

The Deerslayer Study Guide

The Deerslayer by James Fenimore Cooper

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Contents

The Deerslayer Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	8
Chapter 4.....	9
Chapter 5.....	10
Chapter 6.....	12
Chapter 7.....	13
Chapter 8.....	14
Chapter 9.....	15
Chapter 10.....	16
Chapter 11.....	17
Chapter 12.....	18
Chapter 13.....	19
Chapter 14.....	21
Chapter 15.....	22
Chapter 16.....	23
Chapter 17.....	24
Chapter 18.....	25
Chapter 19.....	26
Chapter 20.....	27
Chapter 21.....	28
Chapter 22.....	29



[Chapter 23..... 30](#)

[Chapter 24..... 31](#)

[Chapter 25..... 32](#)

[Chapter 26..... 33](#)

[Chapter 27..... 34](#)

[Chapter 28..... 35](#)

[Chapter 29..... 36](#)

[Chapter 30..... 37](#)

[Chapter 31..... 38](#)

[Chapter 32..... 39](#)

[Characters..... 40](#)

[Objects/Places..... 43](#)

[Social Sensitivity..... 45](#)

[Techniques..... 47](#)

[Themes..... 48](#)

[Style..... 52](#)

[Quotes..... 54](#)

[Adaptations..... 56](#)

[Key Questions..... 57](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 59](#)

[Literary Precedents..... 60](#)

[Related Titles..... 61](#)

[Copyright Information..... 62](#)



Plot Summary

The Deerslayer is the opening novel in a series about frontiersman Nathaniel Bumppo, nicknamed Deerslayer. The novel follows Deerslayer as he lives alongside his Native American friends and develops into a legendary figure during the decades leading up to the American Revolution. His rugged honesty sets him apart from the other settlers and his strongest relationships remain with the Native American tribes of his youth, particularly a young chief known as Chingachgook. The Deerslayer chronicles the earliest exploits of this pair as they establish a name for themselves in the northern frontiers of colonial New York.

The novel opens with the French and Indian war. The French and British colonial governments are fighting for territory in North America, with Native American tribes taking sides. The principal characters are aligned with the English side, including the Delaware tribe. Their enemies, sometimes known as the Iroquois, the Huron, or the Canadas, are aligned with the French. A small group of these French allies have been delayed in their journey to the French territory when they cross paths with Deerslayer and his friends.

Deerslayer, a young and inexperienced frontiersman who has spent a great part of his life living with the Mohican and Delaware tribes, is meeting his friend Chingachgook in order to rescue Chingachgook's bride, Wah-ta-Wah, who has been kidnapped by Briarthorn of the Iroquois. On his way there, Deerslayer meets Hurry Harry March, who is going to propose to Judith Hutter, who lives with her family on an isolated lake. The two of them meet up with the Hutter family just in time to rescue the family from the attacking Iroquois tribe.

The Hutter family consists of Tom Hutter, a fugitive pirate, and his two daughters, Judith, a local beauty with a bad reputation, and Hetty, a simple-minded girl with strong religious feelings. Hutter and Harry devise a plan to sneak into the Iroquois tribe and scalp all the members in order to collect a reward from the colonial government. Despite warnings from Deerslayer and Hetty, they go out on this foolish and greedy mission and are captured. Hetty goes to preach to the tribe to release her father on Biblical grounds. They do not hurt her out of respect for her innocent mental condition. Eventually, Deerslayer negotiates for the release of the two prisoners in exchange for trinkets he finds in the Hutter home.

Deerslayer and Chingachgook set out to rescue Wah-ta-Wah. In order to help Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah escape, Deerslayer is taken prisoner. He is ordered to marry one of the tribe or die. He is given a furlough, or twenty-four hours freedom, to decide. His return from the furlough proves his honor, but his refusal to marry the Native American woman insults them. They torture him for some time. They are about to torture him with fire when the local garrison arrives and massacres the tribe. Hetty Hutter is accidentally killed in the shooting, but all the other principal characters survive.



Judith Hutter tries to convince Deerslayer to marry her, but he refuses because of the rumors about her past. Instead he returns to the Delaware tribe with Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah. Deerslayer and Chingachgook become legend in the area, but the others all disappear into history.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The story opens during the beginning of the French and Indian War in the picturesque forests of northern New York. Hurry Harry March and Deerslayer emerge from the woods and stop to rest. Harry is a trapper of great physical strength and has a boastful character. Deerslayer is the more quiet and smaller of the two, though he possesses great agility and honesty.

Deerslayer describes his long residence with the Delaware tribe and explains his moral philosophy about refusing to take human life outside of a just and honorable war. They discuss the surrounding area, and note the local family of Thomas Hutter, a family with a mysterious reputation among the locals. Harry describes the two daughters. Judith is the beautiful one, and Harry expresses both his admiration for her physical beauty and his anger at the rumors about her relationships with the soldiers at the nearby garrison. The other sister, Hetty, is described as simple minded but very kind. Deerslayer is more interested in Hetty because of her mental condition than he is in Judith. The two continue on their journey.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening chapter describes the unspoiled forest of colonial New York with strong detail, one of many such descriptions that will take place throughout the novel. Deerslayer and Harry are set up to contrast each other. One is quiet and noble, the other bumbling but attractive. Deerslayer makes the first of many of his references to his personal moral code that directs all of his actions. Though he has gained a reputation as an expert marksman, he feels strongly against the taking of life without purpose. This philosophy is given a concrete form when Harry expresses his intention to kill any man that has married Judith. Deerslayer's response is very straightforward in warning that he will personally report Harry's threats to the authorities if any such thing were to happen. In this way, Deerslayer establishes the absolute nature of his feelings without regard to claims of friendship.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

As they continue walking through the words, Deerslayer expresses his admiration for some of his Native American companions. These include Uncas, the chief of the Mohicans, and Uncas's son, Chingachgook.

The two men find a canoe that Harry had hidden on a previous trip to the area. This canoe is necessary to visit the home of the Hutter family, who live in a house, nicknamed Muskrat Castle, which is located in the middle of the lake. This building is built secure against all attackers. However, when Deerslayer and Harry pull up the house is empty. The bedroom of the two daughters is particularly interesting because of the personal belongings displayed on the walls.

Deerslayer and Harry discuss the origins of the place, which Harry helped to build several years ago. Harry explains that the lake has no official colonial name, but is called Glimmerglass by the locals because of its smooth and mirror-like surface. Deerslayer surveys the entire scene with the eye of a poet, admiring the simple beauty of nature and hoping that settlements will not take over the spot.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Again, Deerslayer's admiration of natural beauty is shown as key to his character. His observations about the lake and the possible encroachment of settlers show that he is much more comfortable in the wild than in the human civilizations of the towns.

The Hutter home, otherwise referred to as the castle, provides foreshadowing about the two Hutter daughters. One side of the bedroom, presumably Hetty's side, is simple and plain. The other side, presumably Judith's, has expensive materials and several items for personal decoration, such as ribbons and caps. This room is meant to represent the different characters of the girls and give Deerslayer, as well as the reader, a sense of what to expect of the girls when he meets them.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Harry, anxious to see Judith, seeks out the Hutter family. He and Deerslayer leave the house to look for them in the canoe. Harry and Deerslayer get into an argument about the character of Native Americans. Harry argues that all are equally evil and sub-human. Deerslayer, however, points to his experience with the Delaware tribe as an example that some tribes are honorable and produce honorable people. He argues that people are essentially the same, though led by different moral codes. This conversation leads Deerslayer into a more abstract lecture on the nature of laws, and he expresses his opinion that no law against God is lawful, regardless of which government or human authority passes it.

As they continue in their search for the Hutters, the conversation turns to physical beauty. Harry takes pride in his appearance while Deerslayer regrets that he, himself, is not more attractive.

While they scan the shore for the Hutters, they hear footsteps. It turns out to be a deer, which Harry tries to shoot but misses. Deerslayer is angry with him for doing such a pointless thing in an unsecured area. He tells Harry that it is wrong to kill an animal without intending to eat its meat or make something from its skin. He also argues that if there are dangerous enemies in the forest, the sound of the shot has alerted those enemies to their presence in the area.

They paddle the canoe out of the lake and into a river. Finally, by chance, they discover the Hutter family, hidden in the trees near the shore. The three of them are living in a large boat with a wooden shelter built on. They refer to it as an Ark.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Deerslayer has more opportunities to elaborate on his moral code of justice. His defense of the Native Americans defines his character just as Harry's unapologetic racism defines his. Deerslayer's comments about unjust laws will continue to develop as he expresses his opinion that the colonial laws that reward settlers for scalping Native Americans are unjust and against nature.

Harry's action in shooting at the deer marks another division between the two friends. Harry is impulsive and does whatever he pleases without thinking of the consequences. Deerslayer, on the other hand, is cautious and never does anything without a clear reason. Harry's impulsive actions have put the group in danger for the first time, though it will certainly not be the last. His insistence on acting rashly and emotionally will be a constant source of conflict for the group, which now consists of the Hutter family in addition to the two woodsmen.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Deerslayer and Harry join the Hutterers on their ark. Harry is most interested in Judith while Deerslayer is interested in learning how the ark was constructed. Deerslayer has a long conversation with Hetty, who is presented as innocent and angelic. In this conversation, Deerslayer gives some information about himself, including his Christian name, Nathaniel "Natty" Bumppo. He explains that the Delaware tribe assigned the name Deerslayer to him after going through several names, including Straight Tongue, The Pigeon, and Lap Ear.

Tom Hutter greets them with the news of the various tribes that have entered the area. He is worried for the safety of his daughters and is glad for help in protecting them. He is suspicious of Deerslayer when he mentions that his purpose in coming here is to meet his friend, Chingachgook, a member of the Delaware tribe.

