The Light in the Forest Study Guide

The Light in the Forest by Conrad Richter

BOOKRAGS

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Overview

The Light in the Forest addresses universal issues of survival, individual freedom, divided loyalties, and identity through the personal drama of True Son, a fifteen-year-old boy caught between two cultures. Born to European settlers, True Son was abducted by Native Americans when he was four years old. He has grown to love and respect his "adopted" parents; forced to return to his biological family as an adolescent, True Son faces a crisis of identity and purpose.

True Son's individual struggle points to the larger territorial conflict between the early pioneers and Native Americans. As an adventure story, the novel depicts both the white and Native American characters as complex individuals; as a historical account, the story presents the characters as representations of the political loyalties and racial biases of their own groups. Richter openly confronts the issue of racial biases among ethnic groups and encourages cultural sensitivity; The Light in the Forest emphasizes cooperation and respect for the values of others as the only means of ensuring a peaceful society in the future. Forced to choose between his white and Native American families, True Son ultimately rejects both and instead chooses to regard himself as an individual and to provide an example of peace and justice. Through True Son's story Richter extends a message of racial harmony in the United States and peace and understanding among nations.

About the Author

Conrad Richter, novelist, short story writer, and essayist, was born on Johnston Journal Next, he became the October 13, 1890, in Pine Grove, Pennsylvania. Considered one of America's foremost autobiographical novelists, he gleaned material for his writing from local legends about the first Pennsylvania settlers and family stories about his immigrant grandparents. Because his father, a Lutheran minister, served seven parishes, the family moved often, enabling Richter to gather a variety of information on the early history of Pennsylvania. He completed high school in 1906 in Tremont, Pennsylvania, the site of his father's first parish. While Richter did not join the ministry as was expected of him, he explored metaphysical and mystical themes in his fiction and his book-length philosophical essays.

Richter worked as a teamster, farm laborer, industrial worker, bank clerk, subscription salesman, and timberman before launching his writing career at the age of eighteen as a reporter for the editor of the Patton Courier and served as reporter for the Pittsburgh Dispatch and Johnstown Leader. He also worked for a children's magazine, John Martin's Book, and later published and wrote his own Junior Magazine. His first short story was published in 1913, and a year later, his second short story, "Brothers of No Kin," was selected by critic E. J. O'Brien as the best short story of the year. Disappointed that the story earned him only twenty-five dollars, he continued to contribute short stories to popular magazines such as Outlook, Ladies Home Journal, the Saturday Evening Post, and Every Week, but decided to write only in his spare time.

Married to Harvena Achenbach since 1915, Richter sold his small business and farm in 1928 and moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to accommodate his critically ill wife. The move marked a turning point in Richter's literary career.

Here he found his literary milieu and became a full-time author. Although the Southwest was quite different from his native Pine Grove, he was awed by the majesty of nature and the endurance of the people who, like the early settlers of Pennsylvania, represented frontier spirit and courage. He reflected these impressions in novels such as The Sea of Grass, Tacey Cromwell (1942), and The Lady, which glorify the struggle for survival and the mystical relationship with nature that characterized life on the frontier. Sea of Grass and Tacey Cromwell were both adapted to film. Richter also wrote his Ohio Trilogy while in New Mexico. The Trees, The Fields, and The Town trace the transformation of Ohio from wilderness to farmland to the site of modern industrial civilization, all in the lifetime of one character. The trilogy earned Richter immediate acclaim as a historical novelist. The Town won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1951, and The Trees was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection after it was published. Richter also received the 1947 Ohioan Library Medal for the first two volumes of the trilogy.

Richter returned to Pine Grove in 1950 and continued to explore the human condition through historical and autobiographical novels, short stories, and a book-length essay, The Mountain on the Desert (1955). In an attempt to acknowledge the culture and history of Native Americans, he wrote The Light in the Forest and its sequel, A Country

of Strangers. Before his death in Pine Grove on October 30, 1968, Richter had published two volumes of the wellknown autobiographical trilogy based on his family: The Waters of Kronos, which won the National Book Award in 1961, and A Simple Honorable Man. He died before completing the third book in the trilogy. In recent years, Richter's work has received increasing critical acclaim for its exploration of the relationship between past and present and for its themes of brotherhood, justice, and love.

Plot Summary

Fifteen-year-old True Son is the adopted white son of Cuyloga and a member of the Lenni Lenape Native American tribe. For the past eleven years he has lived as a true member of the tribe, but now he has learned that he must return to the white family from which he was taken. He does not remember his white family and wants to remain with the tribe, but his father cannot resist the white soldiers who come to take True Son back to Pennsylvania, where he was born. According to Del, the red-haired soldier assigned to guard and translate for True Son, this was done to appease the whites and keep them from further encroaching on Indian land. Cuyloga hates to give up the boy he had loved as his own son, but even more, he hated the thought of the enemy creeping nearer as they attempted to take back what they believe to be theirs.

In spite of his attempts to resist, True Son is taken by the white soldiers. Because he can neither escape nor shame his father by fighting, he begins to despair and even makes a plan to commit suicide. When his cousin, Half Arrow, appears and joins him on the journey, it lifts his spirits. Half Arrow and their friend Little Crane go with the party as far as the river. After a failed attempt by True Son to steal the guard's gun and escape, they turn back while True Son sadly crosses the river with the rest of the captives.

In the town of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, True Son's white father, Henry Butler, comes to claim him. They leave for the family's home in Paxton along with Del, who will translate and make sure True Son does not harm anyone in the family. On the way True Son makes one final attempt to escape and is once again stopped by Del.

At the Butler family home True Son learns that his white name was John, and he meets his younger brother Gordie, his Aunt Kate, and his mother Myra, who has been an invalid since his abduction. They give him his white cousin's clothing to wear and try to make him speak his white name in English, but he refuses. Eventually they take his Indian clothes and moccasins, and he is forced to wear the strange and uncomfortable clothing made for him. The only positive outcome of the meeting is that an early bond forms between True Son and Gordie when Gordie takes an interest in the Indian clothing.

True Son has a difficult time adjusting to his life in white society. The house feels like a prison to him, and he is haunted by the stories he remembers hearing about white violence, even toward Indians who had converted to Christianity. His misery worsens when he meets his Uncle Wilse, who seems to despise him and who tells his father that he will have no luck making a white boy out of him. True Son's relationship with Uncle Wilse is thus adversarial from the start, and they proceed to argue about which race is the more savage. The meeting results in Wilse striking True Son.

True Son becomes more determined to resist assimilation. He refuses, ultimately without success, to wear the white clothes. His homesickness grows when he and Gordie visit the black basket weaver Bejance, who tells him of an Indian named Corn

Blade, who lives in the nearby mountains and can speak True Son's language. This leads True Son to sneak off in search of Corn Blade, but he is once again caught.

In the spring, True Son falls ill with a mysterious illness the doctor diagnosis as an Indian ailment resulting from his long Indian captivity. His father worries and blames himself, but healing is not far off: The news that Indians have been spotted in town and have been asking for True Son gives him the strength to leave his bed. He finds Half Arrow outside and learns that Little Crane has been shot and scalped by someone in the town. They blame Uncle Wilse, and in retaliation they beat and nearly scalp him. In the end they are forced to escape into the mountains, where True Son tells Half Arrow they will return to their home village together.

When they reach the Lenni Lenape village, the family of Little Crane assembles the council and calls for revenge on the whites. True Son, his father Cuyloga and Half Arrow join the party, determined to take blood for blood. On the way back to Paxton some of the party stop at a white settlement where they scalp some of the residents, one of them a child. This gives True Son pause because he had so vehemently told his white relatives his people never did violence to children. When they reach the river and discover boats carrying whites, the party decides to lure some of them to shore so they can attack them. As bait, they dress True Son in white clothes and put him in the river. As the next boat approaches he pretends to need help and they steer toward shore. At the last moment he is overcome with guilt about what is about to happen to them, so he warns them of the ambush waiting for them. The whites narrowly escape.

Many of the Indians in the party want True Son to burn for betraying his brothers in this way; however, Cuyloga stands up for him, taking responsibility for his failure to behave like a true Indian. He then tells True Son that he must leave the tribe since his bonds with white society are clearly still strong. He takes him as far as the river, telling him they must then part as enemies. It is the second time True Son has stood on the far side of the river and watched one of his people leaving him behind. He looks ahead of him, seeing the white road leading back to his white home, and realizes he is about to give up the wild freedom of the Indian life for good.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In the first line of the novel True Son has already learned he must leave the life he knows with his father, mother and sisters in the Lenni Lenape tribe and return to his white family, from whom he was taken eleven years before, in Pennsylvania. He knows the story of how he came to the tribe: He was taken to replace Cuyloga's first son, who died of an illness, and Cuyloga used a spell to transform his white blood into Indian blood. True Son considers it wrong that he should be taken from the only family he remembers and made to live with the whites, his enemy. He makes up his mind never to give up his Indian identity, no matter what happens.

True Son first tries to avoid his fate by hiding in a tree. Cuyloga finds him and drags him back. He is humiliated in front of his whole family to be disciplined in this way, especially since his cousin Half Arrow, with whom he has a close relationship, witnesses his shame. It is then that True Son doubts his Indian father for the first time. In the end, Cuyloga gives him to the white soldiers and asks him to behave honorably - like a true Indian - and not shame his father by resisting. True Son meets Del, the redhaired soldier who will be his guard and translator on the journey to Pennsylvania. As his father leaves, True Son envisions his home and feels the first pangs of homesickness. Del mocks him, and True Son vows to kill him the first chance he gets.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening pages of the novel introduce important character elements: True Son is painted as a proud Indian youth who values his culture and who has internalized its values, particularly of viewing whites as the enemy. Though he accepts that he was born among whites, he believes his father has made him a true Indian. His behavior upon learning he will be sent away is a hint of the determination he will show later to remain an Indian and ultimately escape his white captors. The images of True Son taking the endurance tests of touching hot coals and standing in the icy river highlight the strength he will need in order to bear his present ordeal. His father Cuyloga put him through these tests to make him a strong man, and that strength is now being tested when Cuyloga delivers him to the white soldiers. Cuyloga's request that True Son behave like an honorable and brave Indian, thereby avoiding bringing shame on him, thus indicates the degree to which the tribe values the need to endure: Enduring suffering and waiting for the right opportunity to strike or escape, but also enduring in the sense of survival. Resistance with honor is part of the tribe's hope for a future.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Del, the redheaded soldier assigned to be the translator between True Son and the other white soldiers, believes the mission to take back white captives from the Indians is one of suicide. He thinks the colonel in charge of the mission is mad: They are only to fight the Indians in self-defense. Del and the other soldiers have all joined because they want to get back at the natives for killing or kidnapping their relatives. Del himself spent time living among the Delaware's, as the whites refer to the Lenni Lenape. Still, he refrains from harming any of the Indian hostages. He had thought the Indians wouldn't give up their captives without a fight, but as it turned out they were eager to do whatever was necessary to keep the whites from encroaching on their territory.

