

Mink River Study Guide

Mink River by Brian Doyle

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Plot Summary

Just like its weather forecast, the town of Neawanaka seems to offer more rainy times than sunshine for its residents in the book “Mink River” by Brian Doyle. With courage and grace the people of this small town continue to push through their lives even as they struggle with hard times. A bicycle accident, a stroke, depression, unexpected pregnancies and lack of money are among the circumstances with which the people of Neawanaka have to deal during one summer alone. Despite their hard times the people pull together with the help of stories about their ancestors and love for each other.

The most significant theme in this book is that of stories and storytelling. The novel is narrated by an omniscient third person narrator who tells the reader the story of Neawanaka. Meanwhile, the narrator’s story works as a frame that is filled with stories about the characters and the ancestors of the characters. The narrator includes stories told by animals, trees and even the Mink River itself.

There are several storylines that are developed during the course of the novel. The first is the story of 12-year-old Daniel and his bike accident. He smashes both legs when he is thrown from his bike off a cliff. Although he’d wanted to leave Neawanaka when he grew up Daniel changed his mind because the people in his town supported him and pitched in when he needed help. Also a significant story thread in the novel is a deep depression suffered by Daniel’s mother who is known by the name of No Horses. With the help of her friends and family members she finds her way out of the darkness and back to herself.

Four children are left without parents after their hard-hearted father Red Hugh O'Donnell dies. The oldest son tries to sell the property on which his father raised milk cows but learns both the property and the cows are considered worthless. He shoots the cows giving the town the short time reward of a free community wide picnic. Later, Grace, Red’s daughter, swaps her father’s land for the town pub. Stella, who ran the pub, had dreams of growing a vineyard and thought the former farmland would be the perfect place. Grace, meanwhile, had visions of turning the joint into an old fashioned pub where people came to talk instead just getting drunk. These stories and other describe the nature of this small but tough town where the people refused to let hard times get them down.



Part 1, Sections 1-11

Summary

In Section 1, the town of Neawanaka, Oregon is described as a typical small town. The narrator describes as an eagle flies over the grocery store and grabs a piece of flying cardboard. The eagle flies over the elementary school where Daniel with his three braids is riding his bike, Grace is cutting open a car with a blowtorch, No Horses studies a piece of oak and Owen Cooney is in his shop. The narrator describes how the stories of these residents of the town, as well as the others, meld together. The eagle flies over two old men sharing a bottle of beer and salmonberries. The men are best friends and are the employees of the town's public works department. They have been working on an oral history project. They discuss their self-given jobs of healing things. Billy, however, suggests they should stop interfering in other people's lives, like Grace's. After lunch Cedar and Billy, who is also called Worried Man, part ways.

In Section 2, Worried Man narrates in the first person as he makes a tape for his grandson Daniel describing how Daniel's mother got her name. He says that his people were known as being the best horse thieves ever. As a youth he was chosen to watch over his family's horses during a trip to collect berries. Even though he was young and strong, he was so tired by the third day that he fell asleep during his watch. All of the horses were stolen. When he returned home his wife Maple Head asked why the other men were making fun of Worried Man. When he described what had happened, she laughed as well. She laughed so hard she went into labor with their daughter No Horses.

In Section 3, a brief history of the town is given.

In Section 4, Worried Man records another audio tape in the first person. He describes how he met his friend Cedar one day when he discovered him half drowned in the river. Cedar didn't remember anything about his past.

In Section 5, the animals that can be found around Neawanaka are described.

In Section 6, Maple Head, the teacher, is in her sixth grade classroom. She is teaching geometry. Even though her grandson Daniel is a student in her class, she had sent him to his father's shop with a typewriter that needed repair. He hasn't yet returned. No Horses' studio which is located in the public works building is also described.

In Section 7, one of the patients who has made an appointment to see the town's doctor is a man who sells boxes. He has not told his daughter about the pain in his stomach. It is noted that the cause of the pain will kill him in three weeks. The town's doctor smokes 12 cigarettes each day, each named for one of the twelve apostles.

