

The Dharma Bums Study Guide

The Dharma Bums by Jack Kerouac

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Dharma Bums Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	8
Chapter 5.....	9
Chapter 6.....	10
Chapter 7.....	12
Chapter 8.....	13
Chapter 9.....	14
Chapter 10.....	16
Chapter 11.....	17
Chapter 12.....	19
Chapter 13.....	21
Chapter 14.....	22
Chapter 15.....	23
Chapter 16.....	24
Chapter 17.....	26
Chapter 18.....	27
Chapter 19.....	28
Chapter 20.....	29
Chapter 21.....	30
Chapter 22.....	32



[Chapter 23..... 33](#)

[Chapter 24..... 34](#)

[Chapter 25..... 35](#)

[Chapter 26..... 36](#)

[Chapter 27..... 37](#)

[Chapter 28..... 38](#)

[Chapter 29..... 39](#)

[Chapter 30..... 40](#)

[Chapter 31..... 41](#)

[Chapter 32..... 42](#)

[Chapter 33..... 44](#)

[Chapter 34..... 45](#)

[Characters..... 46](#)

[Objects/Places..... 51](#)

[Themes..... 54](#)

[Style..... 56](#)

[Quotes..... 58](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 63](#)

Plot Summary

Ray Smith, a mid-thirties East Coast beat writer gaining national attention, travels to Berkeley, California and lives with Alvah Goldbook, an East Coast beat poet at the beginning of his career. Ray meets the younger Japhy Ryder, a student of Zen Buddhism and outdoors enthusiast. Ray and Japhy forge a strong friendship based on mutual experiences and a shared love for Buddhist philosophy, poetry and the simple life.

The two men, joined by Henry Morley, an eccentric librarian, go on a mountain climbing adventure. While the experienced hiker Japhy easily reaches the summit, the neophyte climber Ray clings to a ledge a hundred feet from the summit, too terrified to move. The two then return to Berkeley and have several experiences, supported by a wide circle of friends, sharing everything from ideas to girlfriends.

Ray returns to his mother's home for Christmas, hitchhiking and riding trains, hobo-style, across the United States of America. He spends several weeks in the North Carolina woods surrounding his mother's house in contemplation and meditation, seeking and finding enlightenment. Newly interested in primitive nature experiences, Ray also accepts a summer job as a fire lookout in the Cascade Mountains, a job opportunity first suggested by Japhy.

After spending a few months doing nothing at his mother's house, Ray once again hitchhikes and bums across the United States. This time, he takes a Southern route and makes a brief stop in Mexico where he discovers the allure of cheap sex, alcohol and marijuana is no longer as intriguing as a simple night of clarity alone in the clean and clear desert of Texas.

Ray arrives in Berkeley and lives with Japhy in a tiny shack in an area bordered by wilderness. The two men resume their friendship and spend many hours discussing poetry, Buddhism, philosophy, Christianity, women and wine. Ray has made substantive progress on his path to enlightenment and no longer looks to Japhy as a philosophical instructor. He sees him instead as a fellow traveler on the path of life. The two men, joined by a wide circle of friends, have several adventures and share many experiences.

After several wild and tumultuous parties, Japhy sails away to Japan to study, and Ray hitchhikes, walks and hikes north to Washington State, where he spends several weeks isolated on the top of Desolation Peak, working as a fire lookout. His time alone becomes an incredible personal experience full of happiness and enlightenment.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In late September 1955, Ray Smith, a beat writer with newly acquired fame, arrives in Los Angeles, California, fresh from a trip to Mexico. Ray sleeps on the beach and then hops a train, hobo-style, out of Los Angeles. Another hobo soon jumps on the same boxcar as Ray. Ray describes him as a little man, older, who is very quiet. At the next temporary stop, Ray leaves his meager belongings under the care of the little bum while he purchases some wine and then returns to the train. The two men share the wine and what food they have and talk for some time. Ray learns that the other bum is from Ohio and is an ex-railroad employee. He shows Ray a small clipping of a prayer by St. Theresa and tells Ray that he reads it every day. Ray then jumps off the train at Santa Barbara, California, eats a small meal and sleeps on the beach.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter sets the tone for the remainder of the novel. Ray is an unconventional character leading a wandering life without the typical constraints of modern society. He is clearly a very intelligent, educated and insightful person who is looking for something beyond the routine daily life that typifies the United States. Ray is able to happily subsist in the moment and is comfortable jumping trains, conversing with bums and sleeping on the beach under the stars.

The man Ray meets on the train is the first so-called Dharma Bum of the novel. Ray recognizes in this St. Theresa bum a kindred spirit. Both men are where they are, doing what they are doing, because there is no other path for them at the moment. Both men find in their simple existence a fulfillment of life and neither man would consider their jobless, homeless, transient existence as any kind of failure. Ray will reflect back on the St. Theresa bum from time to time through the next few chapters of the novel.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Ray reflects on his meeting with the St. Theresa Bum and realizes that the man is doing what he is supposed to be doing. That is, he is a Dharma Bum, having realized and assumed his rightful place in the world. Ray then hitchhikes to San Francisco where he meets a man named Japhy Ryder on the street, and Ray and Japhy spend several hours in each other's company.

Japhy is a backwoods boy from Eastern Oregon and grew up in a log cabin in the woods. He is five feet, seven inches tall, strong and wiry, with a bony face. He wears a goatee and has stained teeth. He has studied extensively in anthropology and Indian myth and speaks Chinese and Japanese. He is considered to be an Oriental scholar. Japhy is well versed in Buddhism, plays the guitar, loves the outdoors and hiking and is involved with the International Workers of the World (IWW).

In the evening, Ray accompanies Japhy to a poetry reading at Gallery Six. Several poets read to a captivated audience, including Alvah Goldbook, Ike O'Shay, Francis DaPavia, Rheinhold Cacoethes, Warren Coughlin and Japhy Ryder. Ray collects some money and buys several huge jugs of wine, which he passes around the audience. Alvah recites his new poem "Wail" as the audience gets drunk. Ray notes that DaPavia has a delicate, English voice and that Coughlin's poetry is incomprehensible. Everyone present feels the evening to be incredible and historic. After the poetry reading concludes, Ray and his friends proceed to a Chinatown restaurant and have some food.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter Two begins the exploration of Dharma, one of the major themes of the novel, as Ray contemplates his earlier meeting with the St. Theresa Bum. Ray is a student of Buddhism and is focusing his attention on two of four noble truths. The first is that all life is suffering, and the second, which he explores to a lesser extent, is that the suppression of suffering can be achieved. Ray is doubtful that suffering can be suppressed. The chapter also introduces Japhy Ryder and Alvah Goldbook, two of the novel's major characters. Japhy in particular, with Ray Smith, will dominate the remainder of the novel's scenes. Warren Coughlin, one of the poets at the evening reading, is a friend of Japhy.

The poetry reading is a lightly fictionalized account of an actual poetry reading entitled "Six at the Sixth Gallery" which took place on October 7, 1955. At the historic reading, Allen Ginsberg first read "Howl" and launched his career as a poet. In the novel Alvah Goldbook reads the poem "Wail," which stuns the assembled crowd.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Ray Smith lives with Alvah Goldbook in a small, ramshackle house near the University of California at Berkeley campus. The house is surrounded by a garden, which is overgrown with mint. The house is old and unremarkable and is full of numerous books on a variety of topics, including a strong emphasis on canonical literature. Japhy Ryder lives in a tiny house, more of a shack, without furnishings on the other side of the university campus. Ray goes to Japhy's house, and the two men drink tea, talk about poetry and translation and discuss Zen Buddhism. Japhy also casually mentions something called yabyum, which Ray does not understand. When Ray asks for an explanation, Japhy declines to answer.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter Three continues to develop the friendship between Ray and Japhy that will dominate the remainder of the novel. Both men live simple lives without many belongings and are students of Buddhism. It becomes obvious through their conversation that Ray is a relative newcomer to the philosophy while Japhy is intimately familiar with the intricacies of Buddhist thought. Japhy keeps himself busy by performing scholastic translations of Chinese poetry, and Ray and Japhy discuss some possible translations of a particular poem. Ray initially argues for a simplistic and literal word-for-word translation, but Japhy points out that such a translation would result in a largely meaningless list of words. Instead, Japhy pursues a more readable method of translation, which preserves the meaning of the original text.

Japhy's yabyum comment will become more significant in Chapter Five. His early mention of yabyum indicates he has some insight into Ray's current state of Buddhist development. Yabyum, meaning "father-and-mother," is a Buddhist symbol - a depiction of a man and a woman sitting face-to-face in a yoga posture, experiencing sexual ecstasy. Yabyum does not necessarily represent sexuality but is rather representative of the state of perfect union.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The following evening Ray returns to Japhy's small house. Alvah Goldbook and Warren Coughlin accompany Ray. Warren, like Japhy, is from Oregon. Ray brings a large amount of wine with him, and the four men spend the evening getting drunk and talking about poetry. Ray senses that Japhy would rather be studying poetry. Eventually, the three visitors leave Japhy's house and walk home, arm-in-arm, singing drunken songs.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This short chapter continues to develop the friendship between Ray and Japhy. Ray is obviously interested in Japhy as a friend, and Japhy seems to see in Ray a potential companion and friend.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

A few days later, Japhy and a woman named Princess stop by Ray and Alvah's house for a visit. Princess is young, about twenty, and has gray eyes, yellow hair and white skin. Ray finds her very attractive. Ray goes to the kitchen to get some wine, and when he returns, he finds Japhy, Princess and Alvah nude. Japhy is sitting in a Yoga position with Princess on top of him in the state that Japhy calls yabyum. Ray is taken aback and spends several moments contemplating his feelings toward sex. Ray has striven to avoid sex, feeling that his Buddhist path of enlightenment is best followed by eschewing desire and physicality. His life without lust, or more accurately his life with lust actively suppressed, has led him to happiness, and he feels conflicted by the sudden sexual desire he feels for the clearly available Princess.

As Ray watches, Japhy satisfies Princess, and then Alvah takes a turn having sex with Princess. Ray's resolve eventually crumbles, and he starts to touch Princess. It takes Ray some time to become comfortable with the situation, but he eventually strips off his clothes and also has sex with Princess. Alvah will later refer to the scene as an orgy. Japhy instructs Ray on the proper Buddhist philosophy of sex and tells him that it represents a perfect union, not a physical need. Japhy and Princess then leave on their bicycles, and Alvah and Ray recline outside on the ground, looking at the stars, and discuss philosophy. Ray tries to sort out his lustful feelings for Princess with his Buddhist philosophy. Alvah finds Buddhism uninteresting and instead just wants to have a good time. Ray chastises Alvah for being so shortsighted about important philosophical issues.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter Five continues the development of the friendship between Ray, the narrator and Japhy. Ray has seen Princess before, around San Francisco, and he finds her extremely attractive. She is young, though, and he assumes she is unavailable. He is amazed to discover that she is Japhy's lover and even more amazed when he learns that she is "sex mad and man mad" (p. 28). Ray's long period of abstinence and his Buddhist philosophy crumble under the dual onslaught of Princess' naked and alluring body and Japhy's enlightened explanation of a deeper Buddhist interpretation of sex. Even though Alvah later refers to the evening as an orgy, the scene portrayed by Ray suggests multiple serial sexual encounters for Princess rather than a more traditional interpretation of orgy. Ray will spend some time in the subsequent hours and days wondering if he has made a fundamental philosophical mistake in giving in to his lust. Alvah has no such mental problems and eagerly looks forward to the next week's yabyum. The chapter also assists in placing Ray's age in the mid-thirties. He notes that Princess is twenty and that she is very young by comparison to himself and his friends.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

About a week later, Ray and Japhy go on a planned hiking trip. Ray is a neophyte hiker, but Japhy is experienced and plans most of the trip. Japhy supplies nearly all of the equipment for the trip, including shoes, sleeping bags and food. Japhy is friendly and mildly patronizing to Ray's nearly complete lack of basic hiking knowledge and spends some time telling Ray about mountain climbing facts. Ray expresses concern that the amount of food Japhy has packed will be vastly insufficient, but Japhy ignores Ray's concerns. Ray also wants to take a supply of wine, but Japhy dismisses the idea. Ray tries to talk about Princess, but Japhy seems uninterested beyond noting that he has had sex with her several times in the intervening week. Japhy tells Ray about his Oregon upbringing as the two walk to the house of Henry Morley.