Tom shows them a moccasin that he found. Deerslayer identifies it with one of the northern tribes that have sided with the French in the war between France and England. This worries Hutter, who wants to return to the castle for safety. The three men work together to pull the ark upstream and back into the lake. They must act as quickly and silently as possible to avoid alerting the enemy tribe in the area.

A group of Native Americans appears on the shore, preparing to attack. Deerslayer's group manages to get the ark into the open waters of the lake before taking cover from the attack. The ark floats toward the center of the lake, out of the range of the rifles.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Hutter's suspicions of Deerslayer's friendships with Native Americans shows his own prejudiced nature and will come up again later in his plans for scalping. Deerslayer shows his knowledge of the Native American traditions in his recognition of the moccasin's origin.

The group of Native Americans that they have encountered is part of the Canadas tribes, otherwise known as the Iroquois, Mingo, or Huron, named for their origins near the Great Lakes and what is now Canada. This group is aligned with the French government in that region. Deerslayer, Harry, the Hutterers, and the Delaware tribe are all aligned with the English government. The conflict between France and England in Europe has drawn sides in the Americas. This is the beginning of the conflict on American soil, so it is less clear who can or cannot be trusted.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Hutter shares his concerns over his daughters' safety in the dangerous area. Harry and Deerslayer both offer their assistance in protecting the girls from whatever might happen concerning the enemy Native Americans.

The presence of the tribe has given Hutter other, less noble ideas. He proposes that they attack the tribe to get their scalps, for which the local colonial government will pay a reward. Deerslayer refuses to help and declares it to be an immoral action. He is further disgusted when Hutter suggests scalping the women and children of the group as well. This prompts a discussion among the men about the morality of seeking revenge, which Deerslayer says is wrong.

The group eats dinner together. After the meal, Hetty sits at her father's feet and sings hymns. She pleads with him not to go scalping, but he disregards her opinion. The conversation turns to physical attractiveness, comparing Harry and Deerslayer as men and Judith and Hetty as women.

Later that night, Deerslayer has a private conversation with Judith. He confesses that he has heard rumors about her from Harry, which disturbs her. His conversation with her confuses him and he is not sure how to judge her.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The discussion about scalping sets up one of the ongoing conflicts in the novel. Hutter and Harry are convinced that there is no wrong and much profit in seeking scalps from the Native Americans. Deerslayer states that such practices might be permissible within Native American moral codes, but that they are never appropriate for white men to engage in. He argues that the colony is wrong to encourage this practice and that a higher law forbids the practice.

Hetty is also involved in this discussion, bringing up her own naive versions of religious teachings on seeking revenge and harming people. Her religious concerns will occur throughout the novel and consistently show the hypocrisy of the white settlers who profess their religion of humility and peace while acting violently against the Native Americans.

The conversation between Deerslayer and Judith is one of many conversations in which Judith tries to gain Deerslayer's admiration and trust and in which Deerslayer is made to feel uncomfortable. Deerslayer's discomfort comes mainly because of the rumors that Harry has shared with him about Judith's reputation, but also because of his own inexperience and hesitation in forming relationships with women. Deerslayer is

generally uncomfortable around women, particularly Judith, and prefers the company of men in the wilderness.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

At midnight, the ark reaches the castle. The girls go in and go to bed while the men discuss their plans. The first task is to find all the hidden canoes on shore so that the Iroquois will be unable to reach the castle. The three of them manage to find all the canoes and pull them to the center of the lake, hoping that they will not be able to drift to shore before the morning. After accomplishing this, they go to find the Iroquois encampment.

Deerslayer stays in the canoe while Harry and Hutter go in search of scalps. He paddles near the castle and waits for Harry's signal. Instead of hearing the signal, he hears a woman scream. Deerslayer paddles near the shore, not sure what he should do. He hears Harry's voice and realizes that the two men have been captured. He paddles back to the center of the lake and falls asleep in his canoe until morning.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The quest for scalps ends badly and the two men are taken prisoner. Deerslayer, the most cautious of the group, is unsure how to help them. He is inexperienced in violence and is unsure of his own ability to fight and possibly kill another human being. While he has warned them that what they are doing is wrong, he still helps them by taking them to the shore and agreeing to bring them back when they are finished. Deerslayer shows his own experience with the woods by being able to distinguish between the natural sounds of nature and the signal that Harry prepared.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Deerslayer awakes and surveys his surroundings. An Iroquois on shore takes a shot at him but misses. Deerslayer hesitates in firing back, unwilling to take a life. He calls out to the man and tells him that he does not want to fight. The two men talk together and the Iroquois agrees to go back to his tribe empty-handed. They part friendly. However, when Deerslayer turns his back, the Iroquois prepares to shoot him. Deerslayer is too quick for the Iroquois and shoots the man before he can shoot Deerslayer. Deerslayer goes over and looks at the dying man. He takes the man's gun and tried to make him comfortable. As the man lies dying, he tells Deerslayer that he should be called Hawkeye. Deerslayer refuses to take the man's scalp. Instead he returns to the castle, where Judith and Hetty are anxiously waiting.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Deerslayer kills his first victim, although he had tried to avoid it. True to his principles, he refuses to take the man's scalp. This encounter has earned him a new name, Hawkeye, which will be used to identify him in later books of the series. For the moment, the name is used when Deerslayer introduces himself to the other members of the Iroquois tribe. This encounter will also have consequences for Deerslayer in the future, as the tribe seeks to make up for the loss of their tribesman. The wife and brother-in-law of the fallen man will demand that Deerslayer marry the dead man's widow in order to support her and the dead man's children. Deerslayer's attitudes toward interracial marriage will then come to the forefront.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Deerslayer tells the girls what has happened to their father and Harry. During their conversation, Judith refers to an old chest that her father keeps in the house but which only Hetty has seen opened.

Deerslayer explains that his friend Chingachgook will be arriving that evening. Chingachgook is searching for his stolen bride, Wah-ta-Wah, who has been kidnapped by Briarthorn of the Iroquois tribe. Deerslayer has agreed to help Chingachgook rescue her. Judith tries to find out if Deerslayer has a lover of his own and is happy to find out that he is single.

The three of them prepare to defend themselves from attack as they wait for Chingachgook. When the time comes to meet him, they lock up the house and board the ark. They approach the meeting place cautiously, attempting to keep the Iroquois unaware of where they intend to go.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Deerslayer explains his mission in coming to the area. This gives Judith the opportunity to learn about Deerslayer's romantic feelings. Deerslayer is clear that he has had no contact with women and does not expect to. He expresses his opinions against interracial marriage, and claims that because he so rarely meets women of his own race, this means he probably will never marry. Judith is growing increasingly attached to Deerslayer and sees him as a very good candidate for a husband. Deerslayer does not understand her feelings and is generally uncomfortable around her.

The old chest is mentioned for the first time. It is a mysterious object and no one knows its contents. Judith is surprised to hear that Hetty has been allowed to see her father open the chest. This shows that their father trusts Hetty in ways that he does not trust Judith. The contents of the chest remain a mystery, but it is mentioned as a possible source of something to exchange for the freedom of the two men.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

They successfully pick up Chingachgook. Deerslayer and Chingachgook talk privately, using the Delaware language. Chingachgook has seen the Iroquois encampment and the two captives. Judith proposes buying their freedom with what possessions the Hutterers have to trade. Deerslayer is forced to admit that he killed a man, despite his resolution not to brag about the killing. As she gains respect for his honest character, Judith continues developing strong feelings for Deerslayer.

While everyone is looking for enemies along the shore, Hetty manages to steal a canoe and paddle away. They try to chase her but she gets away. She believes that she can reason with the Iroquois and convince them to release her father and Harry.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Deerslayer's reluctance to brag about his first kill is in contrast to Chingachgook, who wants to boast about it for the pride of the Delaware tribe. This is another instance in which Deerslayer claims that white men and Native American men should not do the same things. He feels that white men should not brag about killing in the way that Native Americans do. Deerslayer's principles continue to win the heart of Judith.

Hetty, generally disregarded because of her mental condition, has managed to trump them all by stealing the canoe and going to see the Iroquois herself. Hetty is in no danger from them, however, because of strong Native American respect for simple-minded people. Her mission to the Iroquois will be one of the many scenes in which the hypocrisy of the white Christians is shown by comparing the behavior of white men with Biblical teachings. Her own faith is crucial to her worldview and she is quite sure that no one, regardless of race, will be able to disagree with her.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Hetty evades Deerslayer and the others and reaches the shore. Deerslayer pursues her. She calls out to them from the shore, assuring them that God will protect her. They try to convince her to come back but she is sure that she can use Bible passages to persuade the Iroquois to release her father and Harry.

Hetty disappears into the forest and falls asleep. She is woken up the next morning by a family of brown bears. The bears follow Hetty as she makes her way through the forest. Hetty is discovered by Wah-ta-Wah, who tries to warn her about the Iroquois encampment. Hetty explains her plan. Wah-ta-Wah is delighted to hear that Chingachgook is nearby. The two girls become friends. Hetty confesses her mental condition. Wah-ta-Wah agrees to take Hetty into the encampment because she knows that no one will harm her. She warns Hetty not to mention Chingachgook, her father, or Harry when she enters the encampment.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Hetty's character is illustrated by her relationship with the family of bears. Her instinct to play with the baby bear shows her innocence.

Hetty's meeting with Wah-ta-Wah allows the two rescue missions to overlap. Wah-ta-Wah represents Native American womanhood and, even in this first meeting, is contrasted with white women in her attitude toward violence, manhood, and her reluctance to say anything about the man she loves. She brings Hetty back to the encampment because she knows that Hetty will be protected because of the Native American respect for people with Hetty's mental condition. This is an interesting philosophical claim, given that the Iroquois tribe is generally called evil by all the characters, yet still respects the traditions and customs of the so-called good tribes, like the Delawares.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The Iroquois group in the area is making its way to safer territory in the north because it is aligned with the French colonial government. Hetty's appearance in the encampment surprises the Iroquois but they are unsure of what to do about her. She talks to her father and learns that they did not take any scalps.