In Section 8, Grace is patching the tires on the farm's tractor because she knows it is a job her father Red Hugh, who is hard headed and hard handed, has trouble doing



because of his age. Grace curses as she works. His father also curses though most of his cursing is directed at his wife who walked out on him and the family two years ago.

In Section 9, Owen's shop and his pet crow Moses are described.

In Section 10, Cedar warns the man who beats his son not to do so again. Cedar suggests to the man that the next time he gets the urge to hit his son that he walk out with his hands in his pockets. Cedar claims to the man that his love for the boy can heal both him and his son. The man spits in Cedar's face.

In Section 11, Owen tells Danny about his paternal grandfather while Danny watches Owen stuff a beaver. Owen says that his father had a rough life because he was a child of Hunger and because he never found work he really liked to do. Owen also briefly tells Danny how he proposed to his wife, No Horses.

Analysis

As it is described, Neawanaka could be any small American town. In this book it is made unique by the stories that are told about it and its residents. Relationships can be pieced together by what has been told thus far. Owen and No Horses are the parents of Danny. Billy (Worried Man) and Maple Head are Danny's grandparents. Cedar is the best friend of Billy. Notice how some characters are given names and some aren't. The man with three weeks left to live, the doctor and the man who beats his son are not given names. Most of the other characters do have names though they seem like nicknames rather than real names.

As the book progresses, the reader will learn that Danny's grandparents, Maple Head (who is also called May) and Worried Man (also called Billy) have descended from the original people who lived in Neawanaka, presumably Native Americans. This could account for the fact that they are referred to names that seem more appropriate for natives in that they are descriptions of the person, rather than traditional contemporary American names. Those characters that the author gives names to seem to be those that the author wants to stand out as unique individuals. Those who aren't given names could stand for a whole class of people. The doctor, for instance, could be any doctor. He is characterized more by his habits, smoking a set number of cigarettes, than his name. This goes for the man who beats his son as well as Kristi's father. These two men are never known as individuals, only by what actions they have done in the book.

The main theme of the book is that of storytelling. In fact, the entire book is written as if were being told as a story from the narrator to the reader. One of the aspects of the novel that gives it the feeling that it is being told face-to-face is that it is told in the present tense. This makes the reader feel as if the narrator is telling the story right at that time and that they are actually in the town when the action is taking place. Encompassed in the main, long story are shorter stories. These stories include the tales that Worried Man audiotapes for his grandson as well as the story that Owen tells his son while they are working on the beaver. Notice also that when Worried Man



audiotapes the stories for Daniel these stories are told in first person point of view as opposed to the other parts of the novel which are told in the third person point of view.

The author likely chose to vary the points of view because the first person point of view is the only one appropriate for an audiotaped story narrated by one particular person. Because the author wants to tell the story of the town as a whole, however, there is no way he could have accomplished this through the viewpoint of just one person. By switching between the first and third person points of view he is able to provide not only stories specific to individual characters but also a story about the town and its people in general.

Another theme in the novel that the reader will notice right away, especially in reference to the doctor, is the references to religion. The narrator has already made mention of the doctor's habit of smoking 12 cigarettes each day. Each of these cigarettes are named after one of the 12 disciples. This habit of the doctor's will be described in more detail as the book progresses.

Desperation, a feeling of hopelessness, is another theme in the novel that is briefly touched upon in this opening section. None of the active characters have reached the point of desperation yet but Owen mentions to Daniel that his father had an unhappy life. He notes his father grew up during the Hunger, never found the kind of work he liked and was lonely even after he got married to his wife. Though the term "desperation" is never used, his circumstances certainly seem desperate as will some of the situations of other characters who live in Neawanaka.