Morley is a bespectacled and eccentric librarian who lives near the University of California at Berkeley campus. Morley's friends include the poet Rheinhold Cacoethes, and Morley is supposedly a great climber of mountains. He owns a car and has thus been invited on the hiking trip because of his ability to provide transportation to the distant mountain. When Japhy and Ray arrive at Morley's house, they find it full of several strange students of various nationalities. Morley packs up an enormous amount of gear while Japhy tries to dissuade him because of the weight. After Morley packs, the three men load Morley's car and then drive off to the mountain, several hours away.

Morley is an extremely erratic character and most of his speech is either nonsensical or only partially sensible. He makes frequent non sequitur comments and blurts out random sentences or words at inappropriate times. Japhy refers to him offhandedly as a human tape recorder. Ray finds Morley's so-called brilliant inanities both unsettling and somewhat unpleasant. On the drive to the mountain, they startle a deer in the car's headlights and later stop at a bar where Ray and Japhy drink some wine. Morley is a teetotaler. The men sit in the bar discussing Buddhist philosophy, in which Morley is mostly uninterested. They leave the bar and find a place to sleep in the woods. While setting up camp, Morley realizes he has forgotten to bring a sleeping bag, though he has brought along a large inflatable air mattress. Japhy and Ray zip their sleeping bags together and use the assembly as a blanket for all three men. Morley squirms all night, and as Ray sleeps in the middle, he prevents Ray from getting much rest. Ray is put off by Morley's antics and air mattress.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter Six introduces Henry Morley, who will play a significant role over the next several chapters of the novel. Morley is an interesting and bizarre character, and Japhy enjoys his company though Ray finds him somewhat irritating. Morley, supposedly an accomplished mountain climber, packs an enormous amount of frivolous equipment and



then forgets to bring even a sleeping bag. The comic effect of Morley's inept bumbling continues for several chapters.

Ray is somewhat apprehensive of the mountain climbing trip, since he does not know what to expect. Japhy is obviously an experienced hiker and packs a minimal set of necessary equipment and dehydrated food. Ray begins the trip still focused on wine and reminiscing about sex with Princess, while Japhy is dismissive of these worldly concerns. Japhy is already looking forward to the essentially spiritual nature of the upcoming hike. Ray's description of the opening scenes of nature as the men approach the mountain are engaging and vivid, though, still looking backwards, Ray insists that they stop for some drinks of wine. The bar is full of drunken hunters. Earlier in the day, the three men startle a deer in the car's headlights, and Ray wants to somehow tell the deer that they mean no harm. This attitude of course is contrasted with the drunken hunters, who will be hunting deer in the morning. This theme of nature against civilization runs throughout the novel.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Japhy, Morley and Ray awake in the morning, and Japhy starts a fire. Ray is very cold but eventually warms up. Morley behaves in the same erratic way, but Ray finds him more tolerable. They eat a bread and cheese breakfast and then continue their drive toward the mountain. On the drive, Ray spots a lodge on the road and suggests that a breakfast stop would be in order. Everyone agrees, and they enter the lodge's restaurant and order pancakes and coffee. The waitress asks them if they are hunters, and they tell her they are planning to hike a mountain called the Matterhorn. After breakfast, they exit the restaurant and look at the town of Bridgeport, California.

Chapter 7 Analysis

After a night's sleep, Ray awakes and finds Morley more tolerable. Ray even begins to mimic Morley's habit of yodeling at inopportune moments until Japhy expresses a preference for a simple call of 'hoo,' which Ray subsequently adopts. The waitress at the restaurant expresses surprise when she learns they plan to hike the Matterhorn. While in the restaurant, the men see hunters come in for breakfast.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Ray and Japhy sit on the grass and wait for Morley, who goes off in search of a sleeping bag. After what seems like hours, Morley returns without a bag. They complete their drive to the trailhead, and Morley rents a few blankets from the trail's lodge house. They then walk four miles over level ground near a mountain lake and notice several bulldozers leveling the ground in the area. They arrive at the trailhead and buy candy and drinks at a small trail shop. This is the last shop before the real hiking begins.

Morley remembers that he did not drain his automobile's crankcase. Ray tells him to forget it, but Morley realizes if the night is cold, the water in the crankcase will freeze and ruin the transmission. Ray tells him to forget it anyway, but Morley decides to walk the eight-mile roundtrip and drain the crankcase. He tells Japhy and Ray to leave without him and explains he will walk fast and catch up to them on the trail.

Japhy and Ray set off without Morley and hike along the trail for some distance. Ray admires the way Japhy strides along confidently and makes hiking decisions with authority. They talk about many topics including poetry. Ray is exuberant in the wilderness and realizes he is glad that Morley is not present so that Japhy gets to talk more. They come to a cold stream and drink. Ray wants to take a rest break, but Japhy urges him on, explaining that they have a long way to go.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Morley's incompetence continues as he unsuccessfully searches for a sleeping bag and then as he forgets to perform automobile maintenance before leaving the car. This plot device allows Ray and Japhy to spend time hiking together without Morley, while Morley is still along for the hike. The trail conversation focuses on haiku and nature though they also discuss girls, Princess and many other topics. At the lake near the trailhead, Ray notices several bulldozers leveling the ground in preparation for some type of fairly large construction project. This destruction of nature continues the theme of nature against civilization that runs throughout the text.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Having left the constantly talking Morley behind, Ray and Japhy continue to hike, and after several hours, they fall into silence broken only by an occasional haiku. Japhy leads Ray about thirty yards as they climb up the mountain trail. They climb up out from verdant slopes to a field of boulders. Japhy explains that they will follow ducks, small piles of rocks left by previous hikers - including Japhy - to mark the trail through the boulders. Japhy moves over the boulders easily while Ray experiments until he finds a method of hiking that suits him. Ray wonders if they are approaching the top of the mountain, and Japhy tells him they have a long way to go.

Japhy and Ray continue to hike and eventually reach an escarpment where the boulder field ends. Ray sits down, takes off his socks and rests while Japhy scouts ahead for a campsite with which he is familiar. Japhy returns and leads Ray to the campsite. They hike up the steep escarpment to a large flat area where they find the campsite. It is at the base of an enormous boulder that has a concave side that will provide some shelter from the elements. Ray is amazed by the boulder, and he and Japhy speculate on how it could have arrived where they find it.

Japhy and Ray make camp and wait for Morley. After a prolonged wait, they move to the edge of the escarpment and begin to meditate. Japhy meditates with his eyes open and prayer beads in his hands. Ray closes his eyes and relaxes. Ray finds himself in a lucid moment of clarity and feels he has made a deep contact with the mountains. He finds the silence profound and the mountains' immensity both frightening and calming.

When the light is nearly gone, Japhy and Ray make out Morley's yodeling from far, far below. They call back to him until it becomes very dark. Japhy assures Ray that Morley will simply make camp and begin hiking again in the morning. Japhy and Ray return to their camp and make some tea from ice-melt river water. Ray finds the tea incredible, and the two men prepare for the night.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Ray and Japhy spend hours hiking together, and Ray begins to feel a deep connectedness with the mountain wilderness. Even though he is enjoying the trip, he often suggests rest breaks, which the more-experienced hiker Japhy refuses. Ray also feels, on several occasions, that they must be nearing the top of the mountain. He seems somewhat surprised when Japhy tells him that, in fact, they haven't even come to the base of the Matterhorn.

The writing in the chapter is very strong and contains several descriptions of wilderness vistas that are quite engaging. Ray enjoys the beauty and majesty and then, at camp, enters a deep meditative state and feels an inward connection with the area. Japhy also

meditates and is clearly very at home in the mountain wilderness. Ray shares his Buddhist prayer with Japhy, who appreciates it and writes it down. The narrative structure makes it fairly obvious that, for Japhy, the real mountain journey lies ahead while Ray, to whom everything is new, is having an incredible experience.

Ray compares the three hikers to Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya, the three bodies of Buddha's enlightenment, corresponding to body, speech and mind, respectively. Ray's narrative focus on Japhy's effortless and graceful mountaineering physicality aligns Japhy with Nirmanakaya. Morley's incoherent babbling is reminiscent of Sambhogakaya, and Ray's simultaneous innocence of hiking and wonderment at the grandeur of the vista reflects Dharmakaya - though, of course, a strictly interpreted one-to-one correspondence would be an error. Rather, the three hikers are more properly viewed as three different states of the solitary experience of the journey, just as the three Kayas are interdependent aspects of a single enlightened being.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Ray and Japhy make a huge fire at camp, cook dinner, eat and then wash dishes. They talk about language and meaning. Japhy claims to have learned many significant things about language from Ray. Later, Japhy uses a star map and looks at the stars. Japhy is very giving throughout the night and makes sure that Ray receives more than half of the food. He also positions Ray closer to the fire. They drift off to sleep as Ray muses about his past life of drinking and disappointment. He feels his life has been largely wasted and considers Japhy's life to be on a good path. Ray sleeps well, and in the morning they have more tea. Eventually, they hear Morley's yodeling and go to the edge of the escarpment where they see him, about two miles off. As they watch, he covers the distance and comes up to the camp.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter Ten continues the introspective reflection of Ray Smith. Ray decides that his past life of drinking and wandering has been largely without purpose. He admires Japhy's life of essential experience and finds himself deeply connected to nature and the mountains. Ray determines to try and live life in a fuller and deeper way so that he will find more meaning. He reflects that Japhy, although ten years younger than Ray, seems to be more wise and experienced in the essential aspects of living and Buddhism. Their brief discussion of language and meaning makes for interesting reading.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

After Morley reaches the camp, the three men prepare to climb the summit of the Matterhorn. They leave their large packs and most of their equipment in camp, taking only light daypacks with concentrated food. They begin their summit attempt at noon. After hiking for two hours, Ray is tired and suggests that they return home, but Japhy refuses. Ray, now bedraggled, notes that Morley has enormous hiking endurance. For a few hours, Japhy strips down to a jockstrap and boots, and Ray admires Japhy's sense of freedom. Japhy eventually hikes about one-half hour ahead of Ray and Morley.

The party reaches about eleven thousand feet in elevation, and Ray begins to feel frightened and intimidated by the immense height and craggy vistas. He has a strange sense of *dyja vu* and seems to be reliving similar experiences during the hiking. The men hike until they reach a small flat area with a beautiful lake, about one thousand feet from the summit. Morley decides he has had enough hiking and remains at the lake to sleep while Japhy and Ray continue to the summit.

Japhy hikes ahead of Ray, and the howling wind, cold temperature and height frighten Ray badly. His fear grows more intense, and he tries to yell at Japhy that they are too high. Eventually, Ray recalls an old Buddhist saying about continuing to climb after reaching the mountain's summit. Ray constantly feels he is about to fall and interprets the meaning of the Buddhist saying to refer to falling from the mountain's summit. He eventually finds a tiny slot in the mountain's face only one hundred feet from the summit and crawls into it, hiding, overcome by fear. Ray decides that Morley, safe and far below, is the most intelligent one of the group. Japhy unsuccessfully urges Ray to continue and then goes on alone and quickly reaches the summit. Ray then hears Japhy singing out in ecstatic yells from the cloud-enshrouded summit, and the sound of Japhy's voice fills Ray with enthusiasm and happiness.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter Eleven provides the novel's first major turning point and also concludes Ray's previous life of drinking and disappointment. The hard-driving and experienced Japhy easily reaches the summit of the Matterhorn while the neophyte Ray approaches but does not conquer the mountain's peak. Far below, the relaxing Morley sleeps without desire to test himself against the mountain.

