it. The farm at Cross Creek has offered hundreds of opportunities for her to do and learn things she never anticipated. Her relationships with others are sometimes tense, and Rawlings is terribly practical, but she has a very soft heart for others and is generous to a fault. In the chapter titled "Hyacinth Drift," we learn that Rawlings experienced some grief and heartbreak in her personal life involving a man, perhaps her husband. But she is a strong character who, through communing with nature, elevates her own consciousness beyond the level of the human mind and grasps the nature of life and death. She is a stalwart steward of the earth and, for her time, was an advanced thinker. Her understanding of African Americans is astonishing for her era.

Martha, Old Will and the Mickens Family

Rawlings devoted an entire chapter to Martha titled "Taking Up the Slack." Martha is a helpful, loyal and wise older black woman who is the hub of the community. She is a peacemaker as well as devoted mother and grandmother. Martha admits she wa "a fast breedin' woman," and she is always there to help the sick, the troubled or those who need assistance. She has been the best friend Rawlings has in Cross Creek, but Rawlings describes her as one who "presents a low-voiced deference, to our backs an acute criticism, and to the colored world a tongue before which it bows as before a flail."

In other words, Martha has a talent for serving the white man without attitude, even though she does have one; she is an authority figure to other blacks in the community. But Martha is kind to everyone and extremely honest and polite. Rawlings feels she is a natural aristocrat. Martha is a pious Christian as well as a believer in superstitions.

Martha's husband Will is generally in the background of the story. He is an aristocratic man, as well, who has finished a lifetime of work. When he dies, Martha takes up permanent residence on Rawlings' property. Martha's children work intermittently for Rawlings and it seems that her family will always be a part of Rawlings' life. Martha's son, Little Will, is a grove worker, and her daughter, Adrenna, has spent her time learning Rawlings "ways" as a servant in the household. Sissie, (Jamilla) a daughter of Martha's who once was shot, is the wife of Henry, who is abusive and jealous when he drinks. Estelle is Martha's daughter who is married to Sam. The two formerly worked for Old Boss but moved to Hawthorn. An "elegant" daughter of Martha's works for a wealthy family near Boston and sends her mother nice clothing, but Rawlings does not note that daughter's name.

The Townsend Family

The Townsends are a large, polite family who fish for a living at Cross Creek. Two Townsend daughters invited the newly-settled Rawlings to a pound party, which she assumed was a social gesture, perhaps to welcome her to the neighborhood. The pound party required her to bring a pound of something to eat, but when she arrived with her cake, she was the only guest. They served water, peanut butter and soda crackers; the children played harmonica, danced and sang for her, then they ate her cake as well as their own.

The family is dirt-poor but uses their last thirty-six dollars to buy a rundown car. The boys, whose skin looks green, were treated by Rawlings for hookworm, but Mrs. Twonsend did not let the treatment continue. When Rawlings offered clothing to any of the children who would agree to attend school, a few of them agreed and went for just a short time. Mrs. Townsend tried to get Rawlings to make a silk dress for her, even though she, herself, could sew. Ironically, the children grew up to be active and as prosperous as their neighbors.

Moe Sykes

Moe is a good friend of Marjorie Rawlings' and is a carpenter who helped her with her home renovations. Rawlings and Moe are exceptionally good friends. He tries to get her a new "bathroom outfit" from someone who has one to spare, but it turns out the man only has a toilet, which may not even be his, and which he does not want to give up.

Rawlings tells of Moe and his friend Whitey staying on for a family Christmas dinner rather than going home at the appropriate time. She realizes later that Moe really appreciates and almost fears her gourmet cooking. Moe came by on a Sunday morning when none of Rawlings servants was available and helped Rawlings milk her desperate

cow while his sons fixed her broken fence. He also made sure her chickens were fed and watered. He wanted his boys to learn to be carpenters as well as frog hunters.

Neither Moe, nor his mother, are happy with the wife he chose, who is slovenly and irresponsible. He misses the way his mother kept things tidy and organized, and he lives "vicariously" through Rawlings' nice, well-kept place. Moe gave Rawlings a valuable handmade bed that had once been owned by Major Fairbanks, a noted Floridian and orange grove owner. Moe once saved Rawlings' orange crop when a freeze hit while she was out of town. When his closest daughter became ill, Rawlings postponed a trip to New York to make sure the girl had medical help and that Moe had money. Moe shared his vegetables and wanted to take Rawlings to hunt alligators, but he became ill and died. Rawlings misses him.

Zelma

Described as an "ageless spinster resembling an angry and efficient canary," Zelma is a very manly woman who curses loudly but helps those who need it. She takes Rawlings with her to take the census in Alachua County, on two long days of horseback riding. Zelma leads Rawlings through exotic and strange areas and introduces her to the woods and the River Styx as they count heads throughout the county. She tells "fabulous tales" of Burnt Island's huge rattlesnakes, boars and escaped criminals.

Zelma gets them lost resulting in a very long ride. She knows a lot about everyone in the area and tells what she knows to Rawlings. When Rawlings' horse spooked, Zelma cursed over the sweet potatoes that had fallen on the ground. Later, Zelma and Rawlings take the afternoon off to fish with Fred, Rawlings' friend. Rawlins mentions later in the book having opposum cooked by Zelma's mother.