Del is surprised at the emotion shown by some of the Indians when they handed over their adopted children and wives. He is also surprised that the rescued captives did not want to be rescued. The Delaware boy called True Son is the most rebellious and has to be tied up. Del reminds the boy he is white, but the boy insists he is Indian and says he will not go to Pennsylvania. He even refuses to eat.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The novel's point of view shifts to that of Del Hardy, giving the reader a glimpse of the story from a white person's perspective. Though his attitudes toward the Indians are not as strong as some characters, he nonetheless harbors anger for the suffering his own people have experienced at Indian hands. He fails to consider the role whites have played in this situation as encroachers who cause the Indians to defend their land. Like the other whites in the novel, he looks on the Indians with distaste because their ways are so foreign; ironically, though, he speaks the Lenni Lenape language and thereby acts as the initial communication link between True Son and white society. He must explain things to True Son and explain True Son's words and ideas to the other whites. Though this makes it possible for True Son to express himself and thus be able to defend himself and his people when verbally attacked, at the same time Del begins the process by which the whites attempt to convince True Son he is white and not Indian.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The camp prepares to leave for Pennsylvania. The soldiers are excited to be leaving Indian country, but True Son begins to despair. Preferring to die rather than live among the enemy, he makes a plan to commit suicide by eating the heart of the May apple. That way he will triumph over his enemy and be honored by his true people. But the redheaded soldier Del is always watching. He will have to wait until they are on the road.

At the Forks of Muskingum the road splits, with the path back to True Son's village going in one direction and the path to Pennsylvania in another. True Son tries again to escape, but the guard prevents him. Just as despair starts to overtake him again, he hears a familiar voice from the forest, that of Half Arrow, his cousin. Half Arrow promises to walk with True Son and keep him company on the journey. They joke about killing and scalping the white soldiers, and Half Arrow lifts his cousin's spirits with news of the village. As they pass the May apple, True Son invites Half Arrow to come out of the woods and walk with the party and shares his food with him, though neither likes the white man's beef. Having Half Arrow with him almost makes True Son forget the reason for the journey. Only at night are they separated, when the redheaded guard, afraid of being attacked in his sleep, forces Half Arrow to sleep in the woods. Before going into the woods, Half Arrow gives True Son a gift from home: parched corn, new moccasins, and True Son's bearskin bed, sent by Cuyloga.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter introduces the important thematic idea of brotherhood, through the character of Half Arrow. On the first part of the journey to Pennsylvania, Half Arrow serves as an important link back to their village; his passing on of gifts from True Son's family eases the burden of the journey somewhat, and his presence helps ease True Son's transition. But already a dividing line is being drawn between True Son and his Indian cousin, and the scene in which they discuss sleeping arrangements foreshadows the beginning of their alienation from each other. While True Son will sleep among the white soldiers, Half Arrow will happily sleep in the woods under a pile of leaves in the fashion of an Indian on a long journey.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

True Son tries to keep his mind off the moment when his cousin will have to turn around and return to the Lenni Lenape village. They talk of stealing the white soldiers' horses and again of which guards they would like to kill and scalp. Little Crane, who is accompanying his white squaw, joins them in listing all the whites' shortcomings, such as the fact that they had to learn right from wrong by reading a book (the Bible) while the Indians did not. The whites also think too much of their material possessions and fail to pay attention to nature.

A Mohawk joins the party and tells them they will soon reach the river that will take them to their first destination, Fort Pitt. The river is too high to cross, and while they are waiting for it to go down, the body of the Mohawk is found, tomahawked and scalped. Little Crane says the white soldiers are to blame. Though the Mohawk are no friends of the Lenni Lenape, they are still Indians, so this makes True Son and his friends even angrier.

The next morning the redhaired guard tells True Son it is time to cross the river: Half Arrow must return the village. The guard forces Half Arrow away with his rifle. As they are crossing the river, True Son tries again to escape and steal the guard's weapons. He fails. Half Arrow agrees to turn back, but not before giving True Son a message from Cuylogo: Be brave, cooperate with the white soldiers in order to stay alive, and only strike when the time is right. True Son promises not to disgrace his people. He crosses the river, and when he reaches the other side looks across and sees his friends leaving.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The presence of Little Crane and Half Arrow takes True Son's mind off the goal of the journey, but it also provides an important grounding element: His pledge to remain an Indian is supported by their discussions of the whites' shortcomings, and his pride is stoked. He can also remain, for a time, immersed in his own culture. However, the dominance of the whites intervenes in the end, forcing True Son to cross the river and leave Half Arrow and Little Crane on the other side. The river is not just a literal dividing line between the white and Indian worlds; it is also a symbol of True Son's being on the threshold between his Indian and white selves. Crossing the river, he leaves his Indian life behind and moves toward his white life.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

True Son and the rest of the party reach Fort Pitt. As they approach, True Son is determined to be strong in spite of the strange look of the place and the people there: weird buildings, drunken whites, and even a few Indian traitors. As they leave the fort and push east, he is also surprised by the presence of walls, which he has never seen before. He has reached the place where white encroachment has destroyed the forest and forced out the wildlife that is the Indians' food supply. There are roads, uncomfortable to walk on, and livestock in pens. Camping near the white village of Carlisle, True Son wonders how the inhabitants can stand living in houses, which seem like small prisons to him.

When the party enters the village, the people all gather to see the captives. The redhaired guard Del tells True Son that his white father is coming to get him the next day, and as he has foretold, the next morning True Son and the other captives are presented to a crowd so their white relatives can claim him. True Son is one of the last to be claimed. Del translates and introduces him to the white man who has come for him. They shake hands, though True Son cannot believe the man, with his strange dress and pasty looks, can possibly be his father. He denies their relationship. The colonel orders Del to accompany them to the white man's house to translate and make sure True Son doesn't escape or attack.

Chapter 5 Analysis

At Fort Pitt True Son's bemusement by white culture escalates with the strange appearance of the white settlement. If he has felt like a captive of the whites thus far, he feels even more so now. The reality of his journey's goal also comes to sit on his shoulders here. The scene in which families come forth to claim their relatives bears a striking resemblance to a slave auction, and this similarity is not lost on True Son. The presentation of captives thus sets up the theme of slavery and captivity, which will figure in the novel's development as True Son resists what he believes to be imprisonment in white society. Though Mr. Butler is happy to be have his son returned and views the trip to Carlisle as a reunion, True Son still feels like he has been kidnapped and goes with his white father only because he has been forced to do so.

With the introduction of True Son's white family, the tension between his two worlds quickly escalates. The unfavorable comparison between Cuyloga and Mr. Butler strengthens his distaste for whites and confirms for him that he does not belong in white society. Making his first public denial of his white father, he thus shows the whites he will be no easy captive.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Del Hardy is happy when they reach Fort Pitt after the long journey through Indian country. He is cheered by the presence of roads, cleared land, houses and barns. He believes it will not be long before the fort is no longer the whites' farthest outpost.

True Son is sullen and ungrateful toward Mr. Butler, the father he has been returned to. Del cannot understand: At the Susquehanna River his own heart leaps at the sight of the ferry, but the boy is unmoved. Only when he hears his father speak the name Susquehanna on the ferry ride to the other side does the boy perk up. He tells Del the river belongs to his people and that the whites stole it from them. The boy's father tells him they will talk about that another time; for now, they are nearing Paxton, where the boy was born. Hearing the town's name makes the boy jump his horse off the ferry when they near the shore; he climbs out of the water and disappears into the forest. Del soon catches him, and they continue.

At the Butler home Del and the boy are greeted by the boy's younger brother Gordie and his aunt Kate. The little boy is delighted at the sight of the young Indian. With some effort they get him upstairs to his mother's bedroom. She kisses him and calls him by his old name of John, but the boy does not seem to understand her. He refuses to speak his Indian name and surprises everyone by saying in English that his name is True Son and that his mother and father gave it to him. Mrs. Butler gives up and gives him clothes to change into. Gordie asks for his Indian clothes, saying he wants to be an Indian. This, along with the fact that the little boy has addressed him as True Son, makes him begin to like his younger white brother.

Chapter 6 Analysis

On the journey from Carlisle to Paxton, the first attempts at reforming family bonds are hugely unsuccessful. True Son receives important information that freshly steels his resolve to resist his captivity: First, that the Susquehanna River, once a sacred place to bury relatives, is indeed overrun with whites. In fact, at one of its crossings the whites are running ferries back and forth, and True Son, Del and Mr. Butler use one of them to get to Paxton. This is another chance for True Son to remind his white father that he is an intruder here.

True Son also learns something that horrifies him: Some of his white relations are among the infamous "Peshtank white men," whom Mr. Butler refers to as the Paxton boys and who are known among the Indian communities for their unprovoked violence against natives. After the original news that he must return to his white family, this is perhaps the most distressing piece of information he could receive. He is going to live not only among a generally despised race but also among the very worst

representatives of that race - the worst of the worst. Not surprisingly, he makes his first major escape attempt as a result of hearing this news; however, he is perhaps just as horrified by his father's pride in mentioning the Paxton boys.