Ray is overcome by fear, symbolic of the resistance to abandoning his old frenetic life for a new path toward enlightenment. At the critical juncture, he falls a little short of Japhy the master mountaineer. The scene is well-written, interesting, engaging and also an allegory for Ray's development as a character throughout the entire novel. As such, Chapter Eleven is a pivotal chapter and coupled with Chapter Twelve will complete

Ray's mental transformation. Even as he yearns to be at the summit, prevented only by his fear of what he might there encounter, Ray gazes down at the sleeping Morley and decides that, perhaps, Morley makes the most sense of all by his acceptance of life as it happens.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Ray watches Japhy walk around the summit and then is startled to watch Japhy start to descend. Japhy simply runs down the mountain in huge loping bounds. Ray has a sudden realization that he can't fall off a mountain, and his fear evaporates. Ray leaps up and follows Japhy, soon taking huge leaping bounds himself. Ray recalls the Buddhist saying about continuing to climb after reaching the mountain's summit and now realizes it is not about falling, but about descending after arriving at the summit. Ray's epiphany makes him ecstatic. Joined by Morley, they return to camp just as dark is falling. They eat the remaining food and have more tea. Then, they continue to hike down in the darkness. Ray's feet become very sore, and he swaps shoes for Japhy's good hiking boots. Ray becomes exhausted and cantankerous and insists that they stop for frequent rests. Japhy and Morley resist, insistent on pushing on rapidly.

The three hikers finally reach the car in the darkness and drive into town, where they learn that the previous night did not freeze but was remarkably warm. Morley is angry that he walked an extra eight miles needlessly to drain the car's crankcase. They then decide to eat at a restaurant but argue about where to go. Japhy insists on a cheap place, and they are seated but then ignored. Ray gets agitated and insists that they leave the cheap restaurant and go to a more expensive-looking place. They go to the nicer restaurant, but Japhy is obviously very uncomfortable and out of place, which amuses Ray. He has never seen Japhy so self-conscious before. After eating, they drive all the way home to Berkeley and arrive at dawn. Ray goes to his house and sleeps. He wakes up many hours later and feels physically good.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter Twelve concludes the extended allegory of mountain climbing. Ray's fear of the summit gives way to an ecstatic epiphany when he realizes that Japhy has reached the summit. Ray realizes that the continued climbing after the peak is not falling but returning. He thereafter loses all fear of falling from the great height, and instead of inching along when near drops and crags, he leaps and bounds down the mountain full of excited confidence. Ray has turned a metaphorical corner in his development as a character. His old life will fade in the distance as he sets out on a new path.

Even Ray's newfound exuberance, however, gives way to fatigue, and on the long hike back to the car, he becomes irritable and complains. The distance from the car to the trailhead is four miles. From the trailhead to the boulder-strewn area is three miles, and from the boulders to the first camp is five miles. From the camp to the summit is perhaps another five miles, and thus, the hiking for the day includes about five miles up-mountain followed by a seventeen-mile down-mountain return trip. Twenty-two miles of pack hiking over approximately twelve hours is, indeed, a grueling trip - particularly for



Ray who has no hiking experience or conditioning. It is easy to understand how his fatigue becomes so overpowering.

The restaurant scene is also notable. For the first time in the novel, Ray appears to be more assured and centered than Japhy. Japhy explains that he has always been poor and feels somewhat intimidated by nicer social surroundings. Ray finds Japhy's discomfort somewhat amusing, indicating that he now sees Japhy more as a peer than as an instructor. Finally, Japhy and Ray talk about the northwestern woods, and Japhy tells Ray that he should go there and explore it. This foreshadowing will become significant as the novel continues.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Princess stops by to visit Ray and Alvah, but Alvah is out for a few hours. Princess has to call home to tell her mother where she will be, and then she and Ray have a prolonged session of sex followed by a shared bath as Alvah returns. Princess then leaves, and later on, Japhy and Coughlin visit. Later still, Morley visits. The five men get drunk and talk about poetry, philosophy and enlightenment. They wander around Berkeley campus, visit a professor and then return to Ray's house where they drink and talk into the night. Ray has recently received some money and asks Japhy to help him buy good mountaineering equipment. Japhy readily agrees.

The men recite poetry, make up spontaneous poetry and talk about poetry, language and meaning. Late in the night, Ray and Coughlin wrestle wildly and knock some big holes in the walls of the house, which angers Alvah. The drinking and talking thereafter last for many hours. The chapter ends with Ray thinking about a conventional life of home, children and television. He considers television to be a waste, destroying individuality and creative thinking, and he anticipates a life without convention.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Princess' visit is somewhat humorous. She stops in to say hello, but of course, Ray wants her to stay for a sexual encounter. She explains that she must call her mother before she can stay, so the two walk to a payphone, place the call and then return to Ray's house to have an extended sex session. As they walk home, Ray playfully grabs at Princess, and a passerby gives them a disapproving and sour glare. This ridiculous scene is amusing and also underscores the disparate ages of Ray and Princess. It is worth noting that Ray refers to the bathing as customary, perhaps inferring that Princess' visits have become routine, though not narrated outside of the single occurrence.

Even though Ray's former life of drinking and carousing is immediately taken up on his return, he is still looking forward, and he is determined to get proper equipment to go mountaineering. He envisions having his bedroom and bathroom in a pack on his back and enjoys thinking about his coming freedom and experiences. Plus, he enjoys having intense sex with a very young woman.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Japhy and Ray spend the day going to several stores in the area, many second-hand or surplus shops, where Ray spends money buying equipment and food. Ray buys Japhy a few things, and Japhy gives Ray a few things in return. Ray feels that he is properly outfitted for anything, and he thinks he could even survive an atom bomb.

Chapter 14 Analysis

This short chapter details several items of camping and hiking equipment Ray purchases. He does not purchase any hiking boots, however, because he remembers that he has several pairs of boots "back home" on the East Coast. The fact that Ray spends the day buying a suite of equipment foreshadows his commitment to a new style of living.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

In the evening, Ray packs all his new equipment and hikes around the streets of San Francisco. He meets several bums, who advise him that there is great money to be made prospecting for uranium. He thanks them for their advice and subsequently ignores them. Ray then plans to leave San Francisco and stops by Cody Pomeray's house to say goodbye.

Ray finds Cody deeply concerned over the erratic and suicidal behavior of his girlfriend Rosie Buchanan. Cody has to leave for work and asks Ray to stay at the apartment and take care of Rosie while he is gone, and Ray agrees. Cody leaves for work, and Ray tries to talk to Rosie. It becomes evident, though, that Rosie has suffered a mental collapse. Her wrists are wounded and scarred from a recent suicide attempt, and she rants about the police. Every noise frightens her, and she is convinced that everyone she knows is about to be arrested and interrogated to discover their crimes and sins. Ray tries to reason with her, but she is irrational and frantic. Some other neighbors visit, and Ray buys some wine. Rosie eventually eats some food and seems to calm down, even though she tells Ray that it is her last night in the world.

Cody eventually returns from work, and Ray leaves. Ray later learns that while Cody was sleeping that night, Rosie went to the roof of the apartment, smashed in a skylight and used glass shards to slash her wrists. A neighbor then called the police, who attempted to restrain Rosie. Thus, her police paranoia has seemingly fulfilled itself. Rosie ran for the roof's edge pursued by a policeman who grabbed at her, managing only to grab her bathrobe, and the naked Rosie plunged to her death below on the sidewalk.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter Fifteen includes a dramatic and alarming suicide scene. Cody, and to a lesser extent Ray, fail to seriously evaluate Rosie's situation, and rather than seeking professional care for her, they try to reason with her irrational paranoia. Unfortunately, Rosie becomes severely agitated and kills herself. This pivotal moment is foreshadowed by Rosie's comments and previous gestures and is not particularly surprising as a narrative element. Nevertheless, it shocks Ray, who finds it deeply disturbing that the vivacious Rosie of months previous is now gone. The event will have a lasting impact on Ray, as related in the following chapter.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The next day, Ray sits in a park with Japhy, and they listen to some Christian street preachers. One preacher particularly inspires Ray, and he engages her in a brief discussion. Japhy seems uninterested in Christianity, although Ray tries to explain that Buddhism and Christianity are simply two aspects of the same thing. Ray expounds that, in fact, all theories and beliefs are aspects of a single reality.

Ray reflects on Rosie's death. He sees it as pointless and needless suffering. He wishes that he had somehow been able to reach through her craziness and talk to her to convince her of the illusory nature of suffering. He reflects that throughout his entire life his family, most of his friends and his girlfriends have tried to convince him to join mainstream society and become a worker and consumer. He recalls that he has tried to explain his life view to them, but they have, in general, not listened and not learned. Rosie's suicide has reaffirmed in his mind the essential correctness of his position in life, and although saddened by her loss, he is happy to be where and who he is.

Ray says goodbye to Japhy, and then he goes to Cody's family home in the hills where he stays for the night. He says prayers for Cody and Rosie and tries to comfort Cody, who is extremely distressed. Ray then catches a train, hobo-style, to Los Angeles. The train ride down is a joyous and beautiful experience for Ray, even though he has picked up a cold virus from Cody's family.

While waiting for another train out of Los Angeles, Ray meets another Dharma Bum, an ex-Marine from Paterson, New Jersey. This bum has a Buddha quotation on a slip of paper, which Ray reads. The bum is a teetotaler and likes to talk. He tells Ray that the bum lifestyle is the greatest lifestyle in the world, and he also tells Ray that one can cure arthritis and phlebitis by standing on one's head for several minutes in the morning and then drinking a little honey mixed with milk before going to bed. Since Ray sees the bum as Buddha, he takes his advice and is pleased, later, to discover that it in fact works.

Ray then catches another train but discovers to his dismay that there is no flatcar or open boxcar. Several miles out of Los Angeles, he leaps from the train and spends a miserable night sleeping in a ditch. In the morning, he finds the bus station and buys a bus ticket to Riverside, California.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Ray listens to the street preacher and feels like she is calling on him personally to become a teacher and inspiration to others, and he says he will try to do that. He then says goodbye to Japhy, Cody and San Francisco and starts the long trek that will lead him, over the next three chapters, to the next major setting of the novel.



Ray reflects on Rosie's suicide. All his life, Ray has tried to explain to his mother, his family, his friends and his girlfriends why he chooses to live unconventionally. He feels he has never been able to explain it, and he reflects that for the past several years he has doubted himself and his choices. However, his recent experiences with Japhy and mountain climbing have awakened in him a renewed strength and sense of purpose. Rosie's death has crystallized this awakening and makes Ray entirely sure that he is following the right and valuable path in life. While waiting on a train siding near Los Angeles, Ray meets another Dharma Bum, and the two men talk about the essence of living. This conversation affirms Ray's essential belief in the wandering lifestyle.

Ray's long cross-country trek will consume most of Chapter Sixteen and all of Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen. The hobo-style train ride scenes are extremely well written and have a dramatic and authentic texture, as one would expect from any Kerouac novel.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Ray rides the bus to Riverside, noting that Los Angeles' smog cloud extends outward from the city for nearly twenty-five miles. It is evident that Ray considers Los Angeles to be a hell on earth. In Riverside, a transient warns Ray to be careful of the police as vagrancy is locally considered an arresting offense. Ray therefore sneaks around and finds a well-hidden campsite, where he spends the night. He finds himself becoming extremely sad and actually cries. He considers the homeless life to be sad and difficult but also realizes that for him it is either a life of homeless freedom or a life of watching television with his brain switched off. Ray reflects that it is nearly Christmas, 1955, and he is filled with Christmas spirit. He considers himself analogous to a Don Quixote of tenderness. He sleeps, wakes and gets ready for a three-thousand-mile hitchhike to Rocky Mount, North Carolina, where his mother is living.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Ray continues his trek from California to North Carolina, having covered several hundred miles by train and bus and a few dozen miles by walking. His intense sadness seems based in continued reflection upon Rosie and his loneliness, both physical and spiritual. However, when he considers an alternate to his way of living and thinking, he is repulsed by the mental imagery of nightly doses of television



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Ray hitchhikes to Mexicali, California, catching rides with several interesting or eccentric people. In Mexicali, he walks across the border to Calexico, Mexico, has lunch and enjoys being in Mexico. He considers camping in Mexico but remembers that it would be dangerous to sleep alone so near the border. He returns to the United States and is harassed, detained and thoroughly searched by the border patrol agents as usual.