Tim

Tim is one of the first poverty-stricken people Rawlings meets when she moves into her farm at Cross Creek. Tim and his wife came with the farm. He hates the farm work, and his wife, who is gentle and serene, complains about not being able to keep the antses out of Tim's food. Tim is an angry man and eventually leaves the place because he can no longer stand the mosquitoes and poor living conditions in the servants' cabin. Rawlings realizes only later that it was her moral responsibility to make sure these people were more comfortable, and she includes Tim's wife as a character in one of her books. Tim's wife is a character whose memory haunts Rawlings.

Widow Slater and Snow Slater

The Widow Slater is a white woman who is extremely pious and positive. Her children are Snow, Henry, Alvah, Irene and Rodney. She makes do with miserable living conditions, as well as many heartbreaking physical ailments of her own and her children. Her focus on God is unwavering, and she appreciates His hand in everything,

good or bad. The Widow Slater once did laundry for Rawlings, and her biggest concern was trying not to step on the wild-grown phlox as she hung out the sheets. She helped Rawlings create false fences to keep the cows from crossing and brought Rawlings her milk and eggs. Her daughter Alvah was allowed to help Rawlings wash dishes; Alvah saved her money and bought Rawlings a wind chime for Christmas. When Rawlings was having company, the Widow asked Rawlings to protect Alvah. The women all cried when the Widow took her family and moved away. Her son, Snow, who stays on at the Creek, becomes a close friend of Rawlings'.

Son of the Widow Slater, Snow has learned how to survive by catching catfish. When his mother and sisters move to Carolina, Snow stays behind, living in a shack made from palmettos and a crate. Rawlings gave him a job and became his friend; Rawlings finally learns that all Snow ever wanted was a piece of land and a wife like his mother. Rawlings bought him thirty-five acres upon which he built a house with her help. Snow borrowed Rawlings' truck and returned from Gainesville with a bed and a wife. Snow once gives Rawlings a duck-hunt for Christmas.

Mr. Martin, Mr. Higgenbotham and Tom Glisson

Marjorie Rawlings shoots a pig belonging to Mr. Martin because it is constantly leading other pigs into her yard and being destructive. Mr. Martin is angry and highly valued the pig, but when she is straightforward with him about why she shot him, he cannot stay mad at her. They demonstrate the way problems are eventually worked out at Cross Creek.

Mr. Higgenbotham is a snake hunter who tries to lend a large snake to Rawlings to catch the rats in her attic. Rawlings helps him by getting some information frm the Zoos about the prices of snakes. He comes by needing a loan of six dollars to renew his truck registration, and weeks pass without repayment. When he shows up again, he has a pig worth six dollars, which he proposes to give to Mr. Martin to pay back Rawlings' debt to Martin. If the sow "takes" and produces offspring her debt will be paid. Martin later tells Rawlings the pig is paid for.

Tom Glisson, another neighbor, was overheard to say that he did not want any female dogs at Cross Creek. When Mandy, Rawlings' female dog comes home and dies from strychnine poisoning, Rawlings is sure it is Tom's doing and does not speak to him for a long time. She confronts him over a cut fence, assuming he has done that, as well. When they finally speak, Tom weeps and tells her he could never have hurt her dog, and she realizes that she has been angry at him for nothing. He forgives her twice. They become fast friends.

'Geechee

'Geechee, whose name is Beatrice, is a large, fierce- looking African woman from the Ogeechee River area and a special African tribe that has held on to its identity. Hired as a servant, she is a hard worker who takes excellent care of Rawlings and her property.

'Geechee is blind in one eye and has come from a very rough background. Her "man" is serving time in prison for manslaughter and writes her letters begging her to help him get out. 'Geechee asks Rawlings for help, convincing her that Leroy is a good, innocent man. Rawlings manages to get him out, arranges for their marriage and takes him on at the farm. 'Geechee is very sad when the lazy Leroy threatens Rawlings, and she escorts Leroy out of town when he is fired. 'Geechee is an alcoholic, and her condition worsens over time until she begins to use bad judgment in her job. When Rawlings breaks her neck, 'Geechee returns long enough to care for her in her illness but eventually gives liquor to the other servants and neglects her responsibilities again. She leaves permanently. Rawlings loves her, but 'Geechee knows herself that she will never conquer her alcoholism.

Dessie and Ed Hopkins

Dessie is the wife of Rawlings' doctor who lives in Tampa, and a good friend to Marjorie Rawlings. She and Rawlings take the boat trip together down the St. Johns River in the chapter entitled "Hyacinth Drift." She is an amazing, capable woman who was raised in Florida and is a complete natural in the wilderness. She knows boats, guns, fishing, hunting and survival, yet lives an upscale life in the city with her husband. She is a great friend to Rawlings, especially in her times of need.She calls Rawlings "Young un" even though Rawlings is older than Dessie. In this chapter, there is a sense that Dessie is clear about what she is doing for Rawlings, since she seems to be in the role of caretaker. Dessie tracks down 'Geechee when Rawlings is injured and needs her.

Ed Hopkins is a close friend of Rawlings' who takes her frog hunting and teachers her how to eat turtle eggs.