Billy and Worried Man are the two only employees of the town's public works department. Along with filling potholes and keeping the sewers running the men have their own self appointed forms of public works to which they attend. Cedar seems more devoted to these public works than Worried Man. He tells Cedar they shouldn't meddle as much but Cedar claims they are in the business of healing. In this section specifically Cedar approaches the man whom he knows beats his son. He tells the man his love for his son can help to heal them both but also warns him that he will break his wrists if he continues to beat the child.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss names in this book. Why do you think some characters are given names while others are not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the tone and language of the novel thus far.



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Cedar's encounter with the man who beats his son. Why do you think he says he is in the business of healing people?

Vocabulary

vistas, collage, fermented, rhythmic, symmetrical, textual, juxtaposition, inchoate, fascist, chortling, capacious, torque, ephemera, precipitously, gratuitous, impregnable, bulwark, entropy, purview, rapport, stalwart, exuberant, lithe, frenetic, cormorants, motley, cuckolded, assiduously, redolent, unanimously, bamboozled, druidry



Part 1, Section 12-30

Summary

In Section 12, No Horses considers the piece of spruce wood on her bench and wonders if she could make a man out of it.

In Section 13, Cedar thinks about No Horses, also named Nora, who is his goddaughter. She is a tough and kind woman but they recently had a conversation about holes in people. Nora said she felt as if she had a hole in herself.

In Section 14, Daniel asks his father to tell him the story of how his mother and father met. He admits to his father that he thinks his father pays more attention to his mother than he does to him.

In Section 15, Daniel hurries back to school. Owen thinks about No Horses and how they met on the beach. He was surprised by his boldness when he asked No Horses to walk with him.

In Section 16, Worried Man sets out for his walk with the doctor. He feels the pain in Mrs. L's arthritic wrists as she gives him and the doctor some berries. As they walk close to the river Worried Man begins to sense the pain of a woman. Knowing he wants privacy, the doctor leaves him. Worried Man continues to follow the pain.

In Section 17, Daniel gets back to school with just five minutes to go before the bell rings. He apologizes to his grandmother and agrees to walk her home. She tells him how she met his grandfather near the river. She also tells him what she knows about Cedar and his past.

In Section 18, Owen remembers the first lesson he gave No Horses in Irish. She finally convinces him to stop trying to teach her the language and just speak to her in it. He says sexually charged things to her in Irish he would not say to her in English.

In Section 19, Owen finishes the beaver on which he's been working. The crow praises his work. A nun had brought Owen the crow several years ago when the crow needed repair. Owen and the crow had been friends since. Now the crow tells Owen that he believes that Grace, for whom Owen has stuffed the beaver, likes Owen. Owen says he's not available. When it is time to close the shop and go home Owen asks Moses to keep an eye out for Daniel. As Moses flies home he flies over the hotel where the nun who nursed him back to health lies dying. She sees him but cannot call for him.

In Section 20, Worried Man fights through the woods, following the pain he senses.

In Section 21, as Cedar puts away his recording gear for the night he thinks about George Christie, the man who founded the public works department.



In Section 22, Grace is helping her brother Declan out on the boat. Declan considers his sister and thinks that his father should send her to college even though he knows his father would never do anything for anyone else.

In Section 23, the old nun thinks how she saved Moses and nursed him back to health after he fell from a tree. Owen had made a concoction of slings and splints to help the bird heal. The nun taught him words. One day Moses learned to put words together and said his first phrase “pain mud mother” to the nun.

In Section 24, Worried Man is dizzy following the pain. He lies down. He thinks of the pain of Anna Christie that he’d felt all the way across town. He’d found her drunk. She’d kicked him when he turned off her music. Now he recognizes that the pain he feels is coming from a young woman.

In Section 25, George Christie tells his daughter Cyra about his time working as a logger. As he talks, Cyra thinks about how she almost didn’t pull her drunk mother out of the creek one day as well as her fear of going to college.

In Section 26, No Horses cleans up her studio and thinks about her project. She sits on the porch outside her studio and begins to cry.

In Section 27, as Daniel rides his bike he thinks about how strange his family is. Daniel watches deer in the meadow. He is so silent that not even Moses sees him as he flies overhead.