True Son's displacement from his familiar surroundings becomes ever more apparent as he is confronted with white innovations in the Butler family home, such as stairs. Here in this enclosed environment, forced family dynamics cause tensions to boil. From True Son's point of view, the insults and degradations keep coming. He views the white clothing his mother gives him as a symbol of the white man's evil; thus it is the ultimate humiliation to have to wear them.

The only positive that comes out of this first family meeting is the quick bond that forms between True Son and Gordie. While their parents are forcing the symbols of white domination on True Son, Gordie is asking to bear the symbols of the life True Son has been forced to leave behind. It is a trade-off that paves the way for a burgeoning sense of brotherhood between them.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

True Son has trouble sleeping in his white family's home, with its prison-like walls. He is also troubled because of a story he once heard: A group of Conestoga had converted to the white man's religion, but the white savages from Paxton slaughtered them and burned their village anyway. True Son dreads having to meet more of the whites the next day. To comfort himself, he gets out of bed and wraps up in his bearskin by the fire.

The next morning he comes to breakfast in his Indian dress. Aunt Kate tells him he will have to change, and only when Gordie offers to help him does he give in. Gordie and Del show him how to bathe and dress, and then he reluctantly goes downstairs to greet his mother and meet the relatives. He meets his uncle Wilson Owens, who says that they will not be able to make a white boy out of him - his Indian ways cannot be unlearned. His father stands up for him and reminds Wilse that he was born white. True Son listens to his uncle berate his ways and his language. It is only then that he speaks, explaining that Delaware is a rich language - there are twenty different ways to say God. Hearing this, Uncle Wilse gets angry, saying that the savage who took True Son from his white family has no right to speak of God. True Son accuses Wilse of his own brand of savagery, of murdering the Christian Conestoga.

Uncle Wilse warns him that his Indian friends should stay away. In retaliation, True Son tells a story about a man named David Owens, who married an Indian woman and had children with her. Perhaps this was his brother? In response, Uncle Wilse strikes him.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Uncle Wilse plays an important antagonistic role, and he and True Son are set against each other from their first meeting. From the start, Uncle Wilse represents all that is considered evil about the whites: He speaks with ignorance and bigotry about the Indians' religion and language, generalizes that all Indians are murderers or murderers-in-training, and admits that he thinks they deserve to suffer violence. True Son has already learned from Gordie that Uncle Wilse is the leader of the Paxton boys, so he gives little credence to his trying to pass himself off as a Christian.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The evening after the argument with Uncle Wilse, True Son takes off his cousin's borrowed outfit and puts his Indian clothes back on, swearing to never again dress as a white boy. But a tailor comes and cuts new clothes for him, and a shoemaker makes him some uncomfortable new shoes to replace his moccasins. When he tries to wear the moccasins, Aunt Kate takes them away along with his Indian clothes.

True Son is miserable. Del, his only link to his people and his language, has left. Five days a week he must learn to read and write in his mother's bedroom, and on Sundays he goes to church. He thinks the white church foolish but remembers the wisdom of one of his tribe's elders: The Great Spirit will provide. He must wait for the white enemy to be delivered into his hands.

One day True Son is sent with Gordie to get a basket from Bejance, an old black man in town. True Son almost feels at home in the old man's rustic cabin and is overtaken by a strong feeling of homesickness. Bejance tells him about a man named Corn Blade, who lives in the mountains and can speak Lenni Lenape. True Son becomes preoccupied with the thought of seeing an Indian face, and the first day winter appears to be letting up he and Gordie ride out toward the mountains. They pass Uncle Wilse's house on the way and are soon overtaken by Mr. Butler and Uncle Wilse. His father accuses him of lying, stealing and trying to escape and vows to watch him closer. It is difficult to turn around because the beauty of nature was almost his again.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The theme of slavery and captivity is introduced when True Son and Gordie go to Bejance's cabin and hear his speech about how white society slowly and imperceptibly places them in bondage. Even Gordie is bound because he is a child who has no choice but submit to white society's rules for etiquette, making a home and working. This is important information for True Son, because it confirms his belief that he is there as a captive and not as a free member of the family. His distrust of the Butlers and the rest of Paxton deepens. When Bejance tells him of Corn Blade, who can speak his language, he sees the opportunity to once again make a connection back to his people.

Just as True Son's distrust for the whites is hardening, the whites' distrust of him, originating with Uncle Wilse, is also developing. Uncle Wilse and Mr. Butler mistake True Son's attempt to visit Corn Blade for an escape attempt, and the situation looks worse to them because True Son has taken Gordie along and has taken food from the house. Mr. Butler's accusation that he lies and steals sounds much like Uncle Wilse's statement that all Indians lie and steal because their sense of morality is opposite the whites.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Myra Butler remembers the day her son was taken by the Indians. It was the reason she became ill and unable to leave her bedroom. Parson Elder stops by for a visit, and Myra and Kate tell him of John's escape attempt and how he is refusing to give up his Indian ways and take on those of white society. Kate gives a list of things she believes he has stolen. Parson Elder agrees to talk to the boy.

When True Son is called into the room, he sits on the floor and refuses to drink anything. The parson lectures him about politeness, but True Son replies with evidence of the white traders' shady dealings with the Indians. A debate ensues over the respective virtues of whites and Indians, with each accusing the other's people of violence and savagery. In the end the parson tells John it is the Christian duty of all people to be kind. He tells Myra and Kate to be patient and not expect to rid the boy of his Indian teachings overnight.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The debate with Parson Elder gives True Son an important spiritual perspective on the whites' lifestyle. The parson is the only person, white or Indian, who offers him a more than one-sided view of the situation. When True Son tells of the traders who get the Indians drunk and then cheat them, the parson allows that some whites act out of self-defense while others out of pure hate. He is careful, though, to emphasize that many Indians have also committed acts of unprovoked savagery, often against children. This causes True Son to burst out in defense of his people as respectful of the young. He himself is perhaps the best evidence of this, since Cuyloga adopted him rather than killing him. But rather than offering this, he simply affirms what he believes to be true, that no harm to white children ever comes at the hands of his people. This is an important statement, since at the end of the novel he will learn this is not in fact true.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

True Son has fallen ill. The doctor claims he has a mysterious Indian illness, possibly the result of having been a captive of the Indians for so long. Henry Butler blames himself for the boy's illness: Eleven years ago he took little Johnny with him to the wheat field from which he was taken by the Indians. His depression deepens when the boy speaks mechanically to him, as though he does not consider him his true father. He is moved by the sight of the boy's clothing, which he wore in health, hanging on the wall.

Parson Elder's son comes to tell Mr. Butler there are Indians outside and one has been shot. They have been asking for the white boy who was taken away from them. By mistake, they are directed to Uncle Wilse's house, and it is clear that some kind of fight took place. Mr. Butler decides not to tell his family yet: the news would only upset his wife and son. He tries to busy himself by working on his accounts, wishing as he does so that his son could appreciate the pleasure of the work.

Chapter 10 Analysis

True Son's illness offers a rare glimpse into the perspective of Mr. Butler, from whose eyes we see the ailing boy. The point of view shift here is significant, because it shows the relationship between father and son. According to him, the boy is no closer to accepting him as his father. His possible theft of the curly maple gun is evidence of this fact, as is the mechanical way in which he answers questions.

The boy's illness is painful for Mr. Butler because of the blame he assigns himself for it. The doctor says the illness is a mysterious Indian malaise brought on by his long captivity, but to Mr. Butler this is the equivalent of saying it is his fault the boy is dying. After all, if he had not taken the boy to the wheat field that day when the Indians attacked, he would not have been abducted in the first place. It is clear from this scene that Butler is willing to make efforts at rebuilding his bond with his son; for example, even though it might have put his family in danger, he reveals he had been planning to give the gun as a gift, a gesture that would have been an important pledge of trust and of faith in their ability to have a relationship.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

True Son blames the pain in his head, a symptom of his mysterious illness, on straining his eyes when he looks across the river for a messenger from his village. Spring comes, and still he receives no word from his people, but the sounds of the season take him back to pleasant days spent in the woods with his cousin. Could it be that he is dead to his people? Even now he feels himself becoming tamed by the white people, becoming used to their food. True Son also feels strange when his father has him hoeing. This is considered "women's work" back in his Indian village. Bejance sees him working and comments again that he is becoming enslaved to the white man's ways.

True Son learns through Gordie that Indians have visited the town. This gives him the strength to get out of bed and climb out the window. Once outside he makes a call like an owl, and an Indian voice answers - his cousin Half Arrow. He learns that their friend Little Crane has also come, though he has been killed. Half Arrow takes True Son to see his body, explaining that this happened after they went to True Son's uncle's home and tried to be friendly. The stories offended the uncle. They bury Little Crane and then go in search of Uncle Wilse to make him explain. New hate rises when he sees the man. Uncle Wilse tries to grab True Son. Only with great effort are they able to subdue Uncle Wilse by hitting him over the head, after which Half Arrow suggests cutting out his heart. They settle for trying to scalp him, but the assistant Cooper catches them and they must run. They take shelter in the Butlers' barn, but soon hear the gallop of horses coming toward them.

Chapter 11 Analysis

True Son's mysterious illness seems connected to the despair he shows over his situation. His resolve to resist and someday escape seems to have wilted, and he seems to lose hope as a result of his village's failure to send any messages. The thought that he has become dead to his true people seems to accompany what he describes as changes in his unquenchable soul: He has become used to the white man's food, drink, air and work, so it can be no coincidence that he no longer feels the impulse to fight.

True Son's despair during his illness once again brings the idea of captivity. One day while lying in bed, True Son recalls another encounter with Bejance, who sees him hoeing and comments that the process of his enslavement is well under way. Thus, at this point in the novel we see True Son at his lowest and weakest. He is like the Indian that is finally beaten down by white dominance.