Wah-ta-Wah tells the chief about Hetty's mental condition so they treat her with great respect. Hetty reads them Bible verses about forgiveness. The chief, Rivenoak, questions her, pointing out that the white men he has met have not lived by this code. Hetty is upset by this and begins to cry. Rivenoak questions Hutter and Harry, who admit that they came in search of scalps. Because the Native Americans recognize the importance of collecting scalps, they are not angered by this motive. Rivenoak and the other elders continue to discuss the fate of their prisoners. Hutter tries to convince Wah-ta-Wah to help them escape but she refuses. Hutter also shows his anxiety at the thought that Judith might open the old chest in search of something with which to ransom him.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Hetty's appearance at the encampment is both innocent and ironic. She comes to share the Bible verses with them, sure in the idea that they will see the error of their ways. Hetty presents the Bible as the law of all Christian people. Because her own mind is not capable of dishonesty or hypocrisy, she is unable to understand when Rivenoak questions whether Christian people actually follow the Biblical laws. When faced with this mental strain, she can do nothing but cry.

Rivenoak's objections reflect the same discussions that Deerslayer had with Hutter and Harry before they set out to get scalps. During those earlier discussions, both Hutter and Harry expressed the naturalness of seeking revenge and the impracticality of being forgiving. The greater irony is that Harry, Hutter, and Rivenoak all believe the same things with respect to taking their own revenge. The main difference between the Native American belief and that of Hutter and Harry is that Hutter and Harry do not see how the Native Americans have the right to seek revenge against them, because they do not recognize the Native Americans as being human or as having any rights. In this way, the Native Americans, even of the enemy tribe, are shown as being more honest and forthright than their white counterparts.

The chest is mentioned again as a source of Hutter's secrets. When considering that his daughter might open the chest and view what is inside, he is very worried about what she might think or what secrets of his might be revealed.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

On the boat, Chingachgook puts on some of Hutter's old clothes as a disguise. Judith repeats her suggestion that they find something to exchange for her father and Harry. They decide to open the chest. First they need to find the key. They search the house and eventually discover it in the pocket of one of Hetty's dresses that is hanging on the wall in her bedroom. This implies that Hetty was entrusted with the key and Judith was not.

Inside the chest, they find many expensive pieces of clothing, including a complete outfit for a man and a woman. Judith tries on the fancy dress and everyone compliments her on how beautiful she looks. She considers keeping the dress for herself but gives up the idea because of Deerslayer's criticism. They put the clothing aside and find a pair of fancy dueling pistols.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The mystery of the chest is slowly being revealed. The first revelation is the location of the key. The key is in Hetty's pocket, the last place that Judith would ever look. It embarrasses her to see how far her father's distrust of her has gone. Her father has clearly shown that he trusts Hetty, both in letting her see him open the chest and in hiding the key in her belongings. These same actions have also shown how much he has kept hidden from Judith.

Inside the chest are many fancy possessions that surprise Judith, Deerslayer, and Chingachgook. The clothing is much fancier than anything that Hutter would have a reason to own. The pistols also look like they belong to someone very different from Hutter's social station. Judith is very impressed with the expensive dress. This dress and the other contents that she finds later in the chest are important in developing her own self knowledge, particularly as it relates to her own past and that of her mother.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The pistols delight Chingachgook and Deerslayer, who take turns practicing with them. They continue to look through the chest. They find a sailing tool that none of them recognizes. There is also an incomplete set of ivory chess pieces. The rook pieces are mounted on ivory elephants.

At first Deerslayer is very disturbed by these pieces. He has never heard of chess or elephants. He feels that they must be idols, worshipped as gods. Deerslayer expresses his worry that Hutter worships the idols and goes to great lengths to show his disapproval of such a practice. Unlike his previous arguments, he states that idolatry is wrong for all people, regardless of race or cultural background.

Judith recalls having seen similar pieces at the garrison when soldiers played board games. When they discover the game board, Deerslayer is convinced that Judith is right, and that the ivory pieces are just game pieces, not religious idols. He is very relieved by this.

As they are putting the contents of the chest back inside, Hetty is returned to the castle with the assistance of an Iroquois boy. Deerslayer is upset that someone was able to come into the castle without his knowledge, but acknowledges that the chest has kept everyone's attention from guarding the house. Hetty explains that the Iroquois have been converted and want to discuss religion at the castle. Deerslayer assumes that this is just a trick. Instead, he starts negotiations with the Iroquois boy by showing him the chess pieces. The boy is very impressed and goes off to tell the Iroquois about the ransom. Hetty mentions to Chingachgook that Wah-ta-Wah is in the encampment. Wah-ta-Wah has used Hetty to communicate a plan for her rescue. She will wait on the shore at the same point that Hetty came from late that night.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The examination of the chess pieces shows the ignorance of all of them. None of them have every seen this game and do not recognize what it is. Deerslayer's assumption that it is idolatry shows his own ignorance as well as his fierce opinions where religion is concerned. All three of them show the same astonishment at the elephants, thinking that they are mythical beasts of some kind. Judith's connection to the garrison and civilization comes in handy for the first time because she vaguely recalls something similar to the chess pieces and the elephants. She is able to convince Deerslayer that the chess pieces are only toys, not evil religious idols.

Hetty's sudden reappearance begins the negotiations between the Iroquois and the inhabitants of the castle. The Iroquois boy is equally impressed with the ivory elephants,

and it follows that the other Iroquois will be as well. The rescue plan for Wah-ta-Wah is set into place.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Chingachgook wants to attempt the rescue mission and bargaining alone, but Deerslayer convinces him not to go alone. They decide to put all their belongings into the ark because it will be much easier to defend instead of the castle. When they are settled on the ark, two Iroquois, including the chief Rivenoak, approach them on a raft. Deerslayer shows them the chess piece. The negotiations are tense but finally the Iroquois agree to take the chess pieces in exchange for the two men.

Later that day, Hutter and Harry are brought to the ark. The exchange is made. Within minutes of regaining his freedom, Harry attempts to shoot at the departing Iroquois, but Deerslayer manages to stop him in time.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The exchange is accomplished. Harry, again, does not see the risk in attempting to get instant revenge on the Iroquois. His behavior shows that he can never see the consequences to his actions. It also shows that his own violent nature does not recognize when he is in danger or when he puts other people in danger. Deerslayer has to restrain him to keep him from angering the Iroquois again so soon after rescuing him from danger.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Deerslayer tells Hutter how he ransomed the men. He shows Harry a cluster of bloody sticks that he believes is a declaration of war from the Iroquois. Hutter and Harry have a secret conversation but claim that they will follow Deerslayer's advice. Deerslayer suspects that they have come up with some plan of revenge. Chingachgook tells him that Harry and Hutter have formed a new plan to get scalps. Chingachgook, eager to gain honor by taking scalps, wants to go with them.

The three men set out for the encampment, but when they get there it is deserted. They are forced to return, disappointed. Harry and Hutter go to sleep. Chingachgook waits for the appointed time for meeting Wah-ta-Wah. He and Deerslayer go together to the meeting place. It is not the secluded spot they had thought. They discover that the Iroquois have set up their new encampment nearby.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Hutter and Harry continue with their reckless plan to gather scalps. They disregard their failure and capture from their first scalping attempt. While Chingachgook accompanies them the second time, it is clear that their motives are very different. Chingachgook goes for honor, to collect the scalps of warriors. Hutter and Harry are going for profit and would rather collect easy targets such as women and children.

The appointed meeting with Wah-ta-Wah is especially fortunate because it reveals the new location of the Iroquois encampment. However, it makes it more difficult for them to meet Wah-ta-Wah alone because the tribe is so close. They will have to think up a new strategy for rescuing her.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Deerslayer and Chingachgook go to rescue Wah-ta-Wah. Judith tries to convince Deerslayer not to go, but he is loyal to his friend.

They arrive on the shore, but Wah-ta-Wah is not there. Deerslayer goes back to the canoe to do a survey of the area while Chingachgook waits for Wah-ta-Wah on the shore. Deerslayer watches the encampment. Most of the warriors are gone, although one of the chiefs and all of the women and children are there. Wah-ta-Wah appears under guard. Deerslayer returns to Chingachgook to tell him what he saw. The two approach the edge of the encampment.

The warriors are deep in conversation about the elephant chess pieces, as is the group of women. Chingachgook gives a secret signal to Wah-ta-Wah to inform her that he is there. An opportunity presents itself when Wah-ta-Wah's guardian, an old woman, is sent to get water and takes Wah-ta-Wah with her. Deerslayer and Chingachgook surprise her in the woods. Deerslayer grabs the old woman while Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah escape. The old woman screams. The warriors come to find her, and trap Deerslayer.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The Iroquois have the same ignorance as Deerslayer in that they also have never seen an elephant and do not know what one is. The women and the elders both boast of their tribe's ability to defeat such a monster. The bond between Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah is shown in the recognition of the secret signal between them. Deerslayer sacrifices himself so that his friends can get away.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Deerslayer lets himself be taken prisoner so Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah can escape. Rivenoak interrogates Deerslayer about his relationship to the Delaware tribe and the Hutter family. Deerslayer reveals the plan and actions taken to rescue Wah-ta-Wah. Rivenoak is more concerned with getting whatever treasures remain in Hutter's chest. The Iroquois man who had kidnapped Wah-ta-Wah confronts Deerslayer.

Suddenly Hetty appears, sent by Judith to bargain for Deerslayer's life. Deerslayer wants her to leave and return to safety. He tells her that he thinks the Iroquois will torture him into betraying the Hutter, but he thinks he can withstand it.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The confrontation between Deerslayer and Rivenoak shows their different concerns. Deerslayer is concerned with keeping his honor and not betraying his friends. Rivenoak is thinking about how he can get the trinkets that might still be in Hutter's chest. Hetty, because of her mental condition, is a good mediator because she can safely enter both sides.