In Section 28, Michael the cop has a wife named Sara and two daughters. He’s getting tired of being a cop because of all the brokenness he sees all the time but has to work four more years before he will earn his pension. He listens to Puccini’s opera Tosca in his car. Sara is secretly afraid that he will leave her because she believes she is not very exciting.

In Section 29, Anna sings and rocks by the creek until her daughter Cyra comes to let her know dinner is ready.

In 30, Worried Man thinks of the first time he saw Maple Head. Thinking of his wife cheers him up. He begins to focus on the pain again.

Analysis

A feeling of quiet desperation begins to surface in some of the characters’ lives as the narrator tells their stories. One of these characters who seems to be feeling this desperation is Michael the cop. Even though he first enjoyed being a cop, he has seen so much pain that he wants to quit. His wife senses his desperation and wishes he would quit but feels she doesn’t have any say. Michael seems concerned because he has to work at least four more years before he can earn his pension from the police department. Meanwhile, Sara worries that her husband will leave her because she isn’t very exciting.



No Horses, who has also been referred to as Nora in this section, is beginning a fight with desperation. She and Cedar have had a discussion in which she told him she feels like she is missing something, something she didn't even know she needed. She's described to him that she feels as if she has a hole in herself. In Section 26 after No Horses cleans her studio she sits on the deck of the studio and cries.

The Christie family is another one from which the reader gets a sense of desperation. When George Christie stopped working lumber and began the public works department his salary was cut in half, a cut that must have been hard for him. To make matters worse his wife, Anna, is an alcoholic. She gets mean and angry when she drinks. One of the girls remembers her mother passing out in the creek and wondering if she should pull her out or let her drown. She wonders why her father stayed with her mother for so long even with all the yelling and fighting that they did.

In this section of the story the reader learns that the public works department was originally founded by George Christie who passed it off to Cedar and Worried Man. Interesting is the mission statement of the department. Not many public works departments consider the recording of history as part of their duties. Additionally, the statement indicates the men "will also at all times practicably offer its services to residents, of all species, in matters having to do with public assistance and education, under any conceivable, or to be conceived, definition of public work" (46). They believe the definition of public works goes far beyond just keeping up the roads but also maintaining the people of their town.

Art, specifically the therapeutic value of art, will come to be a significant theme in this novel particularly in the stories of No Horses, Michael the Cop, and Anna. No Horses is a sculptor who frees sculpture from the restraints of wood or stone. Michael, meanwhile, is infatuated with the Puccini's opera *Tosca*. It is a comfort to him as he plays it in his car as he patrols. Anna is another character calmed by music. When her daughter calls her for supper she is sitting by the creek rocking and singing. Notice also in Worried Man's memory of the time he was called by Anna's pain, she physically attacked him when he turned off the opera that she was playing. Another art form important in the novel is literature. Worried Man particularly likes to quote the poet William Blake. There are several instances where Worried Man includes in his thoughts some snippet of Blake's work. All these references are attributed to Blake.

The laid back storytelling style is continued in this section of the story. The omniscient narrator knows the thoughts of all the characters, even the ones like Moses the crow. He records the thoughts of each character just as the character thinks them so the thoughts are in the first person point of view. Notice that in some sections of the story, like Section 25 and Section 28, the thoughts recorded bounce between two different characters. In Section 25, for instance, Cyra's thoughts, which are dramatically different from the story her father is telling her, are interspersed along with the narrative of his story. The style gives the impression of Cyra's mind wandering even as her father tries to tell her a story that is important to him. In Section 28 the narrator gives thoughts of both Michael and Sara about Michael's job and their relationship. The thoughts are



interspersed together so that neither characters' thoughts seem to be less important than the other's.

Notice in this section of the novel that while the story is told in the present tense, even some memories included in the novel are told in the present tense. For instance when Owen remembers how he met No Horses his memories are told in the present tense even though they took place in the past. This could be because the memories are so close to Owen that he can't help but tell them as if they are happening in the present.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Worried Man's ability to feel other people's pain.