Medicine for this despair, however, comes in the form of Half Arrow's visit. The news that Indians have been spotted in town seems to redraw the connection to True Son's

Indian people. It is important that Little Crane is found dead in this scene, just after True Son has been least able to resist: Renewed physically, he also renews his resolve to make the whites pay for their crimes, and he directs this wrath at the person he believe most deserves it - Uncle Wilse. The choice to attack his uncle sets in motion a chain of events that are crucial to the novel's climax, which begins with True Son and Half Arrow's escape and True Son's subsequent decision to return to the Indian village.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

True Son and Half Arrow awake in a camp they have made in the mountains, happy in the certainty that they cannot return to the white village for fear of being jailed or hanged. True Son tells his cousin they will return to the Lenni Lenape village together, and Half Arrow jumps for joy. When they reach the river, True Son realizes he has escaped his white enemies. He regrets leaving Gordie behind, so he tells Half Arrow that he must be his brother now. They trek through the wilderness, filled with anger that their kin and fellow Indians have been driven from this land, occasionally coming upon white hunting parties they must hide from. Crossing an enormous flat-topped mountain, they come upon a trader's house along a river and steal one of his boats because Half Arrow believes the river will take them back to the Forks of Muskingum, near their home. He turns out to be right, and when they pass Fort Pitt, True Son remembers the last time he saw it as a prisoner. Now he sees it as a free man.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Once he has put his white life behind him, True Son can now immerse himself in one of the things he has missed most during his time in Paxton: The beauty of nature, with its associations of home and familiarity and freedom. He also has to find a replacement for his brother, Gordie. The request for Half Arrow to fill this role is significant. It shows the degree to which True Son has suffered for lack of certain important male relationships; but more importantly, it indicates the surprising bond True Son has managed to form with a white person and foreshadows the moment when his love for his white brother causes him to betray his people.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

After Fort Pitt the boys no longer have to hide by day because they are truly back in Indian country. They take their time now, stopping to enjoy nature and take sustenance directly from the land. When they finally get back on the road, they start to see more and more signs of home, such as the White Woman's River with its familiar banks and sandbars. Then they enter the village, and the people there come out to greet them, including True Son's sister. Finally True Son sees his father, who hugs him in welcome.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Nature, as associated with home and freedom continues to be an important thematic line in this part of the novel. After Fort Pitt, the white-made settlement of walls and strange buildings and restrictive rules, True Son and Half Arrow are finally in free, wild Indian territory, where no white man can tell them what to do. Their fear of being discovered by the whites has gone. They can now enjoy the familiar natural landmarks, which mean they are nearing home.

The part of the journey between Fort Pitt and the Lenni Lenape village is a significant transition period for True Son, the reverse of the one he experienced on the road to Pennsylvania. Just like then, Half Arrow is his companion, only now he is free to explore the wilderness, fish, hunt, sleep where he wants, and go at his own pace. The change from the rules, hard roads and prison-like houses of Paxton is not lost on him. He takes his time because he must re-absorb the essential natural elements he had to cast off on his last journey through this territory; however, he is also trying to experience as much pure freedom as he can before reaching his home village, with its own rules and customs and elders to follow.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

True Son sleeps his first night back home among familiar sounds, smells, people and things. For several days afterward the whole village celebrates his return. Only the family of Little Crane seems unhappy. One day the council drum beats, and the village assembles to discuss the matter of Little Crane's death. They decide to avenge him. On the road to the white town, the party splits so some can raid a white settlement. When they meet up again, the raiders have scalps, one of them of a child. The next day the party comes on a boat full of whites. They make a plan to use True Son as a decoy to get the next boat to come ashore so they can attack. They dress him in clothes they took from the white settlement, and when a boat finally comes along he calls to them. Thinking he is a lost child, the people in the boat steer toward shore, but when they get close True Son sees they have a child with them, which reminds him of Gordie. Suddenly True Son calls out, warning the whites that they are being ambushed.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The revenge party teaches True Son some things he had never known about his own people: They, like the whites, are just as capable of being cruel to other human beings. Before the party splits to attack the white settlement, True Son is happy to be back among his people and excited to be a part of the revenge attack on Paxton; however, when he sees Thitpan, who rejoins the rest of the party and shows off the child's scalp, True Son begins to question the absolute moral correctness of his people. True Son rejoices over it with Half Arrow, but inside he is troubled by it: He had boasted to his white family and Parson Elder that never had he known any of his Indian kin to scalp or otherwise harm a child.

Inevitably, True Son is placed in the position of choosing whether or not to participate in violence toward whites when the party decides to ambush the boatful of whites and use him as the critical decoy. Seeing the choice to commit the violence he had berated his white relatives for condoning, he elects to prevent it, showing that he has grown significantly since being taken from the Indian village. At the beginning of the novel he would have gladly acted as decoy for such an attack; now he realizes that whites are people just like Indians.

When he stands at the edge of the river and decides to warn the whites about the ambush waiting for them, he also stands on the dividing line between his Indian and white lives. One choice will guarantee him the love and acceptance of his Indian people, while the other will mean rejection and possibly even death. The idea of brotherhood figures strongly in the ambush scene; it is because the little boy in the boat reminds True Son of Gordie, a white whom he has come to love and respect, that he chooses to

save the whites in the boat. But at the same time, it is with shame that he looks on Half Arrow, who has pledged to be his brother. In saving one brother, he betrays another.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

True Son realizes he has betrayed his Indian brothers to save a group of whites. They seize him and bind his hands and feet, then call a council to decide his fate. Many in the party want to burn him because they believe the whites have sent him back to betray them. When it is Cuyloga's turn to vote, he takes responsibility for his son's failure, even though what he has done has not caused them any real harm. He says he cannot stand by and let them burn his son.

Cuyloga also tells him that he has disappointed him by showing that his bond to white society is still strong. He will have to send him back to the whites once again. They will go as far as the nearest white man's road, and then part--as enemies. They leave the party together, and as promised Cuyloga sends him on alone when they reach the road at the point where it crosses the river. Just like last time, True Son crosses the river while his people stay on the other side. Ahead of him is the white man's road leading to the white man's town.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The complexity of human relationships makes the events at the end of this novel painful for all involved. Cuyloga bravely, and with love, defends his son's life and puts his own life at the mercy of his kinsman in doing so. At the same time, he rejects him as a son and as an Indian. It is clear that his love for True Son, now no longer his true son, is still strong, however. Going with him as far as the river he must cross to get back to white society, Cuyloga protects him from death at the hands of his former tribesmen and gives him yet another transitioning period from one world to the next.

The journey back is thick with parallels to True Son's first journey back into white society. Once again, a kinsman accompanies him to the edge of Indian Territory, and once again he finds himself on the threshold between two selves. He had had stood on the river moments before the ambush with choice still before him; now he is again on the brink between two lives, but by force. The difference now is that neither society will welcome him. Returning to Paxton will mean punishment and alienation, but trying to go back to the Lenni Lenape village will mean death. The novel's ending is thus uncertain. What will True Son do? How will he make use of his newfound strength and maturity? Will he find a way to re-enter the white society in which he was born?

Characters

True Son/ John Butler

At the age of four, John Butler is taken from his white family by Delaware Indians during an attack on his family's farm. The Indian Cuyloga, whose own son had died of an illness, adopts him and renames him True Son. For the next eleven years, True Son lives as a member of the Lenni Lenape tribe. When he learns that he must return to his white family after all this time, he resists, saying that he will never live among his enemy. Throughout the novel he makes several escape attempts and never seems to give up the determination to remain a member of his tribe.

True Son's struggle in this story has a number of facets. He fights to reconcile his Indian and white selves until the very last page, resisting the growing knowledge that all whites are not evil just as all Indians are not fully virtuous. He fights to assign evil and virtue to their proper places, trying to sort out a jumble of information about which characters are good and which are bad. He struggles with the problem of loyalty as well. How can he be fully true to his Indian people when he has formed bonds within white society? Likewise, how can he be a willing member of white society knowing the damage it has done to his people and their ancestral lands?

True Son is determined to be a strong, brave, honorable Indian male. Masculinity is thus an important ideal in the novel: Female characters figure only in minor ways, but True Son has deep and even volatile relations with other males. When he compares his two fathers, Cuyloga is described as vigorous, manly and capable, while Mr. Butler seems weak and lacking authority. Identifying himself with the strong Indian male, True Son thus values his ability to endure the suffering of captivity among the whites and keeps reminding himself of the reasons the whites are his enemy: He recalls the words of his father, constantly comparing the ways of the two societies (e.g., the whites worship indoors, while the Indians' sacred places are all outdoors), and tells himself the stories told to him by tribe elders in which whites committed evil acts for no reason. All of this helps him keep his resolve to stay true to his Indian people and not give in to the enemy.

He learns though, that things are not as simple as waiting the enemy out until the right time to attack or escape. He develops a bond with his younger white brother Gordie, a fact that later complicates his re-entry into the tribe late in the novel. When he gets the choice to help his fellow tribesmen ambush a boat full of whites, he chooses not to because a child in the boat reminds him of Gordie. Thus, True Son at the end of the novel is very different from True Son at the beginning. He learns to question the world around him in terms of a broader morality, not just accept the worldview that has been presented to him by his elders.

As a result of this growth, True Son cuts himself off from his tribe. His actions are viewed as betrayal: He has aided the enemy. Only his father's standing in the tribe

saves him from death as punishment, but the alternative is nearly as bad. Cuyloga severs their relationship and sends him back to the white settlement.

On the last page of the novel, True Son has crossed the threshold from his Indian self to his white self. He has been forced to choose; he does not want to live among the whites, but he has taken an ethical stand that his own people cannot understand. He is thus alienated from them; however, he cannot easily return to Paxton because punishment awaits him there as well.

Half Arrow

True Son's Indian cousin Half Arrow fills many roles in True Son's life. He is a kind of surrogate brother (True Son only has sisters in the tribe), and he acts as a vital link with the tribe once True Son is taken to Paxton. He accompanies True Son on the journey to Paxton, easing the transition somewhat by giving him gifts and news from the village. He also stokes True Son's rage and his desire to avenge himself on the whites for taking him captive. Half Arrow also reappears late in the novel when he and their friend Little Crane attempt to visit True Son in Paxton. He takes part in the attack on Uncle Wilse that forces them to flee and then accompanies True Son back to the Lenni Lenape village.