Adrenna and Little Will Mickens

Adrenna and Little Will are Martha and Will Mickens' children. Adrenna is a man-magnet, and the only reason Rawlings can come up with for this is that she has a squared behind that she swishes when she walks. As a servant to Rawlings, Adrenna wants to find a man who will be suitable as her partner, as well as a good servant for Rawlings. She goes through several but is never able to find the right one. Temporarily married to Samson, Adrenna goes away from the farm and returns later with a child whom she claims belonged to a neighbor. Rawlings assumes that Martha is hoping Adrenna will fill Martha's place in the tenant house, and the baby will work for Rawlings.

Little Will, Martha's beloved son, steps into Samson's job at the Rawlings farm, and is a good worker, like the other members of his family and Rawlings relies on him heavily. He marries Alberta, who is staying in the tenant house because her husband had temporarily left her for Adrenna.

Mary

One of Rawlings' many servants who did not work out, Mary screams frequently and tells Martha that Rawlings is not feeding her. She shouts and throws things in the kitchen, then pretends nothing has happeend . She fails to wake Rawlings up early enough because it was raining and she did not want to get wet. She was an escaped patient at the "insane ward" of a mental hospital. When Rawlings checked into Mary's history she was told that May could be dangerous, but in her good times, Mary was patient and grateful. She went once to spend time at her father's farm and did not return to Rawlings' farm claiming she had missed Rawlings at their meeting place.

Tim

A trapper who lives with his wife in sheer poverty, Tim is a proud, angry white man who came with the farm when Rawlings moved there. When Rawlings offers to employ his wife, he is incensed over the thought of his wife working for another white woman. He and his wife leave the property and Rawlings only later realized her moral obligation to have made them more comfortable. His wife haunts Rawlings thoughts, and Rawlings based a character in a book on her.

George Fairbanks and Mr. Swilley

George Fairbanks is the last descendent of Major Fairbanks, who owned most of this region many years prior. George has some remnant of wealth, which is supervised by Snow and Old Boss. George once married a woman who left when she found he had no real money. He resented this and politely asked Marjorie Rawlings if he could spend time with her and bring over his Victrola and records. He has a cleft palate and is slightly arrogant due to his ancestry. Rawlings has considered giving him the old carved Fairbanks bed, but his houses always burn down.

Mr. Swilley was another potential suitor. Mr. Swilley has a spastic problem and looks odd due to his strange movements and self-cut hair. Swilley has a dream of his dead mother telling him he will meet a rich widow who will provide for him, and he assumes it's Rawlings. He brings her strange silver coins and tells her they are for bedbugs. Rawlings gives him a Christmas present but avoids giving him anything personal. She finds that Swilley's home is made of boxes and corrugated tin. When he brought Rawlings a ladder for Christmas and learned she had been to his home, he "pranced toward me like an old and decrepit goat." Rawlings asked him to bring a servant's belongings to the tenement house and lets him drive her truck. He swerves all over the road as has obviously never driven before. He falls over the fence with her bed, tries to jump the fence with her trunk and falls, causing the trunk to open and spill its contents. When he thinks the truck is stuck, Rawlings has to put it in gear for him. He then flies over the road, the truck ending up against the side of the barn.

The Bass family, Grampa Hicks and Marsh Turner

The Bass family, who eventually prospered, was a family with integrity. They would not take free milk. Mrs. Bass once borrowed a dime for her little son. who had gone to school hungry, and made sure she paid it back.

Grampa Hicks lived by illegal trapping of fish, renting rowboats without permission and siphoning fuel. He was selfish, but would not fish on Sundays, apparently because he was raised with religion.

Marsh Turner lived with his mother and was a poor alcoholic, addicted to liquor and music. On Satuday nights he was jailed frequently, but paid his fines and repeated the process. His animals were running wild over Rawlings' property and she sent a note to him that he must do something. He appeared on his horse and told her that the next time his cattle and hogs bother her, they will belong to her. He always made right his wrongs. When a Sheriff went to arrest him, he told Marsh to put down the gun he was oiling. Marsh extended the gun and told the Sheriff that this gun was for him. The Sheriff, perhaps misunderstanding, shot and killed him. Rawlings feels he spoke without menace and had offered the gun, the same as he had offered her his livestock.

Ross Allen

A friend of Rawlings, Ross Allen is a herpetologist who takes her on a rattlesnake hunt. He teaches her everything about snakes and eventually, she sees them differently, and is able to handle them. Ross helps her conquer a deep lifelong fear.

Kate and Raymond

Kate and Raymond are a servant couple hired by Rawlings after 'Geechee left. Kate was smaller but dominated Raymond. Raymond was strong and a good worker, and Kate learned quickly. When Rawlings goes on vacation for the summer, Kate and Raymond assure her they will take care of the property. When she returns, her liquor is gone; the house had not been swept or dusted; there are spiders, an empty icebox, no milk, a nearly dry cow, no chickens and total chaos. Since her brother is driving from Alaska for a visit, she fires Raymond and pretends everything is fine. She and her brother go out to see Florida together. When they return Kate announces she has a new sweetheart, but Rawlings thinks she is seeing Raymond hopping the fence at night. After a weekend hunt, Rawlings arrives home and the cow is unmilked and not fed or watered; the dog is locked in the back porch with no food or water and dishes from the day before thrown on the floor of the pantry. When Rawlings and her brother get to the tenant house with their guns drawn, Kate, Raymond and the new sweetheart are forced to pack up and leave.