Discussion Question 2

Consider Daniel's description of his "weird" family. Do you think there is any family who could not be considered weird?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the mission statement of the public works department. Is it typical? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

riveted, deftly, aura, redolent, succulent, impertinent, corvidian, lintel, fervently, advocate, concatenation, leering, sacristan, truncated, rendezvous, vortex



Part 1, Section 31-49

Summary

In Section 31, Maple Head is cooking bread for dinner. She looks for Worried Man but isn't concerned about him yet. When she sees an offering of salmonberries lined up on her windowsill she invites Cedar to come in.

In Section 32, Maple Head and Cedar discuss the osprey that Cedar had been recording that day. Cedar also tells May that he believes No Horses is troubled. He describes the conversation they had about holes in people. May begins to get concerned about Worried Man and sends Cedar out to look for him.

In Section 33, as Moses looks for Daniel he thinks about the nun who nursed him back to health.

In Section 34, the narrator gives an overview of what a variety of people in the town are doing. Among these people Worried Man has finally reached a deck, on which he senses the person in pain is sitting.

In Section 35, Daniel rides his bike down a dirt trail faster than usual because he is late for dinner. One of his braids catches on a branch and throws him off balance. He falls over the edge of a cliff.

In Section 36, Worried Man believes the porch he's looking at is familiar. As he makes his way around the house to knock at the door he realizes he is at the public works department. He knows the woman in pain on the deck is his daughter.

In Section 37, after they are finished fishing Grace goes to the bar even though Declan warns her she will get drunk and have sex with a loser.

In Section 38, the narrator tells the story of Timmy and Rachel. For Timmy's twentieth birthday Rachel has decided to give herself to Timmy. She and her friends have fixed up a fishing cabin of a friend for the occasion.

In Section 39, Owen tapes a story about his great-grandfather Timmy Cooney who helped build a road that goes nowhere. He had seen much death and dying because of the Hunger. As an older man he went back to the spot where he had helped to bury a family and marked the graves of the family members.

In Section 40, Worried Man beats on the door of Nora's studio until she opens it. He holds her while she cries. He is trying to get her to talk to him when Moses flies up with the news that Daniel is hurt. Nora jumps over the railing of the deck and runs to get her son.



In Section 41, Owen continues taping stories for Daniel in the first person. He describes how the Hunger came when Timmy was 15. The potatoes died in the fields. He tells of his grandfather's sister Cait who died of the fever that came along with the famine.

In Section 42, Cedar is still looking for Worried Man when he sees Moses fly over and then No Horses run past. He starts to follow them but then thinks he needs to get a truck and the doctor.

In Section 43, the only creature who saw Daniel's accident was a young female bear.

In Section 44, Owen continues taping his stories about Timmy Cooney for Daniel.

In Section 45, the narrator notes a point in time where everyone is kneeling though for different reasons and under different circumstances. At the end of the section everyone, with the exception of Daniel, rises from their knees.

In Section 46, Moses leads No Horses to Daniel and then sees Cedar and the doctor on the path. He leads them to the patient as well. Daniel's heart is beating but his legs are bloody with his bones shattered. Cedar and the doctor brace and splint Daniel's legs and then make a board to carry him on. Instead of allowing No Horses to pick up the board, he calls a bear from the woods. The bear carries Daniel up the hill.

In Section 47, the bear is confused but carries Daniel up the hill anyway.

In Section 48, Maple Head is not terribly worried about her husband because he often gets caught up in his own thoughts. She thinks about the times she had to walk down to the department of public works to get him when he didn't come home.

In Section 49, the nun thought of Moses just before she died. She remembered how she had made him leave when she found out she was sick. She didn't want him to stay because she didn't want him to watch her sickness claim her.