Deerslayer prepares himself for torture and does not ask his friends to help him. He sees the upcoming torture as something to help him prove his manhood.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The warriors are unsuccessful in their search for the canoe that brought Hetty. They set up watch over the encampment during the night, guarding Deerslayer. During the night, Hetty wakes up and leaves the camp. His lover distracts the guard posted on the shore. Hetty meets up with Judith who is hiding in the canoe in the bushes next to the shore. Hetty described the situation to her sister, who vows to liberate Deerslayer. They talk together for a long time before they begin to sail back out into the lake. They hear a woman scream and discover that the guard's lover has been shot. They paddle toward the center of the lake and go to sleep in the canoe.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Hetty and Judith have managed to outwit the Iroquois guards. Judith continues to show her strong feelings for Deerslayer. They see that the guard's lover has been shot but they do not know what has happened.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Harry, along with Hutter, has woken up and heard the story of how Deerslayer has been captured. He fired his gun by chance when he saw a person on the shore, the guard's lover. The others yell at him for doing such a foolish and unnecessary thing.

The next morning, Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah use the spyglass to monitor the area, including the castle. They see a moccasin floating in the water near the castle and are worried that the Iroquois have taken over the castle during the night. They share their concerns with Hutter and Harry, who think that it is a silly thing to worry about. Chingachgook seeks to gather further evidence by paddling his canoe out to gather the moccasin to see which tribe it came from. He brings the moccasin back and shows it to Wah-ta-Wah, who insists that it is Iroquois. The Iroquois moccasin alarms Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah, but Harry and Hutter insist that there is no danger at the castle. They express contempt for the Native Americans as they enter the castle.

When they enter the house, they discover that it is full of Iroquois who have been waiting all night to ambush them. Because they have been waiting in the castle, they do not yet know about the girl that Harry killed, so they have no plans to kill them. They capture Harry and Hutter. Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah escape using the ark.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Native American wisdom and caution is compared to the boastful manner of the white men. Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah discover the danger at the castle and try to convince Harry and Hutter not to go. They use clear logic and evidence to support their opinion. Harry and Hutter, however, refuse to consider anything carefully or logically, and think that the Native Americans are worrying over nothing. Harry and Hutter have a great laugh about the Native Americans and their caution. This quickly changes when it is clear that Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah are right and that Harry and Hutter have put themselves in great danger.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Harry and Hutter are taken prisoner. Harry is tied up and left on a platform in front of the castle. Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah watch from the ark, but are unable to help. They try but are unsuccessful at contacting Judith and Hetty, who are floating in a separate canoe in the center of the lake.

Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah steer the ark close enough to the platform to throw a rope to Harry, who catches it and is dragged behind the ark as they make another escape. Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah manage to drag Harry on board the ark. The Iroquois give up pursuit of the ark and go after the girls in the canoe. Judith and Hetty paddle to escape. The Iroquois break a paddle in their canoe and have to drop out of the chase. The girls reach the castle, which has since been deserted. They find that their father, who has been scalped, is slowly dying.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Again, when in a crisis, the white men, especially Harry, rely on the Native Americans to figure out a plan of action. Their caution and logic are contrasted to the brute strength that Harry provides. Wah-ta-Wah's plan to rescue Harry, though complex, is a success.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

On his deathbed, Hutter reveals that he is not the biological father of Judith and Hetty. The group from the ark returns to the Castle. Harry is regretful about his own attempts to scalp the Iroquois now that he sees Hutter's scalped head. After Hutter dies, the group takes his dead body out to the center of the lake and sinks it near where Hutter had sunk the body of his dead wife two years earlier.

Harry takes Judith aside and proposes to her. She refuses because she loves Deerslayer. She suggests that Harry go and inform the local garrison about the location of the Iroquois and bring back soldiers to help rescue Deerslayer. She mentions a Captain Warley, who she wishes to avoid seeing. It is assumed that she once had a romantic relationship with him.

Chapter 21 Analysis

The death of Hutter and his burial in the lake is deeply emotional for the members of the group. The revelation that Hutter is not the birth father of the two girls brings up more questions about his relationship with the mother of the girls as well as the mysteries surrounding the old chest. Harry's proposal and Judith's refusal follow her established feelings for Deerslayer. She respects him for his honest and strength of character and prefers him to Harry, who is physically attractive but with a weak moral center. Her conversation with Harry, however, also foreshadows the potential problems for Judith in forming a relationship with Deerslayer. The rumors of her past appear to have some truth in them, as the presence of particular military men is embarrassing for her.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Hetty and Judith sit together, alone, in a canoe to discuss their lives now that Hutter has died. Judith suggests that they move to the settlement for protection. She hopes that papers in the old chest will reveal the names and locations of family members that might help them. She also mentions her hopes in marrying Deerslayer. Hetty wants to stay at the castle and believes that they would be left in peace there.

In the distance, they see Deerslayer paddling toward them in a canoe. He explains that the Iroquois have granted him a furlough of twenty-four hours on the promise that he will return and face punishment from them. Judith urges him to flee while he has the chance, but Deerslayer insists on showing his honorable nature by being true to his promise.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The discussion between Judith and Hetty shows more division in the way that they think about their situation. Judith is quick to dismiss Hutter and end their connection. Hetty remains emotionally attached to him, despite learning that he is not her real father. Judith wants to go and live in the settlement because she fears that the two of them will be unsafe alone in the castle. Hetty, as usual, has a naive understanding of danger and wants to remain in her home.

Deerslayer's unexpected arrival is clearly meant to show more details of his honest character. The furlough is a test of his honor because he could so easily break his word and flee to safety. Instead, Deerslayer is determined to prove that he is honorable. Again, the Native American codes are illustrated as based on honor and dignity, and Deerslayer insists on upholding the codes.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Deerslayer explains the terms of his furlough. He has been sent to the group on the ark to ask them if they will agree to certain terms. The first concerns Wah-ta-Wah. The Iroquois want her to return to the tribe and marry one of their warriors. They also ask Judith to marry into the tribe in exchange for protection in the area. Both women refuse.

Harry leaves later that night to go to the local garrison and inform them of what is going on at the lake. Hetty gives him a very emotional farewell. Harry tries to convince Deerslayer not to return to the Iroquois but Deerslayer refuses to break his word.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The offers of marriage show how the Iroquois see the situation being resolved. They want to end the violence through union with the other side. These offers are refused primarily because both women have romantic attachments to other men. This foreshadows the marriage offers that Deerslayer will receive, one from Judith and another from the Iroquois tribe. His refusals will not be based on his feelings for another person. Instead, they will be based on philosophical and moral reasons.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Deerslayer and Judith examine the contents of the chest, looking for clues about the real father of the girls. They find a collection of letters. Some are written from a mother to a daughter, the daughter presumably being Judith's mother. The others come from suitors. Judith learns that her mother had a relationship with a man that resulted in the births of herself and Hetty. Then she married Thomas Hovey, the real name of Thomas Hutter, who had been a pirate.

The conversation turns to marriage as Judith seeks to show Deerslayer that she wants to marry him. He explains why he does not think that they would be a suitable married couple and recommends that she marry Harry or one of the soldiers at the garrison instead. She goes to bed discontented, with secret plans for the next day.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The letters from the chest reveal that Judith's mother had made some bad choices in her youth and, most likely, given birth to Judith and Hetty outside of wedlock. They also show that her mother was of a higher social class. Judith is disturbed by these revelations. She is eager to find out if Deerslayer feels anything for her and questions him about marriage. She is disappointed when he tells her that she is much more suited for the men of Harry's type who she has no respect for and that she is not good enough for the honorable, honest Deerslayer. She constructs some mysterious plan, probably designed to help Deerslayer escape from the Iroquois.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The next morning, all are in a philosophical mood. Chingachgook assures Deerslayer of his loyalty and that he will not return to the Delawares until he knows what has happened to his friend. The group discusses their views on life after death. This includes a comparison of Christian and native views on Heaven. Judith gives Deerslayer a Killdeer rifle that used to belong to Hutter. Deerslayer and Chingachgook take turns shooting at birds with the rifle.

Chapter 25 Analysis

The discussions of the afterlife make strong comparisons between the ideas about Heaven that exist in different cultures. The Happy Hunting Ground of the Native Americans is put on the same level as Heaven in the Christian worldview. Hetty, because of her mental condition, takes the discussion literally rather than metaphorically and insists that there is only one Heaven.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Deerslayer says his goodbyes to his friends as he prepares to return to captivity. He tells Judith how much he admires her. He tells Wah-ta-Wah to be proud of her lover, Chingachgook. He and Chingachgook have a long conversation reaffirming their friendship and their views of the afterlife.

Hetty, protected by her mental condition, takes Deerslayer back to the encampment. Deerslayer tries to talk to her about Harry and Judith but cannot make her understand.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Deerslayer's goodbyes show that he is resigned to dying at the hands of the Iroquois. He thinks it is honorable to return to them to face this punishment and tries to comfort his friends before he goes. The various conversations he has about life after death show his state of mind and show the expectations of his friends.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Deerslayer returned to the encampment where he is honored for keeping his promise. Rivenoak offers Deerslayer his freedom with one big condition. He must marry the widow of the Iroquois that he killed earlier. Deerslayer refuses because he does not believe in interracial marriage. The brother of the widow is insulted by his refusal and throws his tomahawk at Deerslayer's head. Deerslayer catches the tomahawk and throws it back at the man, hitting him in the forehead and killing him instantly. Deerslayer runs quickly into the woods, trying to escape. He hides under a fallen tree to elude the warriors. He makes his way back to the canoe and jumps in. There is not a strong enough current to carry the canoe into the water and Deerslayer cannot sit up to paddle it because the Iroquois are firing rifles at him. He lies down in the canoe and lets it drift into the lake.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Deerslayer refuses to marry the Iroquois woman out of principle and not out of romantic attachment to someone else. His swift reaction in throwing the tomahawk is similar to his quick action in killing the other Iroquois. Neither of these deaths is premeditated. They are both immediate responses to the threat that he will be killed. Although he was honorable in returning to the encampment, he takes the first chance to escape. Clearly, this sort of escape is viewed as an honorable advantage rather than a dishonest trick.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Deerslayer's canoe is captured and he is once more the prisoner of the Iroquois. He is returned to shore and has no further chance to escape. He meets Hetty, who is wandering in the area. Rivenoak wants to pardon Deerslayer but cannot accept the insult made by Deerslayer's rejection of an Iroquois wife.