Samson

One of Adrenna's finds, she brings Samson to work on Rawlings' farm as a grove man. He claims to be highly experienced. Rawlings gets them married and finds out Samson knows very little about anything, but he has a green thumb with roses, with which he spends most of his time. Adrenna ends up serving him, as well as Rawlings. Samson and Adrenna are having a dispute with Adrenna's brother-in-law, Henry, and Henry shoots Samson. Henry goes to jail and Samson recovers. For some reason, Rawlings cannot bring herself to like Samson and suspects Adrenna is somehow behind the conflict.

Samson returns and Henry is let out of jail. Although Henry is a favorite of Rawlings', she is incensed at the lack of justice and manages to get him re-arrested so he can stand trial. Everyone in the village loves Henry and no one particularly likes Samson. Rawlings intercepts a note from Samson asking Adrenna to cover for him. Henry is freed again.

Lum and Ida

Lum and Ida represent Rawlings's one attempt to employ white servants. The village was perturbed with Rawlings for hiring only blacks, and she succumbed to the pressure from Lum and Ida and hired them. Ida was good and she and Rawlings become close. But, Lum does not enjoy the hard work and will not even climb up and pull down the high-growing mistletoe as he is instructed. Cold came and the groves needed to be fired, but Lum gets drunk and goes to bed while Rawlings and Ida worked. He claimed to be quitting his job, but Rawlings was going to fire him anyway. He felt the job was too much to ask of someone who is used to his comfort.

Fred Tompkins

A close friend as well as a hunting and fishing companion for Rawlings, Fred is a happy spirit. He takes Rawlings and even her aunt Wilmer hunting.

However, he once met a couple from New York who stopped at the garage in Citra. He sent the couple to Marjorie Rawlings' farm, telling them that she would surely be happy to take them in, probably for a month, if they wanted to stay with her and fish on the lake. When they arrived, Rawlings is appalled, but Tompkins sees her as a Yankee and was sure she would be thrilled to house these strangers and that she would probably refuse pay for it.

Fred was a sereant in the army during the Spanish war. He calls his wife the Old Hen, and she complains because he is always out doing something.

Objects/Places

Cross Creek

A location in Florida where Lochloosa Lake flows into Orange Lake, four miles west of the village of Island Grove, Cross Creek is described as a bend in the road. It is a place with fertile hammock, piney woods, palmettos, orange groves, creeks, orchards and water. It is a place of shabby homesteads, where "wanton orderliness" would be out of place. On one side of the Creek live the five white families and across the creek live two black families. People grow livestock of all kinds, and boars and snakes run wild.

Hammock

Hammock is the rich loamy humus created by the varied vegetation in Florida, which nourishes the orange groves. It is a result of live oak, palm, sweet gum, holly, ironwood, hickory and magnolia trees.

Prairies and Marshes

At Cross Creek, the thick, wet, flat areas overgrown with water grasses are called prairies. The "deep mucky edges of lake and river dense with coontail and lily pads," and true salt marshes are called marshes.

River Styx

A nearby river that Rawlings first visits on her census travels with Zelma. The River Styx slowly rises up out of the forest floor and becomes deeper as it goes.

White Bacon

In the south, white bacon is salt pork coated with cornmeal and deep-fried.

Negroes

Rawlings' polite description of the black population around her is "Negroes." At the time the book was written, African Americans were still reeling from being emancipated into a world that was new and frightening to them. Slavery, although cruel, was clear cut - freedom was not. Although Rawlings understands the plight of the "Negroes" and is sympathetic, she is still naive and prejudiced and sees white people as, at least temporarily, superior.

Varmints

A varmint is described as "any one of the wild things in the woods either definitely predatory or of no domestic service. A human varmint is one who possesses skulking qualities and may be expected to be 'low down.'"

Corn Bread, Corn Pone, Hoe Cake and Hush Puppies

Rawlings differentiates these common forms of southern bread. Baked corn bread is rich, made with milk, eggs and shortening. Cornpone has no eggs or milk and is made on top of the stove, while Hoe Cake is simply cornmeal, salt and water fried in a skillet, Dutch oven, or over a fire. Hush puppies are made from white cornmeal, salt baking soda or powder, an egg or two and perhaps onion. Little cakes are dropped into the hot fat in which fish has been fried..

Pilau

Pilau is a dish made primarily of cooked rice with some kind of meat or protein added, such as squirrel or chicken. Fatty Blake served pilau made with squirrel heads at his party/prayer meeting/fund raiser.

Rations

Rations is the term for servings of food or meals. The Townsends ask for money to buy rations; the Bass child had gone to school without money for rations. Higgenbotham feeds his snakes their rations.

Pound Party

The Townsends invite Rawlings to a party where everyone is expected to bring a pound of food.

Crocus Sack

A common southern term for a cloth bag that was used to collect everything from seeds and berries to snakes and frogs.