Half Arrow seems to appear when True Son most needs to feel connected to his former life as an Indian, yet he is also present when True Son discovers that he also has an unavoidable bond with white society: When he warns the whites on the river they are being ambushed. Half Arrow thus makes True Son's betrayal of his people all the more painful: In saving the white child in the boat, who reminds him of his white brother Gordie, he must cast aside his Indian brother Half Arrow, thus severing their bond.

Cuyloga

As True Son's most significant relationship, his Indian father Cuyloga has a presence in the story even when he is miles away. He has shaped True Son's sense of himself as an Indian and he has taught him the lessons of strength, endurance, honor and bravery. To True Son, there is no higher human authority figure in the tribe and no person he wants to please more. Thus, when Cuyloga tells him that he must return to his white family after eleven years of being accepted as an Indian, True Son experiences the first doubt in his life as to his father's wisdom. Still, he swears he will heed his father's command to behave honorably and avoid bringing shame to him and the rest of the tribe.

Cuyloga appears bodily only in the first few and last few chapters of the novel; however, he continues to influence True Son's behavior throughout. On the road to Pennsylvania, True Son plots to die honorably of suicide so that his father will be proud of him. Cuyloga inspires anger when Uncle Wilse berates him before True Son, and his words remind him to bear his suffering like an Indian when he most needs encouragement.

Cuyloga's hold on True Son goes far beyond the morality and culture he has instilled in his adopted son. For True Son, his Indian father has a transformative power, having spoken words that removed his white blood and replaced it with Indian. He has removed his evil white characteristics and replaced them with virtuous Indian ones. Thus, the name True Son is an interesting one: Though the boy is his only through adoption, because of Cuyloga's special love, their bond is even stronger than if they were biological father and son. This strength is tested at the end of the novel, when True Son chooses to aid a group of whites about to fall into an Indian ambush; Cuyloga rejects him because he has shown he still has roots in white society that will threaten the tribe.

Henry Butler

The polar opposite of his Indian father Cuyloga, Henry "Harry" Butler expects his son to put off his Indian ways and assimilate to white society. Though not an unkind man, he nevertheless grows impatient with True Son's refusal to treat him like a true father and to obey his rules. When the boy grows gravely and mysteriously ill, Harry blames himself because he believes it was his fault that the four-year-old Johnny, now True Son, was taken by the Indians in the first place. Harry is a man of business. He runs his farm with precision and takes pride in keeping his accounts and ledger in neat order. He wishes his son could know the joy of a well-kept account book, as opposed to his preference for running wild in the forest.

When True Son first sees his white father, he cannot believe the contrast with Cuyloga. Where his Indian father is virile and commanding and strong, his white father is pasty and weak looking and wears effeminate clothing. This contrast serves as the major source of their failure to bond throughout the novel.

Myra Butler

True Son's white mother took to her bed the day her son was taken by the Indians in a raid on the family farm. She teaches him reading and writing and demands that he dress like a white boy.

Wilson Owens

Wilson Owens, known as Uncle Wilse, passionately hates Indians and is suspected of being a member of a group of Paxton men who regularly murder Indians without provocation. Thus, he is suspicious of True Son, whom he believes to be secretly plotting against them all. He tells Harry Butler that his newly reclaimed son will not be cleansed of his pagan Indian ways and warns him to be careful. His relationship with True Son is adversarial from the start.

As the epitome of the evil white from True Son's perspective, Uncle Wilse comes to the center of the novel's action, since it is toward him that True Son and his friends direct their strongest anger and vengeance. They come to suspect that he is responsible for

Little Crane's death, so they attack and nearly scalp him before being run off. It is this event that forces them to flee into the mountains, and it is the catalyst for True Son deciding to escape back to the Indian village.

If Cuyloga represents all that is virtuous about Indian society from True Son's perspective, Uncle Wilse represents all that is evil about white society. His one-sided hatred of Indians, his admission that murder - outlawed in the Bible - of Indians is acceptable and even necessary, and his alleged involvement in savage and unprovoked violence against Indians sets him apart as one of the novel's most starkly drawn characters.

Gordie Butler

True Son's younger white brother is the only one in the family with whom True Son bonds, perhaps because of his youth and also because he shows a positive interest in the ways of the Lenni Lenape. He helps True Son adjust to white ways by showing him simple things like bathing and dressing, and he ultimately earns True Son's affection. When he escapes Paxton, True Son finds himself sorry to have left his younger brother behind. He also thinks of Gordie when he sees the child in the boat that his Indian brothers have decided to ambush and is for that reason unable to participate in the child's death.

Aunt Kate

One of only a handful of female characters in the novel, Aunt Kate lives with the Butler family and helps care for the invalid Myra. She is a strong woman who disapproves of True Son's Indian ways and wants to take an active role in bringing him back to the ways of white society. She takes his Indian clothes away and corrects him sternly when he refuses to behave like a white person. Like most of the whites in the novel, she becomes frustrated when he holds onto his Indian ways and does not consider the ways in which his life with the Indians might have been happy.

Del Hardy

The red-haired soldier who can speak the Lenni Lenape language acts as True Son's guard and translator on the journey to Pennsylvania and for a short time after True Son has been returned to his white family, the Butlers. Though he is no friend of True Son, he nevertheless acts as a link between True Son and his Indian people because he can speak their language. True Son is surprised to find that he misses him when he leaves to return to Fort Pitt.

Little Crane

A friend of True Son and Half Arrow, Little Crane is married to a white woman who has been taken from him and returned to her white family. He accompanies her on the journey out of Indian territory, and he also accompanies Half Arrow back to Paxton late in the novel, when he is shot and killed. His death inspires his family back in the Lenni Lenape village to avenge his death on the whites.

Bejance

An elderly slave and basketweaver in Paxton, Bejance tells True Son about the Indian named Corn Blade, who lives in seclusion in the mountains. He also serves to remind True Son that he is not truly free among the whites; though they tell him he has been a captive of the Indians for the past eleven years, Bejance asserts that surrendering to white ways is the ultimate form of captivity.

Parson Elder

As the spiritual leader in Paxton but also a former military man, Parson Elder represents the spiritual element of white society that True Son has trouble grasping. As he does with Uncle Wilse, True Son debates the morality of whites murdering Indians. Parson Elder offers one of the novel's few two-sided perspectives on the violence occurring between whites and Indians at that time: Though he believes that many whites are forced to defend themselves against Indian attacks, he admits that some whites commit violent acts without reason. He is also the only character to suggest that the Butler family give True Son more time to adjust to his new home.

Thitpan

Little Crane's brother leads the party at the end of the novel to avenge his brother's death upon the whites.

Objects/Places

Lenni Lenape Village

After being taken by the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) Indians at the age of four, True Son lives among them in their village until he is fifteen and forced to return to his white family. The village remains in his mind throughout his time in Pennsylvania, and he is haunted by visions of its familiar sights, sounds and smells.

Forks of Muskingum

The white army meets the Indians at the Forks of Muskingum, a sacred place in the wilderness. One path leads to the Lenni Lenape village, and another is the route the army takes to Pennsylvania.

Fort Pitt

The army and the captives stop at Fort Pitt on the way to Pennsylvania; the soldiers are happy to be back in a white military stronghold, but to captives like True Son it is a frightening place full of drunken soldiers, claustrophobic walls and Indian traitors.

Carlisle

The white army delivers the freed white captives to the white settlement of Carlisle, where relatives come to claim their newly returned kin.

Susquehanna River

True Son, his white father and Del Hardy must cross the Susquehanna River by ferry to get to Paxton, where the Butler family lives. On the ferry ride True Son tells his father that the Susquehanna belongs to the Indians and that the land around it was stolen from them.

White Woman's River

One of the landmarks that tells True Son he is close to his beloved Lenni Lenape village is the White Woman's River rushing from the northwest.

Tuscarawas

Another natural landmark near the Lenni Lenape village, the Tuscarawa Mountains are described as brave. They appear in True Son's homesick visions of his home region.

Paxton

True Son was born in Paxton and returns there with his white father and Del Hardy.

Butler Family Home

The Butler family home is a strange place to True Son. He has never seen stairs before going there, and he dislikes the prison-like walls and bed he has to sleep in.

Myra Butler's Bedroom

Myra Butler has been an invalid since the day her son was taken by the Indians. She stays in her bedroom, which is the setting for her first meeting with her newly reclaimed son and any social visit, such as the one from Parson Elder.

Third Mountain

The Indian hermit Corn Blade reportedly lives in seclusion on the Third Mountain, some short distance from Paxton. Because he has heard that Corn Blade can speak Lenni Lenape, True Son tries to go to the Third Mountain to search for him but is stopped by his father and Uncle Wilse.

Kittaniny Mountain

When True Son and Half Arrow escape Paxton after attacking Uncle Wilse, they camp on the nearby Kittaniny Mountain.

May Apple Seed

At the beginning of his journey to Pennsylvania, True Son vows to commit suicide by eating the May apple seed.

Scalps

Scalps are trophies the Indians collect when they attack whites. True Son nearly scalps his Uncle Wilse, and he is present when Thitpan returns from raid with the scalp of a child.

Curly Maple Gun

True Son steals his white father's maple gun and takes it with him on his escape back to the Indian village. Later Mr. Butler indicates that it is unfortunate that he stole it because he had planned to give it to him as a gift.

Bearskin Bed

Cuyloga sends True Son's bearskin bed via Half Arrow. True Son has trouble sleeping in his bed at the Butler home, so he prefers to wrap himself up in it and sleep on the floor.

Turkey

True Son's last meal with his Indian father is the turkey Cuyloga shoots when escorting True Son part of the way back to his white family. Neither is able to eat much, though, and True Son comments that the meat sticks in his throat.

Setting

The Light in the Forest focuses on the relationship between the Scotch-Irish settlers of western Pennsylvania and the Lenni Lenape Native Americans of the Delaware area. The story is set in 1765, against the stormy early period of Pennsylvania history when white settlers paid bounties for Native American scalps, and Native Americans captured and scalped whites. Colonel Bouquet's historic march into Native American territory along the Muskingum River in Ohio and western Pennsylvania forms the focal point of the story. Bouquet pressures the Lenni Lenape and Shawanose to sign a treaty to return all captive whites. Although the Native Americans hate to give up their adopted white relatives, they are afraid to lose their land and see it replaced by a white settlement on the banks of their sacred river. Impressed by the numerous stories of white captives who tried to return to their Native American families and culture, Richter wrote The Light in the Forest to present the Native American point of view.