Ray then meets a professional truck driver named Beaudry. When Beaudry discovers that Ray is familiar with Mexico, he offers to drive Ray as far as Tucson if Ray will accompany him across the border for a few hours of fun. Ray leaves his equipment in the truck, and the two men return to Calexico for an evening of dancing, drinking and whoring. The next day, they drive toward Tucson, stopping for a lunch that Ray cooks over an open fire in the desert. Beaudry opines that although he has a job, a house and a family, Ray is the richer man. Beaudry feels some envy for Ray's simple and carefree life. At Tucson, Beaudry tells Ray that he can continue on with him as far as Ohio, an offer that Ray gladly accepts.

A few days later, Beaudry drops Ray in Springfield, Ohio. Ray realizes it is far too cold to hitchhike, so he buys bus tickets and rides busses from Ohio to North Carolina. At night, he walks the last three miles from the bus stop to his mother's house. Before entering the house, he visits with the dogs and walks around the yard looking at the house. He sees his mother inside the kitchen and contemplates that, after all, she is a compassionate and loving woman living a good and full life. It is just not the life that Ray has chosen. He finally goes into the house and sees his mother, his sister, his brother-in-law and his nephew Lou.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Ray continues and completes his cross-country trek started in Chapter Sixteen, having jumped trains, hitchhiked and walked from Berkeley, California, to Rocky Mount, North Carolina, a distance of approximately three thousand six hundred miles. The experiences he has and some of the characters he meets, notably Beaudry the truck driver, confirm again the essential correctness of his path. At the conclusion of about one week of traveling, the novel has now covered a period of approximately three months, from late September to late December.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Ray arrives at his mother's house and decides to sleep on a couch on the back porch instead of in a bed inside. He visits with his family, and after they go to sleep for the night, he walks into the nearby woods to a place he is very familiar with and spends an hour meditating. He reflects on the nature of existence and happily believes that existence is not real. The next day, Christmas Eve, he drinks wine and watches television. The following week his mother is out of town, and he spends the days alone while his other relatives go to work and school. He goes into the woods and meditates every day, saying prayers and spending time with the dogs.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Ray is obviously familiar with and comfortable in the local surroundings. He remembers that he spent the previous fall meditating under the same tree in the woods. He is happy to know that reality is illusory because he considers that if it were real it would be eternal and terrible. Instead he hopes, one day, to go to heaven like Rosie.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Ray continues to meditate in the woods for about a month. His brother-in-law becomes irritated with Ray's lack of a productive job, and the older, retired locals also notice Ray's peculiar habit of spending long periods alone in the woods. When the locals ask what he is up to, he tells them he likes to go into the woods to sleep and be alone, which they find confusing and amusing. One night, Ray gets drunk with one of the locals, an older retired man, and Ray confides in him that in fact he likes to meditate in the woods. The man tells him that all men would all like to meditate in the woods, but they are too ashamed to be seen as bums. Instead, they spend their time trying to appear busy and productive even though everyone knows they are just pretending.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Ray continues his so-called "do-nothing" interlude at his mother's house for about a month. The time is personally rewarding and enjoyable to Ray, though everyone around him finds his behavior either irritable, eccentric or both. This interlude is a time of centering and healing for Ray and begins to transition him to a second phase of the novel.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Ray continues to meditate in the woods for approximately six weeks. His brother-in-law continues to be irritated with Ray's lack of productive employment. The two eventually have a fight about Bob, the dog. Ray takes Bob along on his meditation trips. Ray's brother-in-law owns the dog and one day refuses to let Ray unchain Bob. Ray is upset by this petty decision, but Ray's sister backs up her husband. Ray has numerous enlightening moments while meditating and comes to a deeper understanding of existence. He has several visions and hears several words that he ponders.

Ray's mother becomes sick with a cold. Ray meditates on the nature of the cold and has a type of vision. Ray's sister has decorated the house with some flowers. Ray, because of his meditative insight, moves the flowers outside and also has his mother use some unguent on her neck. She recovers nearly immediately. Ray later speculates that his mother's sickness was an allergic reaction to the flowers, and he reflects that the nature of unenlightened existence is to constantly persecute one's self.

Ray tries to explain his Buddhism and enlightening experiences to his family, but they ridicule his beliefs. His mother and sister urge him to return to the religion he was born with. Ray becomes discouraged in his inability to explain his newfound wisdom to his family and decides it is nearly time again to head to the West Coast. Through the mail, Ray secures a summer job as a fire lookout for the U. S. Forest Service. His duty station is to be Desolation Peak in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. Ray decides to hitchhike west and visit Japhy before reporting for at the place of his summer employment.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Ray continues his so-called "do-nothing" interlude at his mother's house for approximately another six weeks. The time continues to be personally rewarding and enjoyable to Ray, though everyone around him perceives his behavior as either irritable, eccentric or both. Ray realizes that his deep introspection has resulted in personal enlightenment, and he considers himself a Buddha.

Ray's behavior also puts him into conflict with his family, who does not attempt to understand what he is experiencing. In one sadly humorous and memorable scene, Ray tries to explain the illusory nature of existence to his agitated brother-in-law by stating that perception makes reality. His brother-in-law subsequently sneers and insists that an orange, for example, is real because he can touch and taste it. The chapter contains some excellent contemplative passages relating to the nature of perceived existence as well as describing the state of mind and awareness that Ray creates. This interlude of

nearly three months is a time of centering and healing for Ray and completes his transition to a second phase of the novel.

Ray's mention of a job as a fire lookout foreshadows the setting and tone of the conclusion of the novel. Ray's voyage to his job consumes the subsequent ten chapters, and his experiences as a lookout conclude the novel. Ray plans to make his journey west via Mexico and speculates that he will once again return home the following Christmas. It is also worth noting that the narrator is referred to as Ray throughout the entire novel except for when he is at his mother's home, where he is referred to as Raymond. Ray is attracted to the job as a fire lookout because in a previous summer Japhy performed the job, on a peak near to where Ray will end up, and Japhy's enthusiasm about the summer has piqued Ray's interest.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Ray learns that Japhy has decided to travel to Japan to study for a prolonged period of time. He leaves his mother's home and hitchhikes to Georgia. He catches a ride with a drunk driver and does not enjoy the trip, so instead of continuing by hitchhiking, he takes a bus to El Paso. At El Paso, he hikes a few miles out into the desert and camps for a night. His pack and equipment make him feel completely self-sufficient, and he spends a happy night.

In the morning, Ray hikes back to El Paso, leaves his equipment in a bus-station locker and walks to Juarez, Mexico. In Juarez, he meets some people and spends the day in a smoky bar, drinking and smoking marijuana, but he misses the clarity and beauty of the desert. He returns to the United States, pursued by a young and interested homosexual man as far as the border. Ray retrieves his equipment, returns to the desert and sleeps for another night.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Like many other chapters in the novel, Chapter Twenty-Two focuses on many details of the process of journeying by hitchhiking, bus and walking. The long trip south takes Ray to Mexico, but it also adds hundreds of miles to his east-to-west trip across the United States of America. When Ray visits Mexico, he finds the experience unfulfilling and within just a few hours leaves Mexico for the solitary desert of Texas. This transient and unsatisfactory return to an old lifestyle continues to mark Ray's evolution toward a different type of person.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Ray hitchhikes from El Paso to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and then on to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, he catches a train, hobo-style, and rides as far as Santa Barbara, where he spends an evening sleeping on the beach. He then catches another train, hobo-style, to San Francisco, where he searches for Japhy's shack.

Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter concludes Ray's cross-country journey from North Carolina to San Francisco and contains many descriptive passages. One of the most interesting features of Chapter Twenty-Three is a typographical error where Ray states "...and Gary was waiting for me at the shack" (p. 161). Actually, Japhy is waiting for Ray at the shack, but the reference is to Gary Snyder, a real person on whom Japhy Ryder's character is based. This accidental misnomer reinforces the nature of the novel as being a lightly fictionalized biographical account of the author's own experiences rather than being fiction cut from whole cloth using a more traditional method.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Japhy is living in a shack behind the house of two friends, Sean Monahan and Christine Jones. Ray arrives and meets Christine, who tells him Japhy and Sean are working at a construction job. Ray cooks dinner and waits for Japhy's return. They eat dinner, and then Japhy tells Ray about the Cascade Mountains and about several of his experiences there. Ray finds Japhy somewhat jaded and cynical and feels that the past few months have not been a positive time for Japhy. Ray sleeps outside of the shack, preferring to camp out in nature.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Ray meets Christine and Sean in March. He will continue to live in the shack on their property until mid-June, and Japhy will live in the shack until mid-May. Ray's reception by Japhy is somewhat estranged. Japhy seems, to Ray, to be disillusioned with a Buddhist way of life. After Japhy tells Ray stories about his Cascade adventures, Ray tries to talk to Japhy about his meditative experiences in North Carolina. Japhy, though, is very dismissive, insisting that he doesn't want to hear a bunch of meaningless words.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

In the morning, Ray finds Japhy much revived and returned to his former good spirits. Ray and Japhy split logs for Sean, eat lunch, talk and discuss philosophy. That evening there is a big party at Sean and Christine's house, and three couples, including Japhy and one of his girlfriends, strip naked and wildly dance around while Ray, single, watches. Ray refuses to give in to his lust, and after spending much of the evening with his eyes clamped shut, he returns to his sleeping bag and sleeps alone.

The next day Princess, Alvah and Coughlin visit. Several weeks quickly pass by. During the week, Japhy and Sean work at a construction job while Ray spends his days meditating and occasionally splitting wood. Japhy teases Ray about being lazy. On the weekends, big drunken parties are the norm, and Ray lists a catalogue of visitors that includes Coughlin.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Chapter Twenty-Five provides an interesting interlude in the novel. Essentially, Ray and Japhy pick up their friendship and lifestyle of the earlier section of the novel but in a different place and with a slightly different group of characters. Time passes quickly. In fact, the chapter covers nearly two months of time in a novel that spans approximately ten months. While Japhy indulges in sex with several partners, Ray deliberately abstains. He has returned again to a voluntary life of asceticism, of sorts. Sean and Christine's house is close enough to urban San Francisco to attract large crowds but far enough out of town to not draw unwanted attention. The parties described appear to be regular, joyful, loud, large and tumultuous affairs with widespread drinking, smoking and copulation.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

A last huge party is planned for Japhy's going away. As the party nears, however, Japhy and Ray find themselves largely uninterested, as they have become bored of the party scene. Rhoda Ryder, Japhy's sister, and her fiancy visit Japhy and Ray. Rhoda's fiancy is a firmly middle-class man who aspires to work, wealth and traditional family life. He spends several hours tight-lipped and smiling while Japhy lambastes the middle-class lifestyle and remonstrates with Rhoda for her planned marriage. Throughout it all, Ray remains calm and resists lustful feelings, instead choosing to meditate.

Chapter 26 Analysis

A short interlude, Chapter Twenty-Six deals with a visit by Japhy's sister Rhoda. Rhoda and her fiancy visit Japhy before they go on to be married. Japhy is upset that she is planning on a life of middle-class values and argues her decision, even questioning whether her fiancy is a good enough lover for a Ryder. Ray sees in Rhoda many of the physical qualities he so admires in Japhy and finds her very attractive. Instead of dwelling on this attraction, however, he meditates.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Ray and Japhy go to San Francisco for a day. Ray begins to drink wine, becomes inebriated and continues to drink. Ray has gained a reputation of some note as an East Coast writer, and Japhy wants to introduce Ray to some friends at a lecture and discussion session. Ray just wants to get drunk and miss the lecture. Japhy tells Ray that he drinks too much. Ray goes to Alvah's house and stays there, drinking, while Japhy goes off to the lecture.

Japhy returns, drunk himself, several hours later. He tells Ray that everyone at the lecture was drinking and that Ray was right after all. Japhy apologizes for being argumentative, and they agree to drop the argument.