Swamp Cabbage

The root of the prolific palmetto, which in most of the country is called hearts of palm, is simple swamp cabbage to those in the south.

Scuppernongs

A wild grape that is made into wine, scuppernongs come in purple and white. Not a native of Florida, the scuppernong cuttings came from old Carolina and Georgia via covered wagon and ox-cart.

First Day of Season

November 20th is the opening day of hunting season in Alachua County and has become something of a holiday, as well as the beginning of winter.

Pinders

Pinders are a Floridian name for peanuts and are called goobers in Georgia. Mr. Butler at Orange Lake Station was enamored of his pinder crop, where Marjorie Rawlings left her two pigs to fatten up. Pinders grow on vines and are boiled before they mature.

Water Hyacinth

A water hyacinth is a marshy flowering plant that thrives in water. It is so prolific in some areas it can choke the channels and waterways. In this book, Rawlings and Dessie were able to determine which branch of water was the river by watching how quickly the hyacinth drifted in a particular direction.

Rawling's Orange Grove

Marjorie Rawlings inherited and owns a beautiful orange grove that was once part of a larger grove owned by the Fairbanks family. Oranges represent money in this part of the country.

Poverty

Most of the families in Cross Creek live in utter poverty. Rawlings employs many of them, but they struggle for food and shelter. Most are uneducated or under-educated, and many are black. Poverty is an ongoing issue throughout this story, as Rawlings interacts with her community and her more prosperous friends who live in larger cities. Her wealth contrasts sharply with those around her.

Magnolia Tree

Rawlings devotes an entire chapter to her love of a magnolia tree that towers over her orange grove. The magnolia has waxy, shiny leaves and beautifully fragrant flowers.

Even when it is not in bloom, the tree is beautiful. A typical tree in the tropics, the magnolia loves warm, mild weather and does not impinge on other growth. Its seedlings wait until the larger tree has run its course and died before they appear.

Themes

Haves and Have-Nots

Every aspect of Rawlings' story of Cross Creek is touched by the reality of the poverty around her, and her writing reflects her increasing sensitivity to it. When Rawlings first arrived at the Creek, she took the poverty around her for granted. The story of Tim and his wife, who live in quiet desperation in the rundown tenant house with mosquitoes and ants, reflects her initial naivety as well as her lack of previous exposure to real hardship. It did not occur to Rawlings until later that she had any responsibility to treat these people any better than they had been treated in the past or to help them, since they worked on her property. She admits that Tim's wife has haunted her mind, and it is because of her that Rawlings awakens to the real meaning of abject poverty as time goes on. The incredible Townsend family, whose meal consists of water and crackers, become her first project. She tries to help them but finds that they choose the life they live and are none the worse for it. The destitution of those who live under trees and in shacks, as well as those living in the old houses in the neighborhood, is stark enough to be included in her stories.

Rawlings is quick to tell us how, when and where she is of help to the less fortunate and that she is grateful for her own good fortune, but she does not see a way out of the problem, and in her description of the "sieve" idea, she sounds as though she feels it is simple fate that makes us wealthy or poor. That concept also betrays a vague sense of guilt, since she claims to think that the poor are exactly the same as the more well-to-do, only without the clutter of wealth in their lives. The advantage of Rawlings' wealth is, of course, that she has the education and leisure time to write books rather than toiling every day of the week for a meager wage. For this, the readers are grateful as the readers would not have her intriguing perspective on life during that time if she had not been a woman of means.

Rawlings makes certain her readers know she has friends in high places and mentions that Martha and her husband would be aristocrats if they were white. She mingles with senators and others who are well off but shows no particular preference for their company over that of her poorer neighbors.

Alcoholism

Although her books are authored during Prohibition, there is alcohol present in many of the stories and anecdotes Rawlings offers. Liquor is brought openly and routinely into her home. She, herself, seems to be quite blatantly fond of alcohol and has a hefty stock of it on hand. The "negroes" are affected by alcohol and it seems to lead them into explosive and life-changing circumstances over and over. The "negroes" often are so addicted that they break into her cupboards and become destitute, like 'Geechee, due to alcoholism. There is much destruction and damage associated with alcohol in the lives

of the Cross Creek population, including shootings, adultery, promiscuity, and loss of fortune, such as the case of George Fairbanks.

Clearly, Rawlings herself is fond of alcohol and admits to having a weekly delivery of illegal moonshine delivered to her door. She is quite open about her drinking, and there is even a hint that it may be fashionable to do so. The gin bottle in the garden as well as her fully-stocked bar indicates that alcohol plays a role in her life. Rawlings mentions more than once that she has rough days and, particularly in the chapter "Hyacinth Drift," her emotional state is fragile. Whether her occasional depression was due to alcohol use or vice versa, it definitely helped her self-medicate.