The early and later parts of the novel are set in the Tuscarawa village at the forks of the Muskingum, where True Son, born John Cameron Butler, has been raised as a Native American. He hates the whites for stealing Native American territory and devastating their land and culture. The experiences of True Son, who is unable to adjust to the restrictions of white civilization, epitomize the enmity between the settlers and the Native Americans. Paxton township, where True Son's white parents live, is also the home of the Paxton boys, who according to historical documents, butchered and mutilated the Conestogo Native Americans, including those who had converted to Christianity and lived in peace with the whites. As the scene shifts from the natural beauty and freedom of the Tuscarawa village to the fenced-in white settlement at Fort Pitt, Richter shows the disparity between the Native Americans' and the white settlers' relationships with the land.

Social Sensitivity

In an attempt to present Native American history and culture in an unbiased fashion, Richter inevitably contradicts the glorious myth of the early settlers. While Richter admires the pioneers' fortitude, as is clear from his frontier novels, The Light in the Forest shatters the settlers' moral stance by pointing to the irony in their seeking political, religious, and social freedom for themselves, while invading Native American territory, breaking treaties, and cheating the Native Americans.

They subjugate the Native Americans for economic gain, thereby destroying the Native American way of life. Furthermore, the novel questions the ethnocentrism of Western civilization and decries the racial injustice that prevails even in contemporary society.

As a novel that authentically recreates the American past, The Light in the Forest makes numerous references to war, scalpings, and killings that may be offensive to adults and disturbing to children. Most of these events are not graphically described but are reported as having taken place in the past; the readers' emotions are not directly engaged in these events. Two instances, however, could create confusion and raise ethical questions about the heroic aspects of war and the cruelty it entails.

True Son and Half Arrow, both sympathetic characters, very naturally and without moral qualms start to scalp Uncle Wilse for the murder of Little Crane, and Half Arrow takes great pride in collecting the "discarded" pieces of scalps to make a war trophy for himself.

Like the refusal of many young Americans to fight in the Vietnam War on moral grounds, True Son's betrayal of his tribe raises the question of how far an individual should extend loyalty to his nation.

Literary Qualities

The Light in the Forest blends historical facts, an understanding of pioneer attitudes, and a Native American viewpoint in a simple but captivating story about a young boy confronting the ambiguous nature of good and evil.

In order to avoid polarizing Native Americans and settlers in a good versus evil structure, most events, characters, and locales are described from both points of view. The omniscient narrator alternates the perspectives of the Lenape and the whites, balancing each account by one group with a similar one from the other group. If the Paxton boys are racist and have killed numerous Native Americans, so have the Native Americans The Light In the Forest scalped whites and even used a child's head as a football. If Little Crane, who comes in peace, is shot from behind, Half Arrow and True Son also start to scalp Uncle Wilse in revenge. The behavior of the two groups toward each other is predictable because each has experienced only one side of the other—enmity and hatred.

Richter also describes the same situation from two diametrically opposite viewpoints. For example, True Son's sorrow at the loss of his Native American family and his sense of injustice at the white man's encroachment into Lenape territory contrasts with Mrs. Butler's continual mourning for her lost son. Similarly, the Native Americans feel that the Paxton Massacre is an outrage against human decency, but to the whites, it is just retaliation for the favored treatment given to the Native Americans by the Quakers. Richter even portrays the two groups' opposing views on language: to Uncle Wilse, the Delaware language is "scrub" and inferior; to True Son it is a rich language with more than twentyseven ways to say "God" to express exact meaning. With this dual perspective, the author manipulates the reader's emotional responses to the events and gives insight into the behavior of each side.

The image of the fork—a Native American symbol of opposites and the dichotomous nature of life—appears repeatedly in the book, beginning with the literal fork in the Muskingum River and continuing in references to the separating paths and tree branches.

True Son comes to a metaphorical fork in the road when he is forced to choose between the Lenape or settler way of life.

Themes

Family and Personal Relationships

Personal relationships are the connective tissue of this novel. They inspire the characters to exhibit many different kinds of behavior - from love gestures to oaths of allegiance to violence. For True Son, no bond is greater than the bond he has with those he believes to be his true people: his father Cuyloga and the rest of his village. It is this strength of relationship that makes him resist being taken by the white soldiers at the beginning of the novel, and it is the reason he cannot fully take on the ways of the whites once he has come to live with them. He does not trust his white father because of the stories his Indian father has told him about the treachery of whites: they push into the Indian territory, steal the land and cut down the trees, and murder Indians without provocation - even children and those who have converted to the white man's religion. Though he does not dispute the claim that he was born in the white town of Paxton, he believes that his white blood was literally replaced with Indian blood, meaning he no longer has anything in common with white society. His relationships to the Butlers were thus severed and replaced with the relationships he has with his Indian family. It is to this family alone that he feels a sense of duty and loyalty.

True Son's strongest relationships are with the males in his village: his father and his cousin Half Arrow. Even when he goes to live in Paxton, it is his dealings with his father Harry, his younger brother Gordie and his Uncle Wilse that seem to matter; his mother Myra and his Aunt Kate, though they try to make an impression, never become more than marginal figures for him. He focuses on the contrast between Cuyloga and Harry Butler; on the fact that Gordie is his new brother, while he only has sisters in the Indian village; and the adversarial relations he has with his distrustful Uncle Wilse. Perhaps more than any other of his white relations, his connection to Uncle Wilse spurs True Son to act because he represents all that is evil about white society. His father poses no real threat, but Uncle Wilse is reportedly connected with the Paxton Boys, who are known to murder Indians, and Uncle Wilse even admits that he thinks killing Indians is a good thing. Thus, the only real act of violence True Son commits in the novel is against Uncle Wilse, when he and Half Arrow decide the older man is responsible for Little Crane's death.

Personal relationships come into play again when True Son escapes back to the Lenni Lenape village. On the journey back, he makes a strong point of telling Half Arrow that he must now be his brother, since he has had to leave Gordie behind. He is happy to be back in his village, but it soon becomes clear that he no longer views his people from a purely Indian perspective. Having spent time with people such as Gordie, who do not inspire his hatred, he is able to view the attack on the white settlement and the resulting scalping of a child from two sides: that of the white who have done nothing to deserve the attack and his kinsman, who rejoice in the violence. With such divided feelings, it is probably inevitable that he will betray his Indian kin by warning the whites in the boat

that they are being ambushed. After all, the child in the boat reminds him of his white brother Gordie, whom he admits caring for.

True Son's final conflict in the novel comes when his father tells him he must leave the village and sever his Indian relations. When he came to live with the Lenni Lenape as a child, he cut his ties to white society by the symbolic replacing of his white blood with Indian blood; now he must now undo the spell and return to the white village. It is important that the last person from the tribe that he interacts with is his father: His father brought him into the Indian community, taking him from his white father, and now he is forcing him out of the community so that he can return to that same white father. True Son cannot fully explain what has happened; thus, the novel ends uncertainly, with his Indian life literally trailing behind him and his white life looming before him. He must now make the choice of whether to pick up the threads of his white family relationships in Paxton.

Virtue

Much discussion in this novel centers on who is virtuous and who is evil or savage. The Indians view the whites as intrusive and murderous, while the whites view the Indians as wild, pagan and violent. The whites do not recognize the Indian religion, which honors the Great Spirit, as a true religion; likewise, the Indians believe the whites to be foolish in their religious pursuits because the Christian religion calls for indoor worship and says nothing about the divinity of nature. The only thing the two societies seem to have in common is that neither believes that the other's behavior is in keeping with their respective philosophies of being kind and respecting living things.

Uncle Wilse is the character True Son most associates with white society's lack of virtue, since he learns that his uncle is the leader of the Paxton boys, who True Son knows are responsible for unprovoked violence against Indians, and since his uncle vigorously asserts that Indian morality is the polar opposite of white morality. In the beginning of the novel, True Son views this statement as a stark lie; however, after returning to his Indian village and discovering that even Indians can commit savagery that makes no sense, the issue of virtue becomes problematic. Gordie shows True Son that whites are capable of goodness, but Thitpan shows him that Indians are capable of evil. Thus, when Thitpan returns from the raid on a white settlement with the scalp of a child, he becomes the moral equal of Uncle Wilse, and this is troubling to True Son.

Personal Identity

The central tension in this novel is one of identity: True Son struggles to find his place while caught between the wild, free ways of the Lenni Lenape and the foreign, structured world of the whites from which he originated. He struggles with the fact that he has traits of both societies; for example, he is quick to inform Del that his "white" skin is in fact quite dark.

The struggle to find his true self is closely tied to the problem of virtue, which over the course of the novel causes True Son to re-evaluate his views on both the whites and his Indian kin. As a white person raised in the ways of the Indian, True Son at the beginning of the novel identifies solely with those who have raised him, even to the point of believing that his white blood was replaced by Indian blood by means of his father's magic. True Son sets himself staunchly against the whites, calling them his enemy because he has been told all his life that whites are murderous and untrustworthy; he vows never to give up his Indian ways and even prefers to die over being assimilated into white society. He is thus troubled when he finds himself getting used to white food and drink and sounding, as Half Arrow says, "like a Yengwe's trying to be an Indian." This all represents an erosion of his Indian identity, a fact that causes him despair and is possibly tied into his mysterious illness.

When Half Arrow comes for him, True Son finds his "Indian-ness" and his resolve to remain Indian renewed; this is only interrupted when he is faced with the life-altering moral choice when his fellow tribesmen attempt to ambush a group of whites on the river. His choice to warn the whites is confusing, for it throws him into doubt about his sense of belonging in the Indian community. He has just severed his ties with his white family, and his moral choice also alienates him from his Indian people. The novel thus ends with uncertainty, in spite of the growth True Son shows in choosing to help the whites, as to who he is and which society he will ultimately take his place in.