Chapter 27 Analysis

In a moment of role reversal, Ray becomes an instructor, of sorts. Japhy is focused on introducing Ray, a burgeoning writer, to a wider circle of associates. Ray, true to the roots that have made him notorious, just wants to get drunk and lay around. In a rare moment of cultural conformance, Japhy angrily stomps off and leaves Ray. At the lecture, Japhy comes to the realization that Ray was, after all, on the right path. Chapter Twenty-Seven is interesting in the way it positions Ray and Japhy in a wider circle of socially significant acquaintances, which Japhy values, at least somewhat, but Ray does not. Throughout the novel both Ray and Japhy have written many poems. They are both becoming more known as authors to a fairly wide audience.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Japhy's big farewell party finally arrives. Many guests arrive, and the party grows into a huge affair. Rheinhold Cacoethes arrives early and spends a large amount of time offering his snide critical opinions on many other writers and poets. For example, he states that Ray is no good because he is always drunk. Henry Morley makes a brief appearance but quickly leaves, which disappoints Ray. Japhy's father shows up, dances wildly with a tall girl and spends some time talking with Ray. Alvah, Japhy and some other partygoers strip naked and spend several hours nude. Ray finds it amusingly incongruous to see nude men conversing with clothed men as if nothing was out of the ordinary. The party becomes enormous and wild and then dwindles as the night passes.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Much of Chapter Twenty-Eight is devoted to some lengthy comments made by Rheinhold Cacoethes. These are interesting primarily only within the context of the author's life and times. In other words, many of the writers and poets that Cacoethes refers to appear nowhere else in the novel, and Cacoethes himself is a fairly minor character in the novel to receive so much attention in this late portion of the text. The narrator also develops an interesting catalogue of party attendees, which includes several of the novel's characters as well as numerous other individuals who do not otherwise appear in the novel. The chapter is well written and descriptive.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

The party continues for several days, slowing in the late hours and then intensifying again on the following day. Ray and Japhy become bored with the party, and the two pack their equipment and sneak away to hike. They walk along and have a prolonged discussion about philosophy and about how the East will meet the West. Japhy envisions his impending trip to Japan. They hike for many hours, and when they sleep Ray dreams of Japhy.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Most of Chapter Twenty-Nine is a descriptive narrative of hiking interspersed with philosophical talk. It becomes apparent that Ray has indeed reached a new state of development in his outlook on life. Instead of being Japhy's pupil, he is now Japhy's philosophical equal. It is particularly interesting to note the change in tone and writing style present in this chapter compared with the tone and style of earlier chapters in the novel, from the period when Japhy teaches Ray many of the basic tenets of Buddhism.

Ray and Japhy's discussion of East meeting West is interesting on two levels. Obviously, they are referring to the cultures of East and West, but the subtext of the East Coast Ray meeting the West Coast Japhy is significant to the novel. Ray, an East Coast writer, is introduced to a new life outlook on the West Coast by Japhy. Ray subsequently returns to the East Coast, where he spends a contemplative winter meditating and gaining enlightenment. When Ray then returns to the West Coast, he has become himself a new master, a Buddha, of Japhy's teachings.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Ray and Japhy take a prolonged two-day hike and return to the shack exhausted and sore. The party has ended in their absence, and they eat a quiet dinner and talk. Sean, Christine and their children walk to the shack and visit, saying their good-byes to Japhy. Ray and Japhy spend Japhy's last night talking. It is mid May.

In the morning, Japhy boards his boat for Japan. One of Japhy's girlfriends also boards the boat and finally has sex with him, begging him first to stay and then, when he refuses, to take her with him. She cries and makes somewhat of a scene, but as the boat is pulling away from the dock, Japhy picks her up and bodily throws her overboard to Sean, who catches her. Japhy embarks on his new path alone.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Japhy comes full circle and becomes, once again, a Dharma Bum free of worldly encumbrance. The scene at the dock is somewhat amusing. Nobody is invited to actually see Japhy leave, since he has planned a last-minute sexual liaison with a woman he has long courted. Once they have sex, however, she tearfully attempts to accompany him on his voyage to the East. Japhy outwits her simply by waiting for the boat to leave and then tossing her overboard to the awaiting Sean. Ray commends Japhy's physical fitness by noting that not many men could literally hurl a woman through the air. Japhy does not appear in person again in the novel, though Ray will later see him in a sort of vision. The novel has covered, to this point, a period of about eight months.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

Ray stays in the shack behind Sean and Christine's house by himself for about a little over a month. During that time he meditates and occasionally splits firewood, and the time passes in relative silence and solitude. In mid-June, he leaves for his future job in the Cascade Mountains.

Ray hitchhikes and hikes north to Crescent City and then on to Eugene, Oregon, where he comments on the smoke produced by a lumber mill. He then continues on, hitchhiking as far as Portland, where he catches a cheap bus trip to Vancouver, Washington, and then makes his way to Bremerton, Washington. From Bremerton, he takes a ferry trip to Seattle, Washington, and then continues hitchhiking and walking north into mountain country.

Chapter 31 Analysis

Another large time period passes rapidly as Ray spends a month in meditation and doing nothing. Chapter Thirty-One, then, is essentially a now-familiar type of travelogue describing Ray's walking, bus rides and hitchhiking as he journeys north toward another destination. Many of the individuals he meets are given brief but interesting descriptions. This chapter marks the final time in the novel that Ray will cover large distances by hitchhiking.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

Ray arrives at the Marblemount Ranger Station and checks in; he muses that he is no longer free but is instead an employee. He trains for a week, learning how to dig firebreaks and operate basic equipment. He meets numerous old friends and co-workers of Japhy. They all wish Japhy had returned, and they all praise Japhy's abilities and dedication to physical work. After training, Ray spends a few idle days at the ranger station.

Ray is finally sent off to his lookout location. Accompanied by a muleskinner and an assistant ranger, he hikes and rides a horse for several days, ascending to Desolation Peak, altitude 6,600 feet. Much of the hike is conducted through thick fog and through pristine wilderness. The party finally arrives at a tiny cabin atop Desolation Peak. The cabin is sturdy and is fastened to the mountain by concrete-footed iron rods. The ranger and muleskinner stay overnight and help Ray move in. In the morning, they depart and leave Ray alone in the tiny cabin. He looks around at a sea of fog and wonders how he will ever spot anything from his occluded post. He cleans and organizes his belongings and sleeps, again alone. In the night, he wakes up and is startled by the enormous Mount Hozomeen looming through his window. Wind has cleared the fog, and he can see for many miles in all directions.

Chapter 32 Analysis

The novel's second major mountain ascent is analogous to the earlier ascent of the Matterhorn. Three men set out on each trip, and each trip takes several days of hiking through vividly described wilderness. The muleskinner is, in many ways, analogous to Henry Morley. Both characters talk a lot, and both of them are fairly entertaining. For example, the muleskinner warns Ray that it's okay to talk to yourself as long as you don't start answering yourself. The muleskinner is also particularly driven to drink and continues to pester Ray, asking him over and over if, after all, he doesn't have some alcohol stashed away. The seminal difference between the two ascents, of course, is that on this the second trip not only does Ray summit, but he owns the summit. The other hikers soon leave him, and he remains in sole and prolonged possession of the peak. His earlier failure to attain the metaphorical (as well as literal) top of the mountain is now a thing of the past, and Ray has come full circle, now living, like Japhy, alone in an old cabin, doing Japhy's old job and possessed of Japhy's ability and wisdom.

The second ascent is also allegorical of the entire novel. Ray starts the journey to a named but unknown destination and travels through thick obscuring fog with companions that are enjoyable but initially strangers. He reaches his destination with the guidance of others and finds his destination to be simple, solitary and surrounded by natural splendor. He alone remains at his destination as the fog clears, and he

witnesses the majesty of nature spreading out before him in seemingly endless panoramas. He then spends time contemplating, meditating and introspecting.



Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

Ray spends time exhilarating in the natural beauty and raw spectacle of Desolation Peak. He meditates and has further insight into the nature of reality. He comes to the heady realization that he is truly alone, and nobody is around to criticize him or tell him what to do. Further wind clears away lower cloud cover, and he is able to see down into valleys far away. He spends time on the peak and feels happier than he has since he was a child. When he gets bored, he cheers himself by smoking hand-rolled cigarettes. He spends days in uncomfortable heat, with insect clouds and with pure beauty. He sees many deer and other wildlife, and the sunsets are unbelievable beautiful. While meditating, he remembers that he is empowered to remind people that they are free, and he immediately reminds himself.

Ray also constantly scans the horizon for smoke, keeps the cabin clean and checks in with the rangers on a two-way radio. All of the other lookouts keep up a daily chatter on the radio network, but Ray does not participate. Although supplied with several extra radio batteries, he doesn't even use up the first battery. Ray continues to find peace and beauty in the wilderness. Some days, he is highly emotional and even cries, falling in love with the world and speculating on the nature of heaven and reality.

Chapter 33 Analysis

Ray experiences Desolation Peak as an enlightening and solitary experience. Many fire lookouts are very stressed by being along for two months. Ray not only enjoys it, but he is even exuberant over his solitude. Some of the novel's most striking descriptions are found in Chapter Thirty-Three, and Ray's enlightened spirituality allows him to participate in nature with fulfillment.



Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

August finally arrives amidst mad, raging sunsets and cascading clouds. Ray watches the weather with wonder and realizes that he doesn't know anything anymore. He feels completely free because of his realization. One day during a deluge, a green and rose rainbow drops down near the cabin and lights around Ray, who thinks that it is a hoop for the lowly. He wanders around Desolation Peak, his shadow ringed by the rainbow. He realizes he will never need to worry about anything anymore, and he realizes "it was I not the void that changed" (p. 242). He sings aloud to himself. Winter starts to threaten, and Ray realizes he has been alone for fifty-five days. A few days later, the ranger in charge calls over the wireless radio, informing all the fire lookouts that the season is over and instructing them to come down. The next morning, sixty days after coming to the cabin, Ray packs up his meager belongings. He realizes that he has found eternal freedom and thanks the absent Japhy for showing him so much and leading him on the path.

Then, off in the fog, Ray sees Japhy - a realer-than-life Japhy of his dreams - standing and yelling down the Cascade Mountains. Although thousands of miles apart, Ray and Japhy still share a spiritual connection. Ray addresses the apparition out loud, thanking Japhy for showing him the path and guiding him to Desolation Peak. Ray then leaves Desolation Peak and begins his hike back down to civilization and the future. Before he goes too far, he turns around on the path, kneels down on the trail and says a prayer of thanksgiving to his little shack for all the days of shelter it provided.

Chapter 34 Analysis

Ray's journey of enlightenment is completed, and the fire lookout season ends in mid-August. The novel's primary timeline has covered a period of approximately eleven months. During that time Ray, the protagonist, has changed from a life of dissipation to a life of enlightened introspection - guided by the Zen Buddhist Japhy Ryder. Ray's personal journey, his voyage on the path to Dharma, is detailed in the novel, a type of *Erziehungsroman* or, more commonly, a *Bildungsroman*, made a very enjoyable read by the expected beat movement elements of religious ecstasy, visionary states, some measure of primitivism and many eccentric characters.



Characters

Raymond "Ray" Smith

Ray Smith, the narrator and main protagonist in the novel, is an East Coast beat writer whose published work is gaining national attention. He is about thirty-five years old and has blue eyes, though he is otherwise not physically described in detail. The narration suggests that Ray is probably around six feet tall, in excellent physical condition and possessed of an incredible constitution. Ray is interested in Buddhism and is seeking personal enlightenment. Ray is introduced to mountaineering and camping by a friend, and through the novel, he develops a deep and personal connection with the wild outdoors.

When the novel begins, Ray is primarily interested in drinking, fun, more drinking and sex, living a life of engaged and active dissipation. He is, however, also newly converted to Buddhism and is beginning to espouse a life of asceticism with, perhaps, a Theravada Buddhist outlook. He lives in Berkeley with Alvah Goldbook, an aspiring poet who is primarily interested in having good times, while he develops a deep and enduring friendship with Japhy Ryder, a young and enlightened Zen Buddhist. Japhy introduces Ray to new perspectives and philosophies.