Nature

Marjorie Rawlings has an affinity for all things natural. She recognizes beauty in places and things that others might not and sees Cross Creek as an enchanted land. She has farming in her blood and meets the challenges of her new life head on. Rawlings is a very close observer of birds, noting their mating and travel patterns, their breeds, colors, songs and habits. Although she is mortally afraid of snakes, she forces herself to know and understand them until she is able to deal with them calmly. She loves the trees, including her orange grove and the magnolias, and has an appreciation of the rain and wind, the water and even of the dark hammock which nourishes everything. She is a lover of the earth and feels we cannot own it but are responsible for taking care of it while we are here. She finds a simple beauty in her surroundings and appreciates the gifts of food that come from the land and the water. She appreciates the geometric jade of the orange trees and feels her spiritual home is here. Rawlings also appreciates human beings but sees them as just another part of the rhythm of the earth that comes and goes just like everything else in nature.

For the time in which she lived, Rawlings had a very enlightened perspective regarding nature. She did not simply accept what she saw at face value but looked deeper into the rhythms and reasons for nature's constant changes and displays. Although somewhat mild relative to New England, Florida offers some very challenging natural conditions that include reptiles, insects, humidity and malaria. Still, she recognizes the cosmic nature of everything, including her own role, on the earth.

Servitude

A great deal of Marjorie Rawlings time is taken with acquiring, teaching, training, loving and losing servants. Of course, she could not have run the farm by herself, but there is a presumptuous quality in her perspective on servants that tells us she is from another time in history. A beloved and great servant is one who makes her life as comfortable as possible, keeps her house clean, does her chores and serves her coffee in bed. She mentions the word "impudent" more than once, which is an attitude she does not like. For all of her open-mindedness about the "negroes," Rawlings does not hesitate to hire them as help and expects them to treat her home as if they own it, too.

Her view of Africans during that era provides an enlightening aspect to her story. She felt that, having been slaves for so many generations, the freed blacks are like children, and she reiterates the stereotypes assigned to them. However, she understands that because they have been in servitude and utter dependence on whites, and for so long removed from their original culture, that they do not yet have the tools to construct and live what she would consider a normal life. The values instilled in them were completely in relation to their service and, therefore, the moment they felt true freedom, such as being left alone at Rawlings' home, they reacted like wild teenagers because they suffered from cultural immaturity.

Style

Point of View

Rawlings writes her entire book from her own personal first-person perspective, thus the reader is limited in terms of the perspectives of other characters. The author often uses dialogue and attempts to capture the dialects of the poor southern African Americans, the poor southern whites, and one character with a speech impediment. Although the story meanders over a number of years, the stories are not chronologically presented but their timeline can be determined by the naivety or naturally attained wisdom of the author as they pertain to Cross Creek. She is a reliable narrator only to the degree that she uses factual material upon which to build her anecdotes and, admittedly, embellishes them if necessary.

Without her disclaimer of combining some characters and stories, this book would not pass the "James Frey" test for accuracy. But Rawlings was already a popular author when she wrote this book, and she felt free to explore her own personality and opinions for us without particular regard to perfect accuracy. Part of the charm of this story is that it is from her own viewpoint, a New England transplant to Florida who finds that she is not as capable of handling a farm alone as she thought. Her characters are colorful and thought-provoking, but her description of them is thoroughly influenced by her own personality.

Setting

Cross Creek is a hot and humid part of Florida in Alachua county. Surrounded by rivers and large lakes, the area is home to many swamps and marshes, as well as salt marshes where ocean water merges with fresh. The rich soil nurtures, among thousands of other plantings, the famous Florida orange groves. A tropical setting, the seasons change only gradually and gently. The Cross Creek region in Rawlings' day, was home to just a small permanent population, as well as a sizable transient population. Far off the beaten path, the area is one that is appealing only to people who want to live far from a city, and those who are "individualists," according to Rawlings.

Cross Creek is home to orange groves, magnolia trees, chestnut orchards, and lush plant life such as bamboo and berries, as well as a thick population of wildlife. Pine forests are heavy with moss, and in Rawlings' era, there were still bears roaming the woods.

Rawlings transports her readers to a steamy, tropical environment where beauty is exotic and elaborate. The thick palmettos, the mossy swamps, heady orange groves and free-range neighborhood is fascinating and somewhat intimidating. The region's laws allow livestock to roam without fences and they invade her property frequently. She brings the fragrance of the magnolia trees to life, as well as the music that hundreds of

frogs make when they are chirping. The place is obviously alive with creatures and lush growth - the sow with her babies that she uncovered in the hammock, the invading snakes and livestock, and the general feel in the air of moisture, heat and life are described in sharp, vivid terms.

Language and Meaning

The author's descriptions are rich and deep and often complex when applied to topics of nature. She is very sweeping and sometimes grandiose in her graphic portrayal of nature, as well as her own impressions and perceptions of it. There is a manic quality to some of her rapturous descriptions, such as the magnolia tree and the frog symphony.

Her writing flows smoothly and is easy to read, but there are moments when it feels as though she is just trying to get this book written and is including detail gratuitously. The most interesting parts of the book tend to be the dialogues with her "negroes," since that dialect is now a thing of the past. In addition, Rawlings couches subtle innuendos in her writing style, such as using the words "never impudent" when describing Martha Mickens. Her story telling about Mr. Swilley is as well written as any comedy scene, however politically incorrect. Rawlings does not hesitate to make fun of the Negroes and people like Mr. Swilley and Mary, but assures us in many passages of her integrity and compassion.