Deerslayer's body is bound. The widow comes forward to state her case. Deerslayer again refuses her. The tribe takes this as a collective insult and prepares to begin the torture.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Rivenoak is impressed with Deerslayer's honesty as well as his sharp eye in throwing the tomahawk. He personally wants to let Deerslayer go. However, he is bound by the feelings of his tribe, who are insulted by Deerslayer and want to punish him. The group prepares to torture him along Native American traditions.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

The first phase of torture involves young braves throwing tomahawks at Deerslayer's head. The idea is to throw them as close to his head without actually touching him. Deerslayer does not flinch at the weapons. Rivenoak is impressed by this and asks the tribe if they would like to end the torture out of respect for Deerslayer's bravery. They refuse because the torture is very entertaining.

The second phase of torture is similar to the first except in this one the braves use rifles instead of tomahawks. Hetty intervenes, trying to stop the torture. She is listened to politely but no one follows her commands. The shooting resumes. Again Deerslayer does not move a muscle. Rivenoak proposes that they loosen the bonds so that Deerslayer's body will betray more weakness. This is done. The torture is interrupted by the arrival of a young Iroquois boy who has a message.

Chapter 29 Analysis

The torture is designed to show the skill and bravery of both sides. On the one hand, the Iroquois braves show their skill in aiming their weapons as close to Deerslayer as possible without actually hurting him. On the other, Deerslayer is able to show his bravery by not flinching during the torture. Rivenoak is impressed by Deerslayer at many points and wants to release him out of respect. The tribe, however, enjoys the torture and wants to continue.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

The young Iroquois boy announces the arrival of Judith. Judith is dressed in the expensive dress from the chest and pretends to be a wealthy and powerful woman. Her appearance impresses the members of the tribe, who believe that she represents great power. The plan is undone, however, when Rivenoak asks Hetty to identify Judith. Hetty is unable to lie and reveals that Judith is her sister, a girl with whom everyone in the tribe is familiar. The tribe continues in its preparations for torture, this time by fire. They are interrupted by Wah-ta-Wah, who has arrived with a knife to cut Deerslayer free. Her plan fails but she challenges Briarthorn, the man who kidnapped her from the Delawares, to fight Deerslayer man-to-man to show who is superior. At this point Chingachgook appears and frees Deerslayer. Just as the Iroquois are about to attack them, a group of soldiers from the local garrison appear. Deerslayer and his friends manage to hide as the soldiers advance and take over the encampment.

Chapter 30 Analysis

The torture is interrupted by each of Deerslayer's friends, who each use their own gifts to rescue him. First is Hetty, who uses her Biblical arguments and simple-minded innocence to free him. Judith follows, who wishes to overpower the tribe with beauty and wealth, based on her observations of wealthy people in the settlement. Wah-ta-Wah brings a secret weapon as well as arguments about honor among the men.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

The next morning, soldiers have secured the area. All of the Iroquois women have been killed. Most of the warriors have also been killed, and the remaining few have fled into the forest. Hetty has also been shot in the battle and is dying in the castle. Captain Warley of the garrison explains that the soldiers had been alerted to the presence of the Iroquois in the area and, on their way there, had met Harry, who showed them the specific location.

The group of friends gathers around Hetty, trying to offer her comfort as she dies. She gives her love to all of them and then slowly passes away.

Chapter 31 Analysis

The massacre of the Iroquois tribe is passed over without detail. There is little to no description of the violent struggle other than referring to the cleaning of the weapons afterward. The Iroquois have been wiped out. Hetty has become an innocent victim of the massacre. Everyone is regretful about her injury and they gather to comfort her as she dies.

Captain Warley, the man who Judith mentioned as someone she never wanted to see again, is directing the soldiers. He is sensitive to Judith's feelings and tries to stay out of her way. This gives more evidence that the two of them have had some kind of romantic relationship in the past.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

The soldiers attend to the dead and Judith closes up the house and prepares to leave her home. Hetty's body is sunk into the lake along with her mother and Hutter. Judith takes Deerslayer aside and confesses that she loves him and wants to marry him. She invites him to live with her at the castle. Deerslayer rejects her, and shows that his feelings are based on the rumors he heard from Harry. Deerslayer, Chingachgook, and Wah-ta-Wah return to the Delaware tribe.

Fifteen years later, Deerslayer and Chingachgook return to the area. Both have gained fame as warriors. They find the castle deserted, as though it has not been inhabited since they left it long ago. They cannot learn anything about Judith in the settlement, aside from rumors that she left to be the mistress of Captain Warley.

Chapter 32 Analysis

The final goodbyes among the characters confirm that Deerslayer and Judith will not marry. Judith's past continues to haunt her and it is rumored that she gave up her attempts to lead an honest life in going to live with Captain Warley without marrying him. Deerslayer and Chingachgook both become famous warriors, although their stories are left to be told in the other novels in the series.



Characters

Deerslayer / Hawkeye / Nathaniel Bumppo

Nathaniel Bumppo's origins are unclear. He lives with the Delaware tribe for at least ten years and develops an understanding of Native American customs and languages. His contact with Native Americans has given him a high respect for them, although he considers himself to be separated from them by his race and religion. He is given the name Deerslayer because he is an expert marksman. However, he is very opposed to violence that has no purpose. His quick shooting during a confrontation with an Iroquois tribesman earns him the name Hawkeye, which is what he is known by in the other books of the series.

Deerslayer is presented as a philosophical frontiersman. His great love affair is with nature and he has little romantic affection for women. His life is ordered by strong moral convictions as well as his never-ending commentary on the gifts of each race. He considers the actions of the Native Americans to be honorable, although he makes it clear that he, as a white man, cannot take part in them. His opposition to scalping in white men while recognizing its symbolic value for Native Americans shows how he distinguishes that which is done for honor from that which is done for money.

Hurry Harry March

Harry is everything that Deerslayer is not. He is handsome, while Deerslayer is plain. He is impulsive and never stops to consider the consequences of his actions. At several points in the narrative where caution would have avoided further violence, Harry acts quickly and brings danger to the group. He brags of his superiority over the Native Americans, even as they outsmart him over and over again.

Harry's mission in the area is to propose to Judith. He is very clear that his only criterion for marriage is physical beauty. Judith is disgusted by Harry's boastfulness and lack of moral convictions. Harry's version of morality is whatever suits him at the time. He is unapologetically racist and considers the Native Americans to be less than human. He feels that any actions he takes against them are justified and never acknowledges his responsibility for attacking or provoking them.

Chingachgook / Big Serpent

Chingachgook is Deerslayer's lifelong friend. His own tribe, the Mohicans, has died out and he has joined the Delawares. He has fallen in love with Wah-ta-Wah and seeks to rescue her from kidnappers. The bond between Chingachgook and Deerslayer is strong. They respect each other highly and have proven their worthiness to each other many times. At the same time, they follow different moral codes and do different things



with their lives. Their friendship provides understanding for each lifestyle. Chingachgook shows himself to be an honorable and trustworthy friend.

Thomas Hutter (Hovey)

Thomas Hovey is a pirate who changed his name to Hutter to avoid being captured. He married his wife, the mother of Judith and Hetty, although she was far above him socially. He keeps a locked chest full of his dead wife's belongings that he does not want his daughters to see. Hutter has kept his family isolated from civilization in a house called Muskrat Castle, which is built in the center of the lake. His isolation has provided the opportunity for Judith to get involved with some of the soldiers in the garrison. Hutter tries to protect Judith and Hetty, even though they are not his biological daughters. His hunt for scalps to exchange for money endangers the whole group and eventually results in his death. On his deathbed he realizes that it was wrong for him to do so. He also confesses then that he is not really Judith and Hetty's father.

Judith Hutter

Judith Hutter is very beautiful and has spent many years socializing with the soldiers from the local garrison. She has developed a bad reputation among the locals in the area, and has had a least one romantic relationship with a man named Captain Warley. Her religious mother and Thomas Hutter have raised Judith at the isolated castle. Judith is happy to find out that Thomas Hutter is not her biological father. Harry wants to marry her, but she has never liked him.

When Judith meets Deerslayer, she immediately is impressed with his honesty and reliability. She respects him and hopes to form a relationship with him. However, the rumors about her past keep Deerslayer from being able to respect her. She is forced to give up her hopes of marrying him. It is rumored that she goes to live with Captain Warley, but there is no clear evidence of that.

Hetty Hutter

Hetty Hutter is the younger sister of Judith. She is simple minded and innocent. Her mental condition makes everyone trust her. It also gives her special status among the Native Americans, who hold simple-minded people in high respect. She wanders freely among the Iroquois tribe and tries to preach Biblical teachings against revenge and violence. They listen politely to her because they respect her mental condition.

Hetty had a particularly close relationship to her mother and mourns for Thomas Hutter even after learning that he is not her biological father. She shows herself to be particularly resourceful, despite her mental condition. Hetty develops a crush on Harry that leads her to defend him at all times. During the massacre of the Iroquois, Hetty is accidentally shot. She dies and her body joins those of her mother and Hutter in a grave in the lake.