During the middle section of the novel, Ray returns to his mother's home in North Carolina, where he spends several weeks meditating in a forest near his mother's house. Although Ray's do-nothing antics irritate his relatives and the town locals, he gains an enormous self-awareness and becomes personally enlightened. He feels that he is connected to life, and he comes to realize that reality is in fact simply perception. Ray then returns to Berkeley where he lives for several weeks with Japhy Ryder. It becomes evident that Ray no longer looks to Japhy as an instructor but now sees him as a peer on the Buddhist path.

During the concluding section of the novel, Japhy travels to Japan to study, and Ray, now alone, goes north into the Cascade Mountains where he spends the summer in isolation atop Desolation Peak working as a fire lookout. He spends more time meditating and builds a deep connection to the natural and spiritual world, enjoying the incredible vista of nature's splendor. Ray is a fictionalized character based on the author, Jack Kerouac, and the novel is traditionally read as lightly fictionalized autobiography.

The St. Theresa Bum

In the novel's opening chapter, the narrator, Ray Smith, meets a bum on a train. The bum is a smaller, older man, and the two characters spend several hours sharing food and wine and swapping stories. The St. Theresa Bum is from Ohio and is an ex-railroad employee. He is named, by the narrator, for a clipping he carries in his wallet of a prayer



by St. Theresa which he reads every day. The St. Theresa Bum is the first so-called Dharma Bum that the narrator meets in the novel.

The Buddha Bum

In a transitional chapter of the novel, the narrator, Ray Smith, meets a bum at a railroad siding. The bum is a talkative middle-aged man, and the two characters spend perhaps an hour talking. The Buddha Bum is an ex-Marine from Paterson, New Jersey, a teetotaler and very talkative. He tells Ray that the bum lifestyle is the greatest lifestyle in the world, and he also tells Ray that one can cure arthritis and phlebitis by standing on one's head for several minutes in the morning and then drinking a little honey mixed with milk before going to bed. The Buddha Bum shows Ray a slip of paper that he carries with him. It has a prayer on it, a quotation of Buddha, which he frequently reads. Ray is so impressed with the man that he considers him to be Buddha. The Buddha Bum is the first so-called Dharma Bum that the narrator meets on his cross-country trek from California to North Carolina.

Japheth "Japhy" M. Ryder

Japhy Ryder, a main protagonist in the novel, is a hard-working backwoods boy from eastern Oregon who grew up in a log cabin in the woods. He is about twenty-five years old, five foot, seven inches tall, strong and wiry, with a bony face. He wears a goatee and has lightly stained teeth. He has studied extensively in anthropology and Indian myth and speaks Chinese and Japanese. He is considered to be an Oriental scholar. Japhy is well versed in Buddhism, plays the guitar, loves the outdoors and hiking and is involved with the International Workers of the World (IWW). Japhy frequently uses a fake, booming, lumberjack voice when he is kidding around.

In the opening phase of the novel, Japhy meets Ray Smith, the narrator, in Berkeley, and the two men develop a strong and lasting friendship based on mutual experiences and a shared outlook on life. Japhy introduces Ray to many new perspectives and philosophies, and the two men share everything from poems to girlfriends.

During the middle section of the novel, Japhy and Ray part ways for a few months. Japhy's sister, Rhoda, becomes engaged to a firmly middle-class man, which irritates and angers Japhy, who is very critical of her decision. Japhy becomes a little depressed and begins to work as a carpenter. Ray, now personally enlightened, then moves in with Japhy, and again the two men engage in an active and constructive friendship. During the concluding section of the novel, Japhy travels to Japan to study. Japhy is a fictionalized character based on the real-life person Gary Snyder, a friend of Jack Kerouac.



Alvah Goldbook

Alvah Goldbook, a minor character through most of the novel, is an East Coast beat movement intellectual poet with an eccentric type of flair and style. He wears horn-rimmed glasses and has wild, black hair. He works, part-time, as a busboy and is busy developing a career as a poet. When the novel begins, Alvah and Ray Smith are roommates in a small house in Berkeley near the University of California. Although Alvah and Ray are friends, Alvah does not share Ray's Buddhist outlook on life and prefers to enjoy himself without worrying about greater significance than the pleasure of the moment. Alvah is a fictionalized character based on the real-life poet Allen Ginsberg, a friend of Jack Kerouac.

Warren Coughlin

Warren Coughlin, a minor character in the novel, is an overweight and shy poet who is a long-time friend of Japhy Ryder. Like Japhy, Coughlin grew up in Oregon and has a bit of the backwoods boy about him. Coughlin reads poetry at the Sixth Gallery reading detailed in the opening scenes of the novel. Upon first meeting Coughlin, Ray Smith considers him to be introverted and largely uninteresting. Eventually, Ray comes to admire Coughlin's introspective and intelligent nature. Coughlin is a fictionalized character based on the real-life poet Philip Whalen, a friend of Jack Kerouac.

Rheinhold Cacoethes

Rheinhold Cacoethes, a minor character in the novel, is an established poet and literary critic. Cacoethes reads poetry at the Sixth Gallery reading detailed in the opening scenes of the novel and later appears at Japhy's going-away party where he delivers several humorous but spiteful criticisms of other poets' work. Cacoethes is a fictionalized character based on the real-life poet Kenneth Rexroth, an acquaintance of Jack Kerouac.

Rosie Buchanan

Rosie, a minor character in the novel, is a young woman with short red hair who is very thin but attractive. She is considered to be very hip and knows almost everyone in Berkeley. She is a writer and a painter's model. Rosie is the girlfriend of Cody Pomeray. Rosie makes a minor appearance early in the novel, attending the poetry reading at the Sixth Gallery. A few months later, she has suffered from a mental collapse and has tried to kill herself. She suffers from paranoid delusions about the police and other authority institutions. Ray Smith watches Rosie while Cody goes to work, and Rosie is unusually disturbed that evening. After Cody returns and Ray leaves, Rosie climbs onto the apartment roof and slashes her wrists again. A neighbor calls the police, and when the police try to intervene, Rosie leaps from the roof. A police officer grabs at her, catching



only her bathrobe, and naked, Rosie plunges to her death on the sidewalk below. Ray subsequently thinks about Rosie occasionally and imagines that she is in heaven.

Cody Pomeray

Cody, a minor character in the novel, is Ray Smith's long-time friend and acquaintance. Prior to the time of the novel, Cody and Ray spent an enormous amount of time together, but recently they see less and less of each other though they remain friends. Cody lives life at a frenetic pace and is very excitable. His girlfriend, Rosie Buchanan, commits suicide, which temporarily shatters Cody, and he returns to a home in the hills where he spends time meditating, praying and trying to sort out life. Cody is a fictionalized character based on the real-life person Neal Cassady, a friend of Jack Kerouac, and he appears in another Kerouac novel under the pseudonym Dean Moriarty.

Princess

Princess, a minor character in the novel, is a young woman, about twenty, with gray eyes, yellow hair and white skin. She is presumably very physically attractive and is the sometimes girlfriend of Japhy Ryder. Ray Smith describes Princess as man-crazy and sex-crazy. One evening, Princess and Japhy visit Ray and Alvah Goldbook, and Princess has sex with each man while the other two watch. Ray and Alvah remember the evening and refer to it occasionally. A few weeks later, Princess visits Ray alone, and the two spend several hours having sex and taking a bath together - an event which is possibly repeated several times. Princess apparently still lives with her parents, since on one occasion she must call her mother to let her know she will be a few hours later than expected. Although a fairly minor character, Princess is the primary female character in a novel otherwise dominated by male characters. As such, her treatment as primarily an attractive sexual object of desire is somewhat disappointing if not unexpected.

Henry Morley

Henry Morley is a bespectacled and over-educated, highly eccentric librarian. He has several friends, mostly students of various nationalities, and is a long-term acquaintance with the poet Rheinhold Cacoethes. Ray Smith notes that Morley and Rheinhold have many mannerisms in common. Morley often says incomprehensible or barely sensible things, and his conversations are loaded with non sequiturs and seemingly random leaps of illogic. Japhy Ryder appears to find Morley engaging and funny, though Ray finds him somewhat irritating. Morley considers himself to be an excellent mountain climber, but in actuality, he over-packs and forgets basic necessities. Unlike Japhy and Ray, his hiking companions, Morley seems to have little interest in Buddhism. Morley is a fictionalized character based on the real-life person John Montgomery, a friend of Jack Kerouac.



Sean Monahan and Christine Jones

Sean and Christine are a married couple with children living in a rural area near San Francisco. Sean is twenty-two years old and has blue eyes, white teeth and a beard. He is a carpenter by profession but prefers to play guitar, meditate and study Buddhism. Christine is young, beautiful and has long honey-colored hair. She likes to go barefoot, is a good cook and is apparently very physically strong. Sean and Christine are very giving and are courteous hosts. Their property has a small shack in addition to their house, where Japhy Ryder and Ray Smith live for several months. Sean Monahan is a fictionalized character based on the real-life person Locke McCorkle, a friend of Jack Kerouac.



Objects/Places

Dharma

The dharma is literally the body of philosophy expounded by Buddha and the duty to pursue a life of conduct in harmony with that philosophy, which will lead to enlightenment. In the novel, the word is often used in a more general sense of being in the 'right' place and doing the 'right' thing, 'right' being what is personally productive toward one's enlightenment. Thus, a dharma bum is a hobo or bum who is a bum because that is his dharma - not necessarily because being a bum is an entertaining way to live.

Buddhism

Buddhism is the teaching or philosophy of Buddha that life is filled with suffering caused by desire, that suffering ceases when desire ceases and that enlightenment obtained through good conduct and meditation releases one from desire and, hence, from suffering. Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder are practitioners of Buddhism, and Ray's personal journey takes him from a life of suffering to a life of happiness through his ability to escape worldly desires.

Yabyum

Yabyum, more commonly yab-yum, means "father-and-mother." It is a Buddhist symbol that depicts a man and a woman joined together in the ecstasy of sexual union. The couple represents a bodhisattva and his female consort sitting face-to-face in a yoga posture. Yabyum does not necessarily represent sexuality but is rather representative of the state of perfect union.

Bhikku

A Bhikku is a Buddhist who has taken a personal vow to lead a life of virtue or, more loosely, a Buddhist religious devotee. Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder frequently refer to their friends or associates as a "Bhikku." Used in this context, the appellation probably is more akin to a fellow traveler on the path of life.

Bodhisattva

A Bodhisattva is, literally, an enlightened person who forgoes nirvana out of compassion for others. Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder frequently refer to close friends as a "Bodhisattva." For example, Japhy calls Princess a Bodhisattva though there is not



much indication in the text that she is particularly interested in Buddhism. Used in this context, the appellation probably is more akin to a good personal friend.

Berkeley, California

Much of the novel is set in and around Berkeley, California. For example, Alvah Goldbook's house and Japhy Ryder's first shack are within walking distance of the University of California at Berkeley's campus. Henry Morley is a librarian for the university, and Japhy presumably studies at and works for the university, performing translation of Asian poetry, though Japhy Ryder's second shack is located some distance away from Berkeley. The setting of Berkeley during the rise of the beat generation is a common setting in many novels and poems.

Rocky Mount, North Carolina

The novel's middle section is set in the small town of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Ray Smith's mother lives in a house in Rocky Mount, a wooded rural area near a large forest with a stream. Ray spends several months during the winter living at his mother's house, where he practices do-nothing and meditates during the day. Many of the locals find Ray's behavior inexplicable and irritating, though they all appear to have a repressed desire to pursue a similar lifestyle.

The Texas Desert

Ray Smith spends a few days camping in the Texas desert about three miles outside of El Paso. During this time, he walks across the border to Juarez, Mexico, for an evening of drinking, dancing and smoking marijuana, activities which he previously found very enjoyable. However, with his change in philosophy and outlook, he finds himself in a smoky bar wistfully thinking of the sparse, clear and immense desert. He leaves the bar and returns to the desert for another night of clarity under the stars. The Texas desert thus provides the setting for a moment of realization for Ray.