Rawlings writes with a casual style that does not require us to study her words, but her era is certainly apparent with some of the outdated words she uses. For her time, she is a very modern writer with ideas that have only recently really taken hold in our country.

Structure

This book is divided into twenty-three unevenly-sized chapters. The beginning of the book contains snappy and efficient chapters on the land, its people, Rawlings' experiences, remodeling of her home, her servants and observations. By Chapter 14, Rawlings has launched into nature writing at its best but includes also people-focused anecdotes in both the "Varmints" and "Ancient Enmity" chapters.

By Chapter 16, she has reverted to discussing the "Negroes" and their plight, as well as her exasperation in dealing with them. In Chapter 17, Rawlings dives into food, one of her favorite subjects, and continues on for 38 pages describing foods, and ending with an anecdote about the dish, pilau. Chapter 18 begins the four seasons chapters. The 22nd chapter, "Hyacinth Drift," takes the readers on a journey with Rawlings at a very sorrowful time of her life. Finally, in the last chapter, Rawlings addresses the nature of land ownership and her opinions about who really owns Cross Creek.

The book is a smörgåsbord of Rawlings' life and her experience of it, with radically varying lengths and depth of detail. The uneven structure may be attributable to her lifestyle and opportunities to write, or may be a result of erratic thinking, since she tends

to swing into almost manic-seeming stories. The chapters that run the longest may be the areas that she is most passionate about - her food and cooking, and her depression.

Quotes

"I said, 'I'm sorry to be so late. I worked very late last night at my writing.' She said compassionately, 'Oh Sugar, I knows you're tired in the arms.'" P. 27

"The jungle hammock breathed. Life went through the moss-hung forest, the swamp, the cypresses, through the wild sow and her young, though me, in its continuous chain. We were all one with the silent pulsing. This was the thing that was important, the cycle of life, with birth and death merging one into the other in an imperceptible twilight and an insubstantial dawn. The universe breathed, and the world inside it breathed the same breath. This was the cosmic life, with suns and moons to make it lovely. It was important only to keep close enough to the pulse to feel its rhythm, to be comforted by its steadiness, to know that Life is vital, and one's own minute living a torn fragment of the larger cloth." P. 39

"Zelma is an ageless spinster resembling an angry and efficient canary." P. 48

"Where a house was rotting to the ground, ants and roaches inhabited the very wood of floors and walls and swarmed over the family's edibles. The situation of Tim's wife puzzled but still did not concern me. I did not yet understand that in this way of life one is obliged to share, back and forth, and that as long as I had money fo rscreens and a new floor, I was morally obligated to put out a portion of it to give some comfort to those who worked for me. I took others' discomfort for granted and the only palliation of my social sin is that I took my own so, too." P. 67

"The word 'hypocrite' may have been a favorite in the family. Little Irene came out with it one day. She brought us a katydid to show, cupped carefully in her small grubby hands. 'I caught me a hypocrite,' she said. The widow chucked. 'That's a jizzywitch, honey,' she corrected her. Irene stamped her bare foot. 'Tis not. It's a hypocrite. I know, because all hypocrites is long-legged.'" P. 73

"My friend Dessie says of it that when I am in a hurry and the head is thrust forward, the upper body lying on the wind, reaching for a speed that is quite beyond the legs and feet, carried hopelessly behind. The effect, she says, is that of a wild turkey hen making a getaway. Patsy was a yard or so behind me. I heard her say, with a curious mixture of pride and affection, 'Step it off, Mama! Step it off!'" P. 80

"'Of course,' I said, 'I expect to pay for it. In a way, I had a right to shoot it, because it was an outlaw. In another way, the right is on your side because in a no-fence county you have the right to turn your stock loose. But I'll pay for it very gladly. Oh, Mr. Martin, I did so enjoy shooting that pig.' He stepped back and studied me. 'Them pigs was practically pets,' he said. 'they were very tame,' I said. 'That was the trouble.' 'You could have ketched it with your bare hands,' he lamented. 'Yes, Mr. Martin,' I said, 'but then I wouldn't have had the pleasure of shooting it.'" P. 101

"He made tentative overtures to me. 'I been thinkin',' he said. 'I dot a Victwola an' twenty-five wecords. Here you are, livin' alone. There I am, livin' alone. I bwing my Victwola an' my twenty-five wecords an' I play for you.'" P. 127

"I was horrified to see him ignore the wide gate and leap, bed and all, over the fence. The bed crashed down ahead of him, Mary let out a shriek that was to become familiar, and Mr. Swilley picked himself up and flung the bed bodily into the back of the truck. He dusted his hands, flushed with pride, and hurdled the fence back to the house. I called, 'The trunk will go through the gate, Mr. Swilley.' He beamed and waggled his head, poised the heavy trunk jauntily on one shoulder, and again attacked the fence. His intention was not only to jump it, but to soar lightly over it. Mr. Swilley missed soaring by half the height of the fence. One leg cleared it in a blithe arc, the other caught midway, the trunk bounced to earth and flew open." P. 133

"The frog Philharmonic of the Florida lakes and marshes is unendurable in its sweetness. I have lain through a long moonlit night, with the scent of orange blossoms palpable as spilled perfume on the air, and listened to the murmur of minor chords until, just as I have wept over the Brahms waltz in A flat on a master's violin, I thought my heart would break with the beauty of it." P. 145