Analysis

The sense of trouble deepens in this section of the novel as Moses finds Daniel with his legs shattered from falling over the edge of the cliff on his bicycle. No Horses cries and holds onto her father but can't tell him what is wrong because they are interrupted by Moses coming to say that Daniel has been hurt. Maple Head both worries and tries not to worry about Worried Man.

In this section of the novel the stories go beyond the scope of those living in Neawanaka. Owen begins recording collections of the stories his great grandfather Timmy Cooney told about the Hunger and the fever that followed the Hunger. Notice how the author chooses to capitalize "Hunger." This capitalization stresses the severity of the situation. Hunger had taken on a life and identity all its own during that particular time in history. Since Owen's great grandfather lived in Ireland and he speaks of the



potatoes dying overnight, it can be assumed that he lived during the time of the potato famine in that country.

Just like some of the stories told about the residents of Neawanaka the stories about Timmy Cooney reference a desperation. The people were so hungry that they were not even kind to one another. It seems that Timmy was an exception to this rule as he went about the land buying people who were dead and even later went back and marked some peoples' graves. Timmy's stories of desperation include the death of his sister Cait to the fever.

There are also references to religion especially in the section where Moses the crow thinks about the nun who saved him and nursed him back to health. First, Moses is a Biblical name. When the nun gave Moses a bath she would rub his feathers with olive oil saying she was anointing him just as his namesake had been anointed. The nun spoke often of how her voice rose to God. She found God in everything, even thunderstorms.

Notice how the author uses phrases and words to express meaning. He often repeats descriptive words for emphasis. For instance the word "black" is used five times in the sentence: "No Horses flies down the path her hair a river of black in the black night between the twin lines of black trees her heart black black." This sentence describes the general darkness of the tone as No Horses, who is struggling with her own coming depression, runs toward her injured son.

In Section 45 the author strikes a parallel between the residents of Neawanaka as they all kneel for various reasons with kneeling a sign of submission. One of the immediate thoughts that might cross the reader's mind is that they are all kneeling in prayer but the reader realizes how many different reasons can be given that a person would be kneeling.

Notice also the use of animals as characters. Already it has been determined that Moses is a crow who can talk in full sentences. He has the intellectual workings of a human and is able to voice his desires, needs and observations. In this section of the novel a bear also becomes a character. This wild female bear is enlisted by Cedar to carry Daniel up the cliff. As she carries the boy, the narrator even records her thoughts and tells her story.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think it was better for the bear to carry Daniel up the cliff instead of the people doing so?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the language used in the novel thus far. How would you describe the style of the novel?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the author chooses to include the stories of Owen's great grandfather? What impact do those stories have on the stories of the people of Neawanaka?

Vocabulary

reconnoiter, exuberantly, inviolate, otolaryngological, forage, askew, sinuous, propulsive, propulsion



Part II, Sections 1-16

Summary

In Section 1, Michael and Sara are washing dishes together. Sara wants to tell him about the baby she is carrying.

In Section 2, Sara asks Michael to tell her about Puccini in bed that night. He stops talking only when he sees that she has gone to sleep.

In Section 3, Worried Man kneels on the deck of No Horses' studio. He can feel her pain as well as Daniel's pain. As he walks back into the public works part of the building he has a blinding pain in his chest and for a while is unable to catch his breath. He thinks of May (Maple Head) and tries to call out to her.

In Section 4, when she wakes in the morning, Sara asks Michael to tell her more about Puccini. They talk about names from Puccini and his life that they might use as names for their next baby. Michael asks if they really need to agree on a name right then. Sara tells him that they do.

In Section 5, Maple Head goes to look for her husband. She packs a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine and heads toward the public works department. She finds Worried Man sitting on the floor smiling at her. She says he needs to see a doctor when he tells her that he had an episode with his heart.

In Section 6, Grace wakes to find herself in a strange trailer. She leaves angrily. She sees Owen working in his shop and stops to talk to him.

In Section 7, Owen tells Grace about Daniel's bike accident. She holds him as he cries.