Themes/Characters

The Light in the Forest involves two sets of characters: the Native Americans and their enemies, the white settlers of Pennsylvania. The believable characters possess human strengths and weaknesses, and Richter's omniscient narrator presents each of their perspectives without making explicit judgments.

Each group harbors stereotyped perceptions of the other. To the white settlers, the Native Americans are ignorant savages who steal, swear, and cheat; the Native Americans, for their part, consider the whites a "mixed people," heedless and immature as children, who heap up material treasures and steal the Native American land. For each Native American character, Richter creates a white one who represents an opposing way of looking at the same situation.

True Son, the central character, crosses into the worlds of both the Native Americans and the whites. Richter compassionately and sensitively presents his dilemma at being forcibly returned to his white parents after eleven years. Love and loyalty for his Native American parents and upbringing make True Son tolerate the daily humiliations of living in the alien white culture with dignity and restraint. True Son is a complex character who grows and changes as he tries to find his true identity in the midst of two cultures. His brief stay with his white family creates inevitable conflicts in him; he grows critical of the Lenni Lenape for scalping a white child to avenge the murder of Little Crane. True Son displays great courage and strength of character when he betrays his tribe as it attempts to ambush a boatload of innocent whites. He no longer believes in absolutes; both sides, he realizes, teach love and respect for all living things, yet both are cruel and inhuman in war. His suffering and loneliness give him wisdom beyond that of any other character in the book. Although the hostility of both the Native Americans and the whites threatens True Son's continued survival, the book nonetheless ends on an optimistic note with the youth's spiritual triumph.

True Son's role model is his formidable adopted father, Cuyloga, the chief and spiritual leader of the Lenni Lenape.

Noble, wise, and objective, he commands the admiration of all who meet with him. In the council meeting to decide True Son's fate, his diplomacy and oratory save his son's life. He understands the duality of human nature and the conflict that traps True Son, yet he cannot condone the betrayal of his tribe and cause. Compared to Cuyloga, True Son's white father, Harry Butler, appears weak and insignificant. He trembles visibly and shows emotion in front of others—both signs of weakness to the Lenni Lenape—upon being reunited with his lost son. Harry Butler loves his son but is too narrow-minded and self-centered to understand True Son's view of the situation. He wants True Son to follow his own way of life, which focuses on thrift, hard work, and the enjoyment of material rewards.

Saddened by his son's rejection, he finds consolation in entering business profits in his ledger.

Myra Butler, although overjoyed at her son's return, immediately tries to make up for his years of "heathen" life by teaching him to talk, dress, eat, and think like a Christian. A generally sympathetic character, Myra suffers a great deal at the loss of her young child, but like her husband is unable to show genuine respect for True Son's plight and the adjustments he must make. Unlike True Son's Native American mother, who is like a "spreading sugar maple provid ing them all with food and warmth," Myra lacks the ability to nurture.

The only white character who attains the stature of Cuyloga is Parson Elder, whose restrained and rational manner also commands respect. He speaks with a calm authority and fairly assesses True Son, acknowledging the value of his tribal upbringing. In recognizing the good and bad qualities of both the whites and Native Americans, he displays an understanding of human nature that goes beyond loyalty to his church and group.

True Son's most touching relationships are with his Lenni Lenape cousin, Half Arrow, and his young white brother, Gordie. Half Arrow adds a touch of humor and lightness to True Son's grim situation. With his wit and jokes he tries to help True Son accept his fate. He even risks his life to visit his cousin in the white settlement. Brave as a warrior, he has no misgivings about killing for the sake of his tribe.

Gordie, the younger brother born after True Son's capture, is the only member of his white family who accepts True Son as a Native American. A caring child, he does not try to change his older brother but instinctively tries to help him adjust to his new surroundings. He admires True Son as a human being and is fascinated by the freedom that his brother represents. To Richter, Gordie symbolizes the Wordsworthian view of childhood as a stage of purity and nobility uncorrupted by civilization.

The themes of survival and freedom dominate the story. Ironically, although True Son has been freed from captivity and returned to his original family, he feels confined in his restored "freedom."

His body and soul start to "wither," and he almost dies. All around him he sees the constraints of white civilization: tight clothes and shoes, houses designed like graves with windows shut to keep out the pure air, animals confined behind fences, and even God restricted to a church building. True Son meets a black man, Bejance, who has been "freed" from Native American captivity only to be forced into slavery by his white rescuers. Like True Son, Bejance remembers his life in the woods as his only experience of freedom.

Both Native Americans and settlers are engaged in the business of sheer survival. While the Native Americans' philosophy is one of organic unity between humankind and nature, the settlers view the forest and all its creatures as obstacles to be conquered and exploited.

But True Son's experiences show that definitions of survival and freedom extend beyond emotional and physical dimensions to a higher plane of spiritual and moral

freedom. The Light in the Forest also touches on the theme of nonviolence, exposing the brutality of war and encouraging mutual understanding and trust.

Style

Points of View

The story is told from third person point of view, holding largely to the perspective of True Son but dipping at times into the minds of Del Hardy and Henry and Myra Butler. This gives the reader the benefit of seeing the situation of True Son's reunion with his family from both Indian and white perspectives, as well as from the perspective of family members versus a neutral outsider. The reader feels sympathy for True Son as the protagonist, but the story is balanced out by showing that he is not the only one with a stake in the events' unfolding.

Because the story is True Son's, the narrative stays close to him, relating most of the important action from his perspective. The novel traces his development from a defiant Indian youth who believes only what he has been brought up with is right to a more mature person who can distinguish between right and wrong by his own moral compass; thus, the reader is with him when he reacts to the news that he must return to white society, meets his white father, attempts to visit Corn Blade, and participates in the attempted ambush of a white boat party at the end of the novel. All of these events are crucial points in his transition and in his resistance to what is happening to him.

When we are allowed access to secondary characters such as Del and the Butlers, we get "the other side of the story." Del's perspective is important because of his history with the Delaware Indians and as a soldier tasked with protecting whites and supporting their dominance on the continent. He represents that part of society that believes the Indians have taken something from them, and he has to hold himself back from taking his anger out on Indians he meets on his mission. He also gives an important outsider's perspective on the relationship between True Son and the Butlers. For example, because we see Mr. Butler through someone other than True Son's eyes, we are able to sense his disappointment at how badly the homecoming goes.

We only glimpse Myra Butler's mind once in the story, when she is about to receive Parson Elder. She considers the day when she lost her son to the Indians, relating the details of how he came to be taken. This is how we learn that she has been an invalid ever since that day. This short access to her thoughts underscores the grief she has felt over the years and provides a contrasting portrait to True Son's description of her as idle and shrewish. Likewise, delving into Henry Butler's mind reveals the pain he feels regarding his son. We learn, for example, that he blames himself for much of what has happened and that he was planning to give True Son a special gun - a significant pledge of faith in the relationship.

Setting

Two locales pull against each other in this novel: the white-dominated town, with its walls and stuffy houses and hard-packed roads, and the untamed wildness of the Indian territory. True Son values nature because doing so is a core principle of his people's religion. Icy rivers are the place where he tests his manhood and endurance; the woods are where he and his kin hunt for their sustenance; the Tuscarawa mountains are a symbol of his home region.

Nature is also tied to some of the trials True Son must endure. On his trek out of his village at the beginning of the novel, nature accompanies him, giving clues as to where he is and what is about to happen. For example, at the Forks of Muskingum, where the road divides, there is an ancient sycamore with one limb pointing sadly toward Pennsylvania. A live branch points toward home. Thus, the setting in which True Son's ordeal occurs frequently underscores the emotional turmoil he is experiencing over the change his life has suddenly taken.

Nature is also associated with the Lenni Lenape village and of thoughts of home. When they reach the point where trees have been cut down, they are now in the white man's territory; the Indians believe the whites have no regard for nature, so this is a sign to True Son that he has entered the realm of his enemy. Likewise, when he crosses the river, another powerful symbol of nature that speaks to the change about to come over his life, he steps out of his Indian life and into his white life. But on the return journey with Half Arrow, nature is there to welcome him back. Near Fort Pitt, the last white stronghold before home, they must hide themselves in boats as they sneak down the river, but once they have passed it they are free again. Nature in this sense is thus a symbol of freedom: The white towns, with their rules, their roads that are difficult to walk on and their prison-like homes, represent captivity and restriction. Being loose in the wild, at liberty to hunt and dawdle and commune with the landscape, is the essence of freedom for the Indian.

In the scene of the thwarted ambush, the natural setting - specifically the river, which repeatedly is an image of crossing over and choosing in the novel - envelops True Son as he makes his final, life-altering choice to aid the whites and betray his Indian people. Nature is also present on his walk of shame out of Indian territory, in this case a source of pain for him as he leaves rejected and unsure of the future. The only certain thing is that behind him lies the wild country of his people and before him the territory of his white family.

Language

The language of this novel is at a level that a young adult reader can easily comprehend; yet it is in keeping with the style of speech for the time period it is set in. In other words, narrative blends well with the dialogue.

There are three types of speech in the novel: the whites' "proper" Victorian-sounding English, the broken English the Indians speak when in the presence of whites, and the rhetorical speech of the Indians between one another in their own language. When no whites are present, True Son and his kin often speak to each other as though through rehearsed for dramatic effect; they will often repeat titles like cousin, brothers or mothers through the course of a speaking turn, and True Son's father will often repeat his name throughout a speech he is giving him. The Indians also speak of the world around them differently, injecting a level of majesty and direness into their descriptions that the whites do not. An example of this is True Son's description of the Susquehanna River: "the Susquehanna and all the water flowing into it belongs to his Indian people...the graves of his ancestors are beside it."

As a novel in which setting figures heavily, the author is apt to give lush descriptions of the physical world, especially from True Son's perspective. This helps to ground the reader in the locale, underscoring the emotion inherent in his connection to his physical surroundings.