"I came to Cross Creek with such a phobia against snakes that a picture of one in the dictionary gave me what Martha calls 'the all-overs.'" P. 167

"The Negro today is paid instead of being rationed. He is left to shift for himself for the most part instead of being cared for. In the South is wages are a scandal and there is no hope of racial development until racial economics are adjusted. Meantime, he continues to be, ostensibly, childish, carefree, religious, untruthful and unreliable. Back of it all is a defense mechanism as ingrained as the color of his skin. He could adapt himself to the injustice of his position and to the master white race only by being childish, carefree, religious, untruthful and reliable." P. 181

"I had a sinking sensation. The baby, Betty Jean, is bright and ingratiating. I can see Martha behind the scenes, managing, manipulating. I am doomed to pay for the oepration and doomed to help Adrenna raise the baby. Perhaps Martha is looking ahead to the day when the Lord reaches down His hand to the Creek and turns her over to Abraham's bosom. Perhaps she sees Adrenna replacing her in the addition to the tenant house in her old age, and Betty Jean serving me in mine. Martha will have a finger in my pie from beyond the grave." P. 20

"The sorriest Negress, who can turn out nothing else fit to eat, can make hot biscuits that would have melted the hard heart of Sherman." P. 211

"As for the pawpaws, which bloom like miniature white orchids late in February, the banana-like fruit is gone down the gullets of the varmints long before I hae had a chance at it, and with pawpaws coveig our woods, I have never tasetd one. Martha said to me, 'Only a nigger young un kin beat the varmints to the pawpaws.'" P. 222

"Leonard caught a raccoon in a trap, and though I had heard that "'coon has a foolish kind of taste," I knew that it was eaten and set to work. I parboiled it, as I had done the limpkin, then roasted it, and it was so inedible that one by one the three of us were obliged to head for the open door. I found later that the raccoon has a musk-sack that must be removed before cooking." P. 234

"The passing hat reached a lean, venerable farmer just as he had completed a tour of exploration through his pilau. 'No!' he shrilled, with the lustiness of an old man with a grievance. 'No, I ain't goin' to give him nothin'! This here was advertised as a free meal and 'tain't nothin' but a dogged Georgia prayer-meetin'. Get a man here on promises and then go pickin' his pocket. This food ain't fitten to eat, dogged Georgia rations, Brunswick stew and all. And he's done cooked the squirrel heads in the pilau, and that suits a damned Georgia crakcer but it don't suit me. I was born and raised in Floridy, and I'm pertickler. I don't want no squirrel eyes lookin' at me out o' my rations!"' P. 242

"I have been on Orange lake by night and had the scent of the jessamine come so strongly from the far shores that it seemed an immense perfume flask had been spilled from the stars. There is a cousin of the yellow jessamine, the nght-blooming jasmine, whose odor is so sweet and strong that invalids cannot endure it in their rooms or outside their windows. Martha says, 'It really tears loose after nightfall.'" P. 246

"It was plain that Ferdinand was no past female handling.
Martha said, 'Praise the Lord!' I looked where she pointed. Down the road came a figure. Little Will was coming home. 'Sugar,' Martha said, 'if that was our President comin' down the Creek road, he couldn't look no better.'" P. 267

"Indians, Seminoles or mound builders, Spaniards in search of fabulous riches or still more fabulous youth, fugitives from justice from the Carolinas, Georgia Crackers, seeping slowly over the border, Yankees with axes to grind, or seeking the sharp blade of beauty — all the intruders have seen Florida's calamities threaten them and come and go. Now a small gauzy fly imperiled the life of the state, and with it, the agriculture of all the southern states." P. 283

Topics for Discussion

Discuss Rawlings' point of view about man and nature. Do you agree with her, or is she trying to justify the pain in her own life?

Is Rawlings a reliable narrator? Is there any reason to believe that not everything she discusses in Cross Creek is factual? Why, or why not?

As the only person with wealth in a region of dire poverty, does Rawlings claim her place graciously? Is she haughty? Give examples pro and con.

Discuss Rawlings' tenacity about seeing justice done in the shooting incident for which Henry has been jailed. What is her point? Why does she persist on seeing "justice" done?

The graphics in this book are referred to as "decorations." Are they not illustrations? Why would they be called decorations? Do they seem to accurately illustrate Rawlings' writing?

Discuss the various ways in which the characters at Cross Creek respond to poverty, with a focus on the families. How are they affected by Rawlings' presence in their community?

Do a careful reading of Chapter 4 and discuss the Pound Party. Was the Townsend family devious? Why is Rawlings the only guest?

Discuss Rawlings' attitude toward Mr. Martin before they settled their grievances. Was she a fair woman? What kind of temperament did she possess?

Is there an attempt on Rawlings' part to prove something about her personality? Were her activities and attitude a facade for a soft heart or an attempt to look tough in the face of a harsh environment?

It is peculiar that Rawlings broke her neck and fractured her skull and was not aware of it. Discuss this passage in the book and try to determine what is really true about this event. Is she simply underplaying her pain? Is she trying to appear tougher than she is? Was she in shock?