Wah-ta-Wah / Hist-o-Hist

Wah-ta-Wah is the bride of Chingachgook. Her reputation for beauty and wisdom has made her a great prize among the Native American communities. She is kidnapped by Briarthorn and taken from the Delaware tribe to live with the Iroquois. Chingachgook rescues her from that tribe and they return to live among the Delawares, where Wah-ta-Wah dies through some natural circumstance that is not described.

Wah-ta-Wah proves to be resourceful and intelligent. She translates the various languages between Hetty and the Iroquois. She is very clever in identifying the moccasin found floating in the lake and warns the others that the castle might be a trap. She defends her friends and puts herself at risk to help them. Her relationship with Chingachgook is strong and based on mutual respect and love.

Rivenoak

Rivenoak is the main chief of the Iroquois tribe. He shows great respect for Deerslayer and often takes his side against his own tribe. Rivenoak finds Deerslayer to be brave and honest.

Captain Warley

Captain Warley is connected in some way to Judith's bad reputation. Judith mentions his name several times with embarrassment. When he arrives with the soldiers and stays after the massacre, the two of them are very uncomfortable around each other. It is rumored at the conclusion of the novel that he and Judith have gone away together, but have not gotten married.

Briarthorn

Briarthorn is the Iroquois brave that kidnaps Wah-ta-Wah from the Delawares. He shows himself to be impulsive and weak and has to drop his claim to marry her.



Objects/Places

Muskrat Castle

Thomas Hutter builds a house in the middle of the lake in order to be secure in an isolated area. The castle is strongly built and often left empty for long periods of time as Hutter and his daughters go to seek animal skins and other goods. The castle is used by the Iroquois to ambush Harry and Hutter, and Hutter is scalped inside his own home.

Glimmerglass

Glimmerglass is the local name for the lake, based on its mirror-like surface. The lake has no official English name and is often marked incorrectly on maps. The lake is the center of most of the action in the novel, and is usually a place of safety and refuge. Controlling access to the lake is important to all the strategic decisions.

The Ark

This boat with a covered shelter on it provides transportation and defense for the Hutter family and their friends. The group lives on it at various times because it is easier to defend than the castle.

The Encampment

The Iroquois tribe is making its way to the north to be within the safety of French territory. It is unusual because it is made up of equal numbers of warriors and women and children. The encampment is temporary as the group heads north. Hutter sees it as a good opportunity to make money by taking scalps, especially those of the women and children. The encampment is moved during the course of events to provide better security to the tribe. Wah-ta-Wah is kept there until Deerslayer and Chingachgook rescue her. Hutter, Harry, and Deerslayer are each kept prisoner there for periods of time. Hetty is the only one who can enter and exit the encampment as she likes, because the tribe has great respect for her mental condition.

The Garrison

The garrison is mentioned throughout the novel, although no soldiers actually arrive until the very end. Judith's relationship to the garrison is problematic and is the source of the rumors that spread about her relationships with the soldiers. Harry goes to seek their help after Deerslayer is captured and happens to meet a group of soldiers on the way. They return and massacre the Iroquois tribe, including accidentally killing Hetty.



The Delaware Tribe

Wah-ta-Wah is from the Delaware tribe. Chingachgook has joined this tribe because his own tribe, the Mohicans, has died out. Deerslayer has a long-standing relationship with this tribe. The Delaware tribe is aligned with the English colonies.

The Iroquois / Mingo / Huron / Canadas Tribe

Called by many different names, the Iroquois tribe is aligned with the French colonies and is therefore the enemy of the Delaware as well as of the English speaking settlers.

The French and Indian War

French and British colonial governments fought each other over territory in North America. Known as the French and Indian War in the United States because of the alliances between the French and many Native American tribes, the conflict continued in Europe as the Seven Years War. In the novel, the Iroquois and the Huron are used interchangeably and aligned with the French. Historically, the Iroquois were aligned with the British colonists and the Huron with the French.

Warpath

Native American tribes in the region had various formal traditions relating to warfare. One tradition was the establishment of two separate trading paths. People walking on the normal trading path were considered to be peaceful. Those walking on the warpath were declaring their intentions for battle.

Moccasins

The woven shoes of the Native American tribes are also worn by most of the white characters. These shoes are often left behind and provide clues about the locations of various tribes. Moccasins are shown as having distinct patterns for each tribe.

The Old Chest

The old chest in the castle contains the mementos and letters of Judith and Hetty's mother. Hutter keeps the chest locked and the contents secret. After he is taken prisoner his daughters open the chest to use the contents to ransom him. The letters in the chest reveal that Hutter is not their biological father and that their mother suffered some disgrace during the time of their birth.



Social Sensitivity

All of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels center on the contrast between the primitive but usually noble world of the Indian and the frontiersman and that of civilized society. In *The Deerslayer*, it is young Natty Bumppo, raised by Indians in a life close to nature, who comes in conflict with the world of greed and corruption represented by Hurry March and Tom Hutter, an old trapper who lives in a "swimming fortress" in the middle of a wilderness lake. The lake has also been chosen as a meeting place for Natty, known among the Indians as the Deerslayer, and his Delaware Indian friend Chingachgook, the Serpent.

Although *Deerslayer* is used to the often harsh practices of the Indians, he does not condone them; he does understand their reasons for their desire to take scalps and kill their enemies.

What he does not understand is the greed which drives white men like Tom Hutter and Hurry to do the same, merely for the sake of the money the government has offered for Indian scalps. During his stopover at Tom's "water castle," a stockade and house built on a platform in the middle of the lake, *Deerslayer* is drawn into a feud with marauding Canadian Indian tribes, the Miwok. He agrees to defend his white fellowmen until his friend arrives, but he refuses their plan to make a night raid on the Indians to capture scalps. Instead, he stays behind to protect Tom's two daughters, the beautiful Judith and the mentally retarded Hetty. When Tom and Hurry are captured by the Indians, *Deerslayer* is at first inclined to consider this a just punishment but agrees to help them for the sake of Judith and Hetty.

During this adventure, *Deerslayer* kills his first man, a loss of innocence, and is given a new name by his dying Indian enemy. He is now Hawkeye.

Although Cooper's hero *Deerslayer* is a faithful friend to his Indian brother Chingachgook, he is not on the side of the red man against the European and American intruders. He has no compunction killing his Miwok enemies who are referred to with disdain as tramps and trash. Even Chingachgook, who is the personification of the "noble savage," is shown to kill his enemies and to take scalps. And when it comes to choosing sides, *Deerslayer* is firmly on the side of his compatriots — he considers himself a white man bound by religion and culture to assist other whites. Cooper reflects the nineteenth-century romantic attitude of the man who lives close to nature as moral, noble, and unspoiled, an idea that found its source in the eighteenth-century writings of Rousseau and other writers of the Age of Reason. It is Natty who fits this image, the white scout who has grown up as part of the wilderness, not the red man.

Deerslayer has the innocence and nobility of a man close to nature and demonstrates this when he keeps his word to return to his Indian captors, to the surprise of Hurry and Tom, whose corrupt and greedy nature fails to understand such action. The only one who understands *Deerslayer*'s concept of honor is his friend Chingachgook, who risks

his own freedom and life to rescue his friend. He, too, is a child of a simple, natural code.

While Deerslayer has a clearer concept of right and wrong than those more civilized, his social graces are somewhat undeveloped. He does not understand or recognize the growing love of the beautiful Judith who is strongly attracted to him. Feeling that he is not the right person for her, he rejects her and hurts her without realizing it.



Techniques

The *Deerslayer* is an adventure novel, and action and suspense dominate the plot. There are a number of climaxes, each with a cliff hanger. Excitement builds up as first Tom Hutter and Hurry, and later *Deerslayer*, become prisoners of the enemy Indian tribe. Their individual rescue attempts form mini climaxes in a series of suspenseful events. There is a canoe to be recovered, prisoners to be freed, Indians to be evaded, while the enemy Iroquois are equally cunning in trying to achieve their goal of capturing the whites and gaining their floating home.

Cooper is a master of slowly building up to a climax — "as *Deerslayer* drew nearer and nearer to the land, the stroke of his paddle grew slower and slower, his eyes became more watchful, and his ears and nostrils almost dilated with the effort to detect any lurking danger." The series of events leads to an important turning point when *Deerslayer* kills his first enemy. Until then, he has been unproven and has only achieved fame as a hunter, as his name indicates. Now he has been "blooded," and his fallen enemy himself gives him a new name — the name of Hawkeye.

The *Deerslayer* has the most unified plot of all the *Leatherstocking Tales*.

Most of Cooper's other novels have multiple plots and subplots, but here, every part of the action and every character is tightly woven into the single story line — the fight between the Iroquois and the inhabitants of the "swimming fortress." This gives the novel a unity of form and purpose that is rare in Cooper's fiction.

Stylistically, Cooper's novels follow the taste of the time, striving for ornateness rather than simplicity. This quality is most often conspicuous when the author lapses into moral generalizations. His language is most effective during the dramatic portions of the novel. Then his writing uses a quick, racy prose, but during didactic and moral contemplations it tends to be long-winded and vague. The author also takes pains to represent the rustic speech of his frontier characters which sometimes seems forced. His Indians all speak a broken English with the exception of Chingachgook, whose infrequent utterances are simple but clear.



Themes

Themes

The Deerslayer is not the first of the Leatherstocking Tales that Cooper wrote; in fact it is his last. Therefore, it reflects a greater maturity and sensitivity compared to his earlier works such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and *The Prairie* (1827). Cooper is aware of the unhappy collision of civilization and a natural, Edenlike state of nature. He himself explains in his preface to the 1850 edition of the Leatherstocking Tales that his man of the forest "possessed little of civilization but its highest principles as they are exhibited in the uneducated . . . on the other hand, removed from nearly all the temptations of civilized life, placed in the best associations of that which is deemed savage, and favorably disposed by nature to improve such advantages, was a fit subject to represent the better qualities of both conditions. . ." Natty Bumppo, the Deerslayer, is indeed, the answer as Cooper saw it. Christianity as well as natural virtue, raise human beings above the corruption. Neither Tom nor Hurry possess this natural nobility, although they are civilized and Christian. They are willing to kill and scalp for greed. Hetty, on the other hand, is pious and good, but lacks the natural ability to live and survive. Her attempts to convert the Mingos is impractical and futile. The theme of the "Noble Savage" is expressed in the Deerslayer but tempered by realism: Natty Bumppo despises the greed of the white scalpers, but he is also willing to kill for self-defense and survival.