Structure

The novel is structured in fifteen chapters and follows a linear progression beginning with True Son's delivery into the hands of the whites and ending with his rejection by his Indian kin. Most chapters cover a small space of time around a single important event: the start of the journey to Pennsylvania, Half Arrow's appearance and his accompanying True Son, the family reunion at the Butler house, etc. Some stages of the story, such as the journey of True Son and Half Arrow back to their village, are spread out over multiple chapters because the material they deal with warrants fuller narration. The author draws out this journey because it is important to give a sense of the slowness with which they are making their way home. They want to savor the freedom they have in the wild, so passages in these chapters are fat with descriptions of the natural world and what it means to True Son.

Contained in these fifteen chapters are several months of action. Often, as with the journey back to the village, short spaces of time will receive long passages and multiple chapters; however, from chapter to chapter, particularly while True Son is in Paxton, weeks and months pass between related events.

Quotes

"Now go like an Indian, True Son," he said in a low, stern voice. "Give me no more shame." Chapter 1, p. 7

"They hated to give them up all right. But they hated worse to see a white man's town a settin' there on the banks of their own river...They were scared we were takin' over the country. So they started fetchin' in their white relations." Chapter 2, p. 12

"So that's why they're so pale and bandy-legged," he nodded, "having to eat such old and stringy leather while Indian people have rich venison and bear meat." Chapter 3, p. 23

"Tell him I will bear my disgrace like an Indian and will wait to strike till the time is in my favor." Chapter 4, p. 34

"He says the Susquehanna and all the water flowing into it belongs to his Indian people. He says his Indian father lived on its banks to the north. The graves of his ancestors are beside it. He says he often heard his father tell how the river and graves were stolen from them by the white people." Chapter 6, p. 47

"Why, you look like an Indian, John!" she exclaimed. "You even walk like one. You've had a hard fate, but thank God your life was spared and you're home with us again. Are you happy?" Chapter 6, p. 52

"He don't know his own name. He don't even know when it's Sunday." Chapter 6, p. 53

"When you put these on, will you give me your Indian clothes, True Son? Then I can be an Indian." Chapter 6, p. 56

"Johnny is no Indian. He has the same white blood as you and I." Chapter 7, p. 63

"You mean this heathen Indian, Cuyloga, who stole Johnny and claims to be his father, talks about God before he goes out and murders Christian men and women!" Chapter 7, p. 66

"Nephews. Never think the Great Spirit forgets you...If we wait and are worthy, he will deliver the enemy into our hands." Chapter 8, pp. 73-75

"No. I'm never free from white folks. And neither are you and your brother. Every day they drop another fine strap around you. Little by little they buckle you up so you don't feel it too much at one time. Sooner or later they have you all hitched up, but you've got so used to it by that time you hardly know it. You eat with a fork and spoon. You sleep in a bed. You own a house and a piece of land and pays taxes. You hoe all day in the cornfield and toil and sweat a diggin' up stumps. Piece by piece you get broke in to livin' in a stall by night, and by day pullin' burdens that mean nothin' to the soul inside you." Chapter 8, p. 77

"You want me your friend, you say. Maybe you want me to do like you. Want me baptize or pray to your God or believe things I be sorry for afterward." Chapter 9, p. 93

"I see many scalp but no children scalp in our village. My father says men are cowards who fight children." Chapter 9, p. 96

"Cousin. I leave a small white brother. Out along the Tuscarawas I have only sisters. Cousin. From today on, you must be my brother." Chapter 12, p. 130

"The last time I saw [Fort Pitt], I was heavy and a prisoner. Now I go light and free." Chapter 12, p. 139

"The white man is a strange creature of the Almighty. He is hard to fathom. How can you reason with him? He is like a spoiled child without instruction. He has no understanding of good and evil." Chapter 14, p. 153

"Never did I think that you would turn against me and that I would have to send you back to your white people. All this time I looked on you as an Indian. I leaned on you as a staff. Now it is broken." Chapter 15, p. 173

"This is the parting place. This is where the path must be closed between us. My place is on this side. Your place is on that. You must never cross it. If you come back, I cannot receive you and they will kill you." Chapter 15, p. 175

Adaptations

A Country of Strangers, a sequel to The Light in the Forest, was published thirteen years later in 1966. In this novel, Richter's protagonist is Stone Girl, who is being returned to her white family.

Reluctant to leave her village and Native American husband, Stone Girl embarks with her son, Otter Boy, on a long, roundabout journey to escape the treaty to return all white captives. At Fort Detroit, her French employer traces her white parents, and she is taken to Pennsylvania against her wishes. She and her son are rejected by her father, Captain Stanton, and subjected to racial prejudice. Stone Girl is wrongly accused of collaborating with the Native Americans to attack the whites, ill-treating her white sister, and stealing. She meets True Son, a recruit of the Twightwee tribe, who helps her to leave the white settlement for the Tuscarawa village.

Through Stone Girl's experiences, A Country of Strangers builds sympathy for the plight of the Native Americans, who have to wander as exiles in a land that was once theirs.

The Light in the Forest was made into a motion picture by Walt Disney Productions. It was directed by Herschel Daugherty and released in 1958. In the movie, certain key events and characters have either been changed or eliminated, while others have been fabricated to distort the intention of the author and to make the story covertly racist. The Native Americans, except for Cuyloga, are presented as savages. The white characters, with the exception of Uncle Wilse, are accommodating, benevolent, and just. They all understand True Son's situation and try to make his adjustment easier. The movie also adds a love affair between True Son and Shenandoah, a white servant girl, which prompts True Son to return to his white parents. Far from promoting an understanding of the Native American point of view, the ending clearly implies that white ways are better. The movie capitalizes on sensationalism and lacks the moral vision and philosophy of the novel.

Topics for Discussion

1. Cuyloga expresses his final estimation of True Son with the words, "Your heart is Indian. Your head is Indian. But your blood is still thin like the whites."

Do you think that lack of courage, symbolized by "thin blood," is an accurate summary of True Son's character after his betrayal?

2. Richter's purpose in writing The Light in the Forest was to show that the white settlers' "ideals and restrained manner of existence repelled the Indian." In what ways are the reactions of True Son and Bejance toward white civilization similar? Are their reactions justified?

3. As a historical novel, what information on the early history of America does The Light in the Forest provide? Do you have a better understanding of Native Americans and the loss of their political rights after reading the novel?

4. Is True Son's attempt to scalp Uncle Wilse in keeping with his character and upbringing? How else could he have reacted to the situation of Little Crane's murder and Uncle Wilse's attack on him?

5. Although True Son's life has been spared by the tribal council, he has been banished from the forest forever. Why does he consider banishment worse than death? Where do you think he will go? Is this open-ended plot satisfactory, or should the author have resolved True Son's ultimate fate?

6. With the possible exceptions of Uncle Wilse and Thitpan, the characters in The Light in the Forest are both good and bad because "evil and ugly things have been committed against the will of God on both sides." Does this ambiguity destroy your sense of right and wrong and make it more difficult to determine the real conflict of the book? What is the central conflict?

7. In the midst of all the racial bias and violence in the book, the adoption of white children and marriages with white women are readily accepted by the Native Americans. What other solutions does Richter provide for solving differences between ethnic groups and, perhaps, even between nations?

8. To Half Arrow, the "taking" of the trader's boat was not stealing but reclaiming what was rightfully his because the whites had stolen and destroyed Lenape land. Is it permissible to steal under certain circumstances?

9. The Light in the Forest raises the point that children have no personal independence but are controlled by the decisions of others. True Son's wishes are ignored by Colonel Bouquet's army and by his Native American and white families. Should he have been forcibly returned to his white parents? Who has greater claim to him, the adoptive

parents who have loved and raised him for eleven years or the natural parents from whom he was stolen as a child?

Essay Topics

Discuss how the idea of morality works in the novel.

Explore the function of gender in the novel as it relates to the construction of the characters' personal sense of identity.

Discuss the role of the natural world, exploring the various images and aspects of setting that support the plot.

Trace the development of True Son's character over the course of the novel, focusing on elements like his developing sense of morality, his personal relationships, etc.

Explore the notion of love as it relates to one of the novel's major themes (personal relationships, good vs. evil, etc.)

Discuss how personal choice comes to play in the novel. What do the choices the characters make say about them? How do the consequences they suffer or enjoy as a result of the choices they make help change or develop them?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. True Son's problem is mainly one of identity. Born white and raised as a Native American, he is confused after his short stay with his white family. In what ways does this make him the enemy of both groups at the end? Is he more Native American or white?

2. Richter attempts through plot, diction, characterization, and setting to give an objective account of the enmity between the settlers and Native Americans. Critics feel that in spite of his conscious efforts to remain objective, the author's sympathy for the Native Americans is apparent. Do you agree? If so, in what ways, subtle or direct, does Richter convey this attitude?

3. Discuss the title The Light in the Forest. What does it mean, and does it accurately reflect the themes of the novel?

4. The Light in the Forest has been described as a moralistic novel that preaches love for humankin d by denouncing the behavior of the settlers and by turning True Son into a figure of redemption. Do you agree with this assessment? Is the novel's message offensive to you?

5. Edwin Gaston, a leading scholar of Richter, states that reconciliation with physical and spiritual fathers is a recurring theme in Richter's novels. Analyze True Son's relationships with both Cuyloga and Harry Butler. How is he rejected by both fathers? How does this affect him? Does he make any attempts at reconciliation?

6. The relationship between the Native Americans and the forest is reminiscent of the mystical communion between humankind and nature that William Wordsworth expressed in his poetry.

Review the experiences of True Son in the forest and discuss why a oneness with nature is so important to humans.

Further Study

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After presenting a brief biography and summarizing Richter's early literary career, Carpenter provides an indepth review of the Ohio Trilogy. The article praises Richter as a simple realist who pays special attention to artistry and authentic language.

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Flanagan, John T. "Folklore in the Novels of Conrad Richter." Midwest Folklore 2 (Spring 1952): 5-14. Discusses Richter's indebtedness to folklore and the frontier life in the Ohio Trilogy.

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Hutchens, John K. "Conrad Richter."

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Weeks, Edward. "Review." Atlantic Monthly 192 (July 1953): 81. This review of The Light in the Forest emphasizes Richter's sympathy for the Native Americans.

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