Sean Monahan and Christine Jones' Shack

Toward the end of the novel, Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder live in a small shack behind the home of their married friends Sean Monahan and Christine Jones. The shack is small and simple without furniture, and is set away from the house at some distance in a fairly undisturbed area of trees and nature. Ray infrequently sees wild animals around the area. Ray and Japhy live in the shack without paying rent in return for falling some large eucalyptus trees and chopping firewood. The shack is the scene of some wild and tumultuous parties and many nights of philosophical discussion and introspection.



The Matterhorn

The Matterhorn is a mountain in Northern California. Ray Smith, Japhy Ryder and Henry Morley hike the Matterhorn over a period of a few days in the opening section of the novel. Henry abandons the pursuit of the summit at a nice spot to sleep, while Ray and Japhy continue toward the top. A few feet from the summit, Ray becomes terrified of the dizzying height and refuses to continue. Instead, he clutches the side of the mountain and wishes he had remained behind with Henry. The experienced mountaineer Japhy easily arrives at the summit, and then Japhy and Ray quickly descend the mountain in huge loping jumps. Ray's unsuccessful Matterhorn attempt is an educational experience for him and foreshadows his eventual triumph of personal enlightenment.

Desolation Peak

The novel concludes atop Desolation Peak in the Cascade Mountains, where Ray Smith lives in a small shack and works as a fire lookout for a few summer months. When Ray reaches Desolation Peak, it is socked in by fog, and he wonders how he will ever be able to see a fire, much less anything else. A few hours later, wind breaks up the fog, and Ray is startled by looming neighboring mountains and captivated by the stark beautiful vista provided from his 6,600-foot perch atop the world. Desolation Peak is largely denuded of climax-community plant life due to an enormous fire that swept through the area several years before the novel's primary timeline. Nevertheless, Ray sees frequent wildlife and many flowers. Ray's hike up Desolation Peak in the fog is allegorical of his personal voyage through difficulty to enlightenment, a primary theme in the novel.

Midnight Ghost

Midnight Ghost is the unofficial name of a train line that runs along a north-south route in California. The train is favored by hobos such as Ray Smith because it runs at night, has many flatcars and is an easy and free ride to catch. Ray rides the Midnight Ghost a few times in the novel, and once he falls asleep on the train and only awakens as it pulls into the destination station.

Themes

The Path to Enlightenment

The predominant theme of the novel is the personal voyage of Ray Smith, the narrator and primary protagonist, on a path leading to enlightenment. The novel opens with a summarization of Buddhist philosophy with a focus on two elements. First, all life is suffering, and second, the suppression of suffering can be achieved. Ray, an East Coast beat writer of some repute is living a life of active dissipation, which has left him unsatisfied and searching for a better way. He has realized that all life is, indeed, suffering, and he wants to believe that the suffering can be suppressed. To this end, he has embarked on a path of asceticism and the study of Buddhist philosophy. Ray's asceticism is perhaps not traditionally ascetic, as his typical excesses are somewhat egregious. Nevertheless, he moves toward the simple life and tries to refute desire.

Ray is helped enormously by the young Buddhist philosopher Japhy Ryder. Japhy is a well-educated and enlightened thinker, and he is also an exceptional mountaineer. Japhy helps Ray to rapidly progress along the path to enlightenment, gently and not-so-gently correcting and instructing him and opening to him a world of hiking and wilderness adventure. Over the course of the novel, Ray engages in meditation and doing nothing and, after a few cross-country hitchhiking treks, reaches a state of personal enlightenment. He and Japhy spent time together not as teacher and student but as enlightened friends, and then they go on separate paths into the future.

Although the novel contains a large number of references to Buddhist philosophy and history, it can be read, understood and enjoyed without a strong Buddhist background. For example, much of the philosophy referenced is presented in an abbreviated form within the text, and Ray often compares Buddhist thought to Christian thought, which will make a useful point of connection for many. However, for readers without a foundation in Buddhist thought, a primer on traditional Buddhist philosophy would make an enjoyable accessory to the novel.

Hitchhiking

The novel opens near San Diego, rapidly progresses to San Francisco, moves to North Carolina, makes a brief stop in El Paso, returns to San Francisco and concludes in Washington State. Ray Smith, the narrator and primary protagonist, moves through all of these settings in less than a year during the novel's primary timeline. Although distances are not specified in the novel, casual reference to an atlas shows that Ray's travels spanned more than 7,500 miles in less than nine months, exclusive of normal daily travel about towns. Thus, Ray's average travel of about 850 miles per month is an incredible sustained trek spanning from the East and West Coasts and the Mexican and Canadian borders. Nearly all of this travel is achieved by hitchhiking, walking, hiking and riding trains hobo-style, supplemented with occasional purchased bus rides. Tracing



Ray's movements on a map shows that he completely circled the United States of America in the course of the novel, and the travel is described in considerable detail in many chapters.

The travel, a traditional element of many beat novels, is also allegorical for the novel's primary theme of traveling the path of enlightenment and meeting others along the way. Yet, the travel in its own right is part of the novel's structure. Ray enjoys traveling; he enjoys hitchhiking, catching trains, walking and meeting random people. Ray likes to hike around deserted areas, and he finds great satisfaction in being self-sufficient, referring to his pack and equipment as a room on his back. This attitude is reminiscent of losing desire for the physical things of the world, losing desire for unobtainable permanency and losing desire to possess land, objects or others. Ray's loss of desire is accompanied by a loss of suffering, which allows him to become happy and enlightened.

Nature

The characters in the novel spend a huge amount of time out-of-doors experiencing nature. For some, like Japhy Ryder and Henry Morley, this experience is a common one. For other characters, like Ray Smith, the connection with nature is new, exhilarating and energizing. Even though Ray has clearly spent many days traveling out-of-doors, he has not previously conceptually connected with nature in the way he does throughout the novel.

The novel's first pivotal event happens outside when Ray, Japhy and Henry climb the Matterhorn, a mountain in Northern California. The journey is Ray's first hiking trip, and he is immediately captivated by the beauty and wonder of the remote and wild area. Ray will spend nearly every day thereafter sleeping out of doors, even when a bed and room are available to him. Ray later spends several weeks in outside meditation and several weeks camping, and as the novel concludes, he returns to another mountaintop, Desolation Peak, for a summer of isolation and introspection.

The language of the novel is also centered on nature and experiencing nature. Most of the novel's descriptive passages focus on the beauty and vastness of natural scenery. Most of Ray's happy times are out-of-doors, and even much of the poetry that Ray and Japhy discuss is poetry about nature and natural experience. Wild nature is frequently attended by animals, particularly deer. Ray notes several deer throughout the narrative, and each time a deer appears in the book, it foreshadows a subsequent personal connection made between the characters and nature. This theme of nature is complemented by, for example, the deer hunters in the lodge near the Matterhorn. The hunters are depicted as boorish and suspicious; they are focused on the desires of the world and therefore do not understand the path Ray and Japhy are following.

Style

Point of View

Ray Smith, a primary participant in all of the novel's scenes, narrates the novel from the first-person point of view. The narrator is reliable, intelligent and sympathetic. Ray narrates his own story along with that of Japhy Ryder, the novel's secondary protagonist.

The first-person point of view is not only appropriate, but critical to the success of the novel, which is essentially the story of Ray's personal enlightenment. Ray's introspective moments are presented with clarity and are believable because they are presented in the first-person. The first-person point of view also allows the novel's structure to focus easily and naturally on the narrative aspects that contribute to the novel's themes. For example, when Alvah Goldbook's character has nothing to contribute to the novel's development, he simply vanishes from the narrative. This tight focus is made possible and believable because of the first-person point of view.

Setting

The novel contains three primary sections, each of which has a different setting. The novel's opening sequences take place in and around Berkeley, California, and focus on the activities of a group of beat movement poets and writers. The setting is historically significant and is therefore appropriate to the novel. However, the setting also provides an interesting place and time where the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures actually happened. For example, after a successful poetry reading, the characters walk to Chinatown for food, and Japhy is employed in the translation of Asian poetry. The setting's historical significance gives the opening scenes of novel an authentic and gritty tone.

The second phase of the novel takes place in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. The area is described in considerable detail, which is appropriate since the locale is far less well known than Berkeley. The area is wooded and rural, and it has a small-town America feel. Most residents there have typical protestant values and do not share Ray's desire for enlightenment. Nevertheless, the solitude of the rural woods allows Ray ample time to meditate, and after several weeks, he feels enlightened and awakened. He simultaneously irritates his family, which is critical of his do-nothing attitude. It is ironic that to find enlightenment Ray travels from the hip environs of Berkeley to the conventional rural environs of North Carolina.

The final phase of the novel takes place atop Desolation Peak, a craggy isolated mountaintop at 6,600-foot elevation in the Cascade Mountain range near the Canadian border. Here, Ray works as a fire lookout and is, quite literally, entirely alone for two months, his only contact with others by way of a wireless radio set that he uses only



infrequently. Desolation Peak is symbolic of emptiness, which is part of enlightenment. Ray is isolated from the world and therefore is entirely free of desire and suffering. He finds the immense area of solitude a happy and fulfilling place.

The other setting worthy of note in this novel is the road. The narrator spends several chapters hitchhiking, jumping rails, riding busses and otherwise traveling across the United States, crossing thousands of miles throughout the book. The distances traveled are not compressed in single sentences or ignored. Instead, these traveling times provide enlightenment and contact with the title characters, dharma bums.

Language and Meaning

The novel uses fairly straightforward English and is not particularly difficult to read. The language is engaging and enjoyable, and the novel is not written with a particularly strict adherence to the traditional forms of structure common to most novels. For example, the novel contains numerous made-up words, many grammatically incorrect sentences - both in dialogue and also in narration - and relates many conversations that are nearly nonsensical. Nevertheless, the reading experience is not rigorous, and the text is very accessible. The novel is perhaps best viewed as being informed by a casual disregard for authoritative form rather than a desire for perverse structure. In this aspect, the structure is immensely successful, and the text is quite appealing.

The novel does make frequent reference to Buddhist philosophy. Readers without a passing familiarity with Buddhism may find these references somewhat confusing, though the text does explain most of them sufficiently. However, for those with a more traditional Christian background, use of a Buddhist primer might assist a deeper understanding of much of the text.

Structure

The 244-page novel is divided into thirty-four unnamed chapters of uneven length. In general, each chapter contains a single scene or event in the novel, and the chapters are arranged in a straightforward and chronological method. Major changes in setting or events are always accented by a chapter break. The structure of the novel allows it to be easily read and understood. In short, the novel's traditional structure allows the novel to function well.

The novel covers a period of approximately eleven months in 1955 and 1956; each month is not given an equivalent amount of detail, however. Several weeks will pass within a single chapter, and then a series of chapters will detail only a few days' time. This structure allows the novel to focus on important details and greatly aids in the successful development of the novel's themes.