Goodness (Hetty) alone is not sufficient for survival and sometimes dangerous without common sense.

Although Cooper sees the conflict between Indians and settlers from a white man's point of view, he is aware of the racial and cultural price that is paid in the westward expansion. Yet he considers the price worth paying. His Indians are not perfect — those closest to Christianity such as the Delaware, who were influenced by the Moravian missionaries, are the best, while the Hurons and other tribes are often described disdainfully as scum and vagabonds. The white man has the role as spreader of civilization. The doctrine of Manifest Destiny which served nineteenth-century America as a mandate for expansion, is alive and well in Cooper's novels. On the other hand, Deerslayer is not unaware of the injustice the white man is doing to the native. Wah-Tah, Chingachgook's girl, angrily asks Judith and Hetty why their father is scalping women and children, and Rivenoak, the Mingo chief, asks Hetty who is attempting to convert his people by reading them from the Bible, why the whites do not follow the Christian teaching they profess. Neither receives an answer — there is no solution. When Deerslayer first sees the untouched wilderness of Lake Otsego, he reflects on its beauty, but when he returns, his feelings are melancholy. The primitive forest and untouched lake have been scenes of horror and violence because of the deeds of other civilized men.



Life in the wilderness is romantic, but offers little in terms of romance and close relationships. The frontiersman of Cooper resembles the later cowboy of the Western who kisses the girl but rides off into the sunset. There is a curiously detached quality to the romantic elements of the novel. Deerslayer is unaware of the deep feelings of Judith, just as Hurry ignores the simple devotion of Hetty, who worships him. Human relationships are impermanent at best, and the only close bond, the friendship of Deerslayer and Chingachgook, is reserved and offers little intimacy. Each would die for the other, but neither tries to understand the other. And there is little emotion except for censure, when Deerslayer leaves Judith, now alone and without protection, and later discovers her disreputable life with the officers of another garrison.

Racial Gifts

Deerslayer makes many distinctions between the Native Americans and the white settlers. These distinctions define the actions he thinks are appropriate for each racial group. His reasoning stands in direct contrast to Harry and Hutter, who do not consider the Native Americans to be people at all, much less people of a distinct cultural traditions.

Religion is a recurring issue in determining the guilt and innocence of the Native American tribes as well as the white settlers. Hetty and Deerslayer both profess Christian values of peace and forgiveness. Often they expand these values to cover all white people, usually with ironic results as the white characters, such as Harry and Hutter, act on the same principles of revenge without the same considerations for honor that the Native Americans have. In particular, Hetty and Deerslayer take offense at scalping. Deerslayer defends the practice among Native Americans where it is the result of honorable battle. His friend Chingachgook, for example, seeks scalps for the honor of himself and his tribe. Deerslayer argues that it is wrong for white people to do the same, however, and disputes on a personal level with Harry and Hutter and on a political level with the colonial government for encouraging white settlers to take scalps in exchange for reward money. He argues his belief that white settlers are not justified in taking scalps because it is not part of Christian tradition and, when applied by the white settlers, the action is usually pursued for greed rather than honor.

Deerslayer usually stands alone as the only white character that stands for honor and honesty. The other white characters, particularly the men, are unashamed at the deceit and destruction that they cause. Their actions against the Native Americans are usually motivated by greed and are usually carried out impulsively without any real plan or consideration of the consequences. The Native Americans, on the other hand, are always shown to have an honorable motive in their actions as well as the ability to develop a clear plan to be acted on logically and unemotionally. At every opportunity, Harry and Hutter advocate deceiving or taking advantage of the Iroquois, while Deerslayer insists on being true to his word and never doing anything that would dishonor him with his enemies.



Nature

Deerslayer takes time out from the narrative to admire the natural beauty of the world around him. He comments on the beauty of unspoiled nature and is worried about the encroachment of settlers and civilization on the forests where he lives. His own attitudes toward nature define his relationship with it.

Deerslayer lives with, not against nature. While he is an expert marksman, he thinks it is wrong to kill animals without a clear purpose for eating them or using their skins. When Harry takes aim for the deer, Deerslayer is offended because Harry has no intention to use the dead animal and merely targets it out of vanity. Similarly, he regrets the fun he has shooting at birds with his new rifle and does what he can to save the birds from pain.

Deerslayer rejects most organized religion, despite his insistence that he is Christian. He argues that churches in the settlement are more concerned with protecting their own interests than in spreading the love of God. He feels that nature is a perfect place of worship and that in protecting nature one shows one's love of God. He often compares the wilderness to religion and expresses his belief that nature and God are one. He clearly recognizes nature as a religion and rejects any human law that goes against nature.

In addition to seeing nature as a religion, Deerslayer also claims that it is the only thing he truly loves. He rejects many proposed relationships with women, and generally views women as part of civilization and therefore in contrast to the wilderness of nature. Instead, he argues that nature is the most beautiful thing he knows and that he is most comfortable when he is alone in the wilderness.

Relationships Between Men and Women

The relationships between men and women are a recurring theme in the novel, showing many instances of both good and bad relationships. Deerslayer displays clear moral principles in his exploration of each relationship, as he does in everything.

The model relationship presented is between Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah. Because they come from the same background, they have the same beliefs and traditions. They instinctively know what to do with each other and rarely require any discussion to decide their actions. Chingachgook's use of secret signals that Wah-ta-Wah recognizes shows the deep connection between the two. Throughout their relationship, however, several of the white characters, particularly Deerslayer and Hetty, admonish Chingachgook to act kindly to his wife and not to treat her in the usual Native American way, which they imply is very violent and neglectful.

Several broken relationships are also presented. Thomas Hutter and his wife have a very mysterious relationship, which is not understood until the secret letters from the chest reveal the true nature of their marriage. Hutter is portrayed very negatively while



his wife is given credit for redeeming herself through religious repentance. The relationships between Judith and Harry and Judith and Captain Warley are also presented as broken. Judith cannot marry Harry because she has no respect for him. At the same time, Judith's secret relationship with Captain Warley does not end in marriage and she will always be trapped because of her past behavior with him.

The other issue presented regarding relationships between men and women is Deerslayer's insistence that the races should not intermarry. Deerslayer is very clear on this point and he is willing to face death in order to uphold this belief. The other characters, however, do not express such strong opinions in the matter and are often shown to be open to such relationships if they are convenient.



Style

Points of View

The story is told in third person omniscient. The reader is able to listen to many of the thought processes of the characters, including Judith, Hetty, Harry, and Rivenoak. However, the vast majority is devoted to Deerslayer. In the beginning of the novel, the characters are introduced by the author, who explains the time period as well as giving an overview of the region. The author makes great distinctions between the time of the novel and the present time in which the novel is written. He does this the most clearly in the beginning, but also inserts little comments here and there during the narrative.

Setting

The story is set in colonial New York in the early 1740s. All of the action takes place at Glimmerglass Lake, although significant background detail comes from the nearby Delaware tribal lands as well as the settlements and military garrisons in the area.

The natural surroundings are described in great detail in order to show how untouched the area has been by people. In addition, the geographically location of the lake and the river it feeds into are also shown in detail in order to stage the various events of the narrative.

Language and Meaning

The narrative is written in clear, Standard English although some of the vocabulary used is old-fashioned and may be difficult for some readers. Most of the story is told using dialogue among the characters. All the background information is delivered in conversation. The spoken words are written phonetically in order to show the accents of the characters. Judith and Hetty speak very clearly because of their educational background. Deerslayer and the other white men all speak with distinct accents that can often be difficult to understand. Words or letters are often omitted and other words are spelled phonetically. The Native Americans, when not being translated from a Native American language, speak in broken sentences. Many of the characters refer to Native American words and expressions, which can be difficult for readers not familiar with these terms.

Structure

The novel is one of a series of novels about Natty Bumppo. This novel chronicles his early adventures, particularly the first time that he has to kill another person.



The novel is written in thirty-two chapters. Each chapter opens with a short piece from a poem or other piece of writing. These pieces are all labeled with the name of the author, the piece, and the page numbers. These opening pieces do not directly relate to the story, but often have some metaphorical hint about what is going to happen.

For the most part the novel is written chronologically. There are some points where characters remember things that have happened in the past or discuss things that have happened in the past, but these are incorporated into the narrative. The last chapter skips ahead fifteen years into the future, but the events that have been skipped are presented in other books of the series.



Quotes

"'Common territory' exclaimed Hurry, laughing aloud. 'I should like to know what Floating Tom Hutter would say to that! He claims the lake as his own property, in virtue of fifteen years' possession, and will not be likely to give it up to either Mingo or Delaware without a battle for it!'" (Chapter 1)

"In a word, the hand of man had never yet defaced or deformed any part of this native scene, which lay bathed in the sunlight, a glorious picture of affluent forest grandeur, softened by the balminess of June, and relieved by the beautiful variety afforded by the presence of so broad an expanse of water." (Chapter 2)

"'That depends on your inimy. As for scalping, or even skinning a savage, I look upon them pretty much the same as cutting off the ears of wolves for the bounty, or stripping a bear of its hide. And then you're out significantly, as to taking the poll of a red-skin in hand, seeing that the very colony has offered a bounty for the job; all the same as it pays for wolves' ears and crows' heads.'" (Chapter 3)

"'Not after I was rich enough to buy a rifle,' returned the other, betraying a little pride through his usually quiet and subdued manner; 'then it was seen I could keep a wigwam in ven'son; and in time I got the name of 'Deerslayer,' which is that I now bear; homely as some will think it, who set more value on the scalp of a fellow-mortal than on the horns of a buck'" (Chapter 4)

"'I've no such feelin', nor any wish to harbor it, not I,' returned the other. 'My gifts are not scalpers' gifts, but such as belong to my religion and color. I'll stand by you, old man, in the ark or in the castle, the canoe or the woods, but I'll not unhumanize my natur' by falling into ways that God intended for another race. If you and Hurry have got any thoughts that lean towards the colony's gold, go by yourselves in s'arch of it, and leave the females to my care. Much as I must differ from you both on all gifts that do not properly belong to a white man, we shall agree that it is the duty of the strong to take care of the weak, especially when the last belong to them that natur' intended man to protect and console by his gentleness and strength.'" (Chapter 5)

"It would be difficult to convey to the minds of those who have never witnessed it, the sublimity that characterizes the silence of a solitude as deep as that which now reigned over the Glimmerglass. In the present instance, this sublimity was increased by the gloom of night, which threw its shadowy and fantastic forms around the lake, the forest, and the hills. It is not easy, indeed, to conceive of any place more favorable to heighten these natural impressions, than that Deerslayer now occupied." (Chapter 6)

"To cock and poise his rifle were the acts of a single moment and a single motion: then aiming almost without sighting, he fired into the bushes where he knew a body ought to be, in order to sustain the appalling countenance which alone was visible. There was not time to raise the piece any higher, or to take a more deliberate aim. So rapid were



his movements that both parties discharged their pieces at the same instant, the concussions mingling in one report." (Chapter 7)

"No one suspects you, Deerslayer,' the girl impetuously cried. 'No - no - your honest countenance would be sufficient surety for the truth of a thousand hearts! If all men had as honest tongues, and no more promised what they did not mean to perform, there would be less wrong done in the world, and fine feathers and scarlet cloaks would not be excuses for baseness and deception.'" (Chapter 8)

"Judith,' said the young man, looking up at her with a smile and an expression of earnest curiosity, that in spite of the growing obscurity did not escape the watchful looks of the girl, 'can you find it in your heart, to part with your own finery, to release prisoners; even though one be your own father, and the other is your sworn suitor and lover?'" (Chapter 9)

"The first impulse of Hetty, who had been mistress of several of these cubs, was to run and seize the little creature as a prize, but a loud growl warned her of the danger of such a procedure." (Chapter 10)

"No - no - Hist, there can't be two sides to truth - and yet it does seem strange! I'm certain I have read the verses right, and no one would be so wicked as to print the word of God wrong. That can never be, Hist.'" (Chapter 11)

"A ransom! Old Tom has paid the fiddler, then, for nothing of mine would have bought off the hair, much less the skin. I didn't think men as keen set as them vagabonds would let a fellow up so easy, when they had him fairly at a close hug, and floored. But money is money, and somehow it's unnat'ral hard to withstand. Indian or white man, 'tis pretty much the same. It must be owned, Judith, there's a considerable of human natur' in mankind ginirally, arter all!" (Chapter 15)

"Do the missionaries teach their white brethren to think it is so?' demanded the Indian, with serious earnestness. 'The Delawares believe that good men and brave warriors will hunt together in the same pleasant woods, let them belong to whatever tribe they may; that all the unjust Indians and cowards will have to sneak in with the dogs and the wolves to get venison for their lodges.'" (Chapter 26)

Adaptations

The Deerslayer was adapted as a made-for-television motion picture that aired in 1978. It was directed by Dick Friedenberg. Its cast includes Steve Forrest as Hawkeye and Ned Romero as Chingachgook in a tale of revenge.

They are supported by John Anderson and Joan Prather. Although not a bad motion picture, The Deerslayer plainly shows its television origin as a shallow rendition of Cooper's complex, richly detailed tale.

There have been many motion picture adaptations of Cooper's novels about Hawkeye. The outstanding example of these is the 1992 version of The Last of the Mohicans. Michael Moran's direction is brilliant, capturing the frantic action scenes of the novel as well as the pacing of the story's events.

The cinematography is lush, full of the rich colors of forest and river. Its cast features a deadly serious Daniel Day-Lewis, as well as Madeleine Stowe, Russell Means, Eric Schweig, Jodhi May, Steven Waddington, Maurice Roeses, and Patrice Chereau. Audiences and critics received this rendition of tragedy and romantic love warmly.

Its main characters are almost supermen, as they are in the novel, and they fight with all the artistry depicted in Cooper's book. The Last of the Mohicans is also one of the rare adaptations of Cooper's work to accurately capture his interest in and sympathy for Native American cultures. If one sees only one adaptation of Cooper's work, this is the adaptation to see.



Key Questions

While Cooper had great initial success with his frontier romances, his polemic and political novels quickly changed critical reaction from positive to negative attacks. Cooper himself commented that his books would be attractive mainly to young boys, and for a long time, this was the case. Today, with a revival of interest in the West as a cultural heritage as well as a fantasy that promises dreams of freedom and excitement, Cooper's works have received renewed sympathetic critical attention. A discussion of the features and the reasons for the attractiveness of his frontier novels for the modern audiences will quickly lead to numerous discussion topics. For instance, why are modern readers so fascinated with the Western myth? The real West was much more harsh and less romantic. A comparison between historic reality and the fantasy of a West that never was reveals much about our modern attitudes.

1. When the reader first meets Deerslayer, he finds him in the company of Hurry March, another frontiersman.

Yet the two form an obvious contrast.

What qualities does Deerslayer possess that are missing in Hurry? How does their juxtaposition reveal some of Cooper's attitudes about people? About civilization?

2. Cooper's later Whig critics accused him of being a sympathizer of the aristocracy. Is this apparent in *The Deerslayer*, and if so, what constitutes nobility in his characters? Who are the "noble characters" and why? How does Cooper's class consciousness reveal itself in his criticism of Judith's relationship with some of the British officers?

3. What is Cooper's attitude toward the Indians? How does the novel reveal it? What creates a bad Indian — his own nature, the savageness of the life style, or the contact with the white man?

4. Cooper's women are usually not strongly characterized. What do Judith and Hetty reveal about women in frontier society? Compare the attitude of Deerslayer towards Judith, Hetty, and the Indian women. How does he receive the suggestion that he marry the ugly widow of the Indian he has slain, and thus save his own life? Compare it with his reaction to Judith's proposal of marriage? Why does he turn both down?

5. How realistic is Cooper's frontier?

How realistic are contemporary Westerns?

6. It has been said about Cooper that it is the diversity of Natty Bumppo which makes his character so successful. Between books he changes abruptly, responding to the needs of the particular story, yet he still seems to demonstrate consistency and growth. Compare the Deerslayer with the elderly hero of *The Prairie* and the mature man of *The Pathfinder*.



7. Young Natty Bumppo first appears under the name of Deerslayer. Is there any significance in his nickname?

"Naming" is an act of great symbolic value among Native Americans. What does the change from "Deerslayer" to "Hawkeye" indicate about his growth and status? Does Cooper engage in other symbolic namings? Why is Chingachgook known as the great Serpent? Is there any significance in the names of the white girls — Hetty and Judith? How about Rivenoak?



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Deerslayer's ideas about the "gifts" of different racial groups. How does this challenge the racism of the other characters? Does it, in any way, support the racism of the other characters?

Judith Hutter, like her mother, repents the actions of her youth. Is Deerslayer justified in rejecting her? Why or why not?

Hetty uses passages from the Bible to argue with the Iroquois. Discuss the ways that religion is used to show the hypocrisy of the white characters, including Harry, Hutter, and the colonial governments.

The beauty of nature is a constant theme throughout the novel. Discuss Deerslayer's special relationship with nature. How does it differ from his relationships with people?

Discuss the role of the soldiers at the local garrison. How are they important to the story?

Deerslayer confesses that he cannot read. Are there any other instances that show his ignorance? How does this affect his character?

Hetty Hutter occupies a special position because of her mental condition. What can you infer about the other characters from their treatment of her?

Many of the characters are contrasted because of their looks. Compare and contrast Deerslayer and Harry *or* Judith and Hetty based on their physical appearance. What aspects of their physical appearance show their true character? What aspects hide their true character?

Literary Precedents

Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales have often been called the first examples of the Western, although their historic and geographic settings are different from more modern stories.

Nevertheless, they are Westerns because they combine the most attractive qualities of this genre — a fast moving story line, an exciting plot, and a natural, romantic locale. And in the novels of more recent writers such as Louis L'Amour, Larry McMurtry, and Zane Grey, the conflict is still between the frontiersmen — or their equivalent, the cowboys — and the wide open spaces of a wild country, free of the restrictions of civilization, law, and order.

Many modern Westerns replay Cooper's conflicts between natives and settlers, with the Indians the inevitable losers. In Cooper's day, the term "manifest destiny" had not yet been coined, but like his hero Deerslayer, he has few doubts about the moral right of Christian civilization, even while admitting that it did not always live up to its teachings. Just as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is the superior intellect and is fittingly served by the faithful Friday, Cooper's white men are the rightful inheritors of the wilderness. Of course, unlike later Western writers, he could not know the impact of civilization on such a huge and seemingly endless country. The noble savage is a literary concept which Cooper inherited from the writers of the Enlightenment, such as Rousseau and Montaigne. They were expressing the belief in the innate nobility of human beings who lived in close contact with nature. Natty Bumppo is such a being, as is his companion, Chingachgook.

Related Titles

All five Leatherstocking novels, *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841), share the character of Natty Bumppo. Although not written in the chronological order of the narrative, they present the scout from his early adventures as Deerslayer to his old age as Leatherstocking, while civilization marches inexorably onward.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994