Quotes

"Meanwhile scores of people stood around in the darkened gallery straining to hear every word of the amazing poetry reading as I wandered from group to group, facing them and facing away from the stage, urging them to glug a slug from the jug, or wandered back and sat on the right side of the stage giving out little wows and yesses of approval and even whole sentences of comment with nobody's invitation but in the general gaiety nobody's disapproval either. It was a great night." (Chapter 2, p. 15)

"'Pretty girls make graves,' was my saying, whenever I'd had to turn my head around involuntarily to stare at the incomparable pretties of Indian Mexico. And the absence of active lust in me had also given me a new peaceful life that I was enjoying a great deal. But this was too much. I was still afraid to take my clothes off; also I never liked to do that in front of more than one person, especially with men around. But Japhy didn't give a goddamn hoot and holler about any of this and pretty soon he was making Princess happy and then Alvah had a turn (with his big serious eyes staring in the dim light, and him reading poems a minute ago). So I said 'How about me startin to work on her arm?'" (Chapter 5, pp. 29-30)

"We pushed the bike down past the various college hangouts and cafeterias and looked into Robbie's to see if we knew anybody. Alvah was in there, working his part-time job as busboy. Japhy and I were kind of outlandish-looking on the campus in our old clothes in fact Japhy was considered an eccentric around the campus, which is the usual thing for campuses and college people to think whenever a real man appears on the scene - college being nothing but grooming schools for the middle-class non-identity which usually finds its perfect expression on the outskirts of the campus in rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing at the same time while the Japhies of the world go prowling in the wilderness to hear the voice crying in the dark mysterious secret of the origin of faceless wonderless crapulous civilization. 'All these people,' said Japhy, 'they all got white-tiled toilets and take big dirty craps like bears in the mountains, but it's all washed away to convenient supervised sewers and nobody thinks of crap any more or realizes their origin is shit and civet and scum of the sea. They spend all day washing their hands with creamy soaps they secretly wanta eat in the bathroom.'" (Chapter 6, pp. 38-39)

"'Goldangit Japhy I feel great this morning,' I said as we locked the car and all three of us started swinging down the lake road with our packs, straggling a bit occupying side and center and other side of the road like straggling infantrymen. 'Isn't this a hell of a lot greater than The Place? Getting drunk in there on a fresh Saturday morning like this, all bleary and sick, and here we are by the fresh pure lake walkin along in this good air, by God it's a haiku in itself.'

"'Comparisons are odious, Smith,' he sent sailing back to me, quoting Cervantes and making a Zen Buddhist observation to boot. 'It don't make a damn frigging difference whether you're in The Place or hiking up Matterhorn, it's all the same old void, boy.' And I mused about that and realized he was right, comparisons *are* odious, it's all the same,



but it sure felt great and suddenly I realized this (in spite of my swollen foot veins) would do me a lot of good and get me away from drinking and maybe make me appreciate perhaps a whole new way of living." (Chapter 8, pp. 54-55)

"So we unpacked our packs and laid things out and smoked and had a good time. Now the mountains were getting that pink tinge, I mean the rocks, they were just solid rock covered with the atoms of dust accumulated there since beginningless time. In fact I was afraid of those jagged monstrosities all around and over our heads.

"They're so silent!" I said.

"Yeah man, you know to me a mountain is a Buddha. Think of the patience, hundreds of thousands of years just sitting there being perfectly perfectly silent and like praying for all living creatures in that silence and just waiting for us to stop all our fretting and fooling." Japhy got out the tea, Chinese tea, and sprinkled some in a tin pot, and had the fire going meanwhile, a small one to begin with, the sun was still on us, and stuck a long stick tight down under a few big rocks and made himself something to hang the teapot on and pretty soon the water was boiling and he poured it out steaming into the tin pot and we had cups of tea with our tin cups. I myself'd gotten the water from the stream, which was cold and pure like snow and the crystal-lidded eyes of heaven. Therefore, the tea was by far the most pure and thirst quenching tea I ever drank in all my life, it made you want to drink more and more, it actually quenched your thirst and of course it swam around hot in your belly.

"Now you understand the Oriental passion for tea," said Japhy. "Remember that book I told you about the first sip is joy the second is gladness, the third is serenity, the fourth is madness, the fifth is ecstasy."

"Just about old buddy." (Chapter 9, pp. 66-67)

"Come on Smith, only another five minutes. I only got a hundred feet to go!"

"I'm staying right here! It's too high!"

"He said nothing and went on. I saw him collapse and pant and get up and make his run again.

"I nudged myself closer into the ledge and closed my eyes and thought 'Oh what a life this is, why do we have to be born in the first place, and only so we can have our poor gentle flesh laid out to such impossible horrors as huge mountains and rock and empty space,' and with horror I remembered the famous Zen saying, 'When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing.' The saying made my hair stand on end; it had been such cute poetry sitting on Alvah's straw mats. Now it was enough to make my heart pound and my heart bleed for being born at all. 'In fact when Japhy gets to the top of that crag he *will* keep climbing, the way the wind's blowing. Well this old philosopher is staying right here,' and I closed my eyes. 'Besides,' I thought, 'rest and be kind, you don't have to prove anything.' Suddenly I heard a beautiful broken yodel of a strange musical and mystical intensity in the wind, and looked up, and it was Japhy standing on top of



Matterhorn peak letting out his triumphant mountain-conquering Buddha Mountain Smashing song of joy. It was beautiful." (Chapter 11, pp. 83-84)

"At seven-thirty my Zipper came in and was being made up by the switchmen and I hid in the weeds to catch it, hiding partly behind a telephone pole. It pulled out, surprisingly fast I thought, and with my heavy fifty-pound rucksack I ran out and trotted along till I saw an agreeable drawbar and took a hold of it and hauled on and climbed straight to the top of the box to have a good look at the whole train and see where my flatcar'd be. Holy smokes goddamn and all ye falling candles of heaven smash, but as the train picked up tremendous momentum and tore out of that yard I saw it was a bloody no-good eighteen-car sealed sonofabitch and at almost twenty miles an hour it was do or die, get off or hang on to my life at eighty miles per (impossible on a boxcar top) so I had to scramble down the rungs again but first I had to untangle my strap clip from where it had caught in the catwalk on top so by the time I was hanging from the lowest rung and ready to drop off we were going too fast now. Slinging the rucksack and holding it hard in one hand calmly and madly I stepped off hoping for the best and turned everything away and only staggered a few feet and I was safe on ground.

"But now I was three miles into the industrial jungle of L.A. in mad sick sniffing smog night and had to sleep all that night by a wire fence in a ditch by the tracks being waked up all night by rackets of Southern Pacific and Santa Fe switchers bellyaching around, till fog and clear of midnight when I breathed better (thinking and praying in my sack) but then more fog and smog again and horrible damp white cloud of dawn and my bag too hot to sleep in and outside too raw to stand, nothing but horror all night long, except at dawn a little bird blessed me.

"The only thing to do was to get out of L.A. According to my friend's instructions I stood on my head, using the wire fence to prevent me from falling over. It made my cold feel a little better. Then I walked to the bus station (through tracks and side streets) and caught a cheap bus twenty-five miles to Riverside. Cops kept looking at me suspiciously with that big bag on my back. Everything was far away from the easy purity of being with Japhy Ryder in that high rock camp under peaceful singing stars." (Chapter 16, pp. 119-120)

"There just isn't any kind of night's sleep in the world that can compare with the night's sleep you get in the desert winter night, providing you're good and warm in a duck-down bag. The silence is so intense that you can hear your own blood roar in your ears but louder than that by far is the mysterious roar which I always identify with the roaring of the diamond of wisdom, the mysterious roar of silence itself, which is a great Shhhh reminding you of something you've seemed to have forgotten in the stress of your days since birth. I wished I could explain it to those I loved, to my mother, to Japhy, but there just weren't any words to describe the nothingness and purity of it." (Chapter 22, p. 157)

"It goes on and on, the disciples and the Masters go through the same thing, first they have to find and tame the ox of their mind essence, and then abandon that, then finally they attain to nothing, as represented by this empty panel, then having attained nothing they attain everything which is springtime blossoms in the trees so they end up coming



down to the city to get drunk with the butchers like Li Po.' That was a very wise cartoon, it reminded me of my own experience, trying to tame my mind in the woods, then realizing it was all empty and awake and I didn't have to do anything, and now I was getting drunk with the butcher Japhy. We played records and lounged around smoking then went out and cut more wood." (Chapter 25, p. 175)

"It was a river wonderland, the emptiness of the golden eternity, odors of moss and bark and twigs and mud, all ululating mysterious visionstuff before my eyes, tranquil and everlasting nevertheless, the hillhairing trees, the dancing sunlight. As I looked up the clouds assumed, as I assumed, faces of hermits. The pine boughs looked satisfied washing in the waters. The top trees shrouded in gray fog looked content. The jiggling sunshine leaves of Northwest breeze seemed bred to rejoice. The upper snows on the horizon, the trackless, seemed cradled and warm. Everything was everlastingly loose and responsive, it was all everywhere beyond the truth, beyond emptyspace blue. 'The mountains are mighty patient, Buddha-man,' I said out loud and took a drink. It was coldish, but when the sun peeped out the tree stump I was sitting on turned into a red oven. When I went back in the moonlight to my same old tree stump the world was like a dream, like a phantom, like a bubble, like a shadow, like a vanishing dew, like a lightning's flash." (Chapter 32, pp. 225-226)

"I had a tremendous sensation of its dreamlikeness which never left me all that summer and in fact grew and grew, especially when I stood on my head to circulate my blood, right on top of the mountain, using a burlap bag for a head mat, and then the mountains looked like little bubbles hanging in the void upsidedown. In fact I realized they were upsidedown and I was upsidedown! There was nothing here to hide the fact of gravity holding us all intact upsidedown against a surface globe of earth in infinite empty space. And suddenly I realized I was truly alone and had nothing to do but feed myself and rest and amuse myself, and nobody could criticize. The little flowers grew everywhere around the rocks, and no one had asked them to grow, or me to grow." (Chapter 33, p. 235)

"'Japhy,' I said out loud, 'I don't know when we'll meet again or what'll happen in the future, but Desolation, Desolation, I owe so much to Desolation, thank you forever for guiding me to the place where I learned all. Now comes the sadness of coming back to cities and I've grown two months older and there's all that humanity of bars and burlesque shows and gritty love, all upsidedown in the void God bless them, but Japhy you and me forever we know, O ever youthful, O ever weeping.' Down on the lake rosy reflections of celestial vapor appeared, and I say 'God, I love you' and looked up to the sky and really meant it. 'I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other.'

"To the children and the innocent it's all the same.

"And in keeping with Japhy's habit of always getting down on one knee and delivering a little prayer to the camp we left, to the one in the Sierra, and the others in Marin, and the little prayer of gratitude he had delivered to Sean's shack the day he sailed away, as I was hiking down the mountain with my pack I turned and knelt on the trail and said



'Thank you, shack.' Then I added 'Blah,' with a little grin, because I knew that shack and that mountain would understand what that meant, and turned and went on down the trail back to this world." (Chapter 34, p. 244)



Topics for Discussion

Is the novel sexist in its portrayal of female characters?

Compare Ray Smith's sister with Japhy Ryder's sister. What do they have in common? What traits differentiate these two minor characters?

Ray states several times throughout the novel that lust leads only to death. Sometimes he means this metaphorically, but at other times he appears to mean it literally. Nevertheless, he actively participates in a scene of debauchery and lust when he has sex with Princess. What other conflicting character traits are present in Ray?

Page 174 of the narrative describes a traditional Chinese cartoon drawn in several panels. A young boy goes up a mountain and discovers an ox, which he tames and rides. Then, he abandons the ox and meditates. Next, he comes down the mountain, enlightened. The fourth panel is blank, and the fifth shows a blossoming tree. Then, the young boy is presented as a laughing fat man who is heading to the city to get drunk while another young boy goes up into the mountain. Compare the cartoon panels to the sequence of events in the novel and explain how the cartoon is an allegory for the novel.

Like many Kerouac novels, the book is traditionally viewed as a lightly fictionalized autobiography. How does the realization that, for example, Alvah Goldbook is based on Allen Ginsberg alter the reading of the novel?

Are the descriptions of hobo-style train riding presented in the novel believable? Why or why not?

Ray believes that Rosie Buchanan goes to heaven. Is this consistent with Ray's Christian/protestant upbringing?

After reading the book, would you be more or less likely to work as a fire lookout in the Cascade Mountains for a summer?

Does the book instill a kind of wanderlust in the reader? After reading about hitchhiking across the United States of America twice within just a few months, are you inspired to do some hitchhiking of your own?

Ray Smith has several short conversations with his young nephew Lou. Are their conversations intelligible, or are they simply talking nonsense to each other?

When Ray leaves Desolation Peak he offers, on bended knee, a simple prayer of thanks to the shack that sheltered him for several weeks. He then addresses the mountainous area by saying 'blah' and suggests to the reader that the mountain knows what he is talking about. What do you think 'blah' means in this context?