In Section 8, Worried Man tells Daniel stories as Daniel sleeps after the surgery on his legs. He tells stories of the people who originally lived in Neawanaka.

In Section 9, after Owen calms down he and Grace drink coffee together. As she prepares to leave, Owen says something to Grace in Irish. She asks him if he will teach her Irish sometime as all she has learned from her father has been curses.

In Section 10, Owen sits by his son's hospital bed to tell stories as the boy sleeps. He tells more stories of his great-grandfather Timmy Cooney. His great-grandfather made it a point to listen to other people's stories so he could help to keep them alive.

In Section 11, Worried Man tells stories of the original Neawanaka residents to Daniel. In these stories he talks about the traditional funeral canoes used for burials.

In Section 12, when the nun dies her soul gets stuck on the broken ceiling fan in her hotel room.



In Section 13, the priest who gave the nun her last rites thinks of all the times he has blessed and anointed the sick, dying and dead.

In Section 14, a description of the doctor's house is given. He has two beds he uses for recuperating patients. One man who was from the navy stayed there for months. He told stories of his wife Mary and the times he was lost at sea.

In Section 15, No Horses tries to carve to keep from thinking about Daniel. She thinks about the boys she dated in the past.

In Section 16, Maple Head asks her students to write a page about Neawanaka. Included are some of the responses she receives.

Analysis

As Worried Man tells stories to Daniel during his recuperation process, stories and storytelling continues to be a major theme in this part of the novel. Worried Man tells Daniel that people have been around even before the point that stories remember them. Worried Man describes stories as people, personifying them to appear as if they have lives of their own, apart from the characters and tellers. Just as Worried Man tells stories to his grandson, Timmy Coonley tasked himself with listening to other people's stories and making sure they lived on. According to Owen, Timmy believed stories that were not told often enough because a person died could not rest. Timmy believed he was doing people a favor by telling their stories and keeping them alive.

Consider the irony of the nun's death in this section of the story. She has been a devout and caring follower of God all of her life. When she dies, however, instead of floating on up the heaven, her soul gets stuck on the ceiling fan that she had put off getting fixed. It is as if this one unfinished and seemingly insignificant task in her life is the one that will keep her grounded.

When May does finally locate her husband she discovers that he has had a heart attack but that he has survived. She is upset for him because she did not want him to die alone. To her husband it matters only that he doesn't want to lose her. They are most scared by the idea of being separated from one another. Despite their desperation and their attempts to stay together Maple reminds her husband "We're always on the lip of lost, Billy." This gives the idea that life is a game of chance in which a person can be devastated at any minute.

Sara uses art and her husband's love of Puccini to finally tell him that they will be having another baby in the theme of art. Also in this section, as Grace sees Owen working in his shop she thinks of the stories her mother used to read to her as a girl. She had always read books in the morning and stories at night, the lessons and characters from which Grace still remembers.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of the nun's death in this section of the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss stories and storytelling as it is discussed in this section of the novel.

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Daniel is able to hear the stories that his family members are telling him? Do you think they are assisting him in healing? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

petulant, precariously, savage, cloistered, hawsers, tresses, semblance, melodrama, endemic, fiefdom, allocations, gargantuan, proprietor, adjacent



Part II, Sections 17-29

Summary

In Section 17, Daniel and the man who sells boxes are both staying at the doctor's house. The same surgeon operated on both of them. The man who sells boxes has 19 days left to live while Daniel has 19 pins, screws and bolts in his legs. The doctor who is caring for them used to smoke 19 cigarettes per day but weaned himself down to 14 and then to 12, the same number as the number of Jesus' apostles.

In Section 18, Worried Man continues his stories about the original Neawanaka people at Daniel's bedside.

In Section 19, the doctor is smoking his last cigarette of the day. He considers the disease of violence.

In Section 20, Red Hugh O Donnell is cursing as he drives down the road. He is late delivering his milk and blames it on his sons. There is a log truck ahead of him carrying Douglas fir logs. One of the logs is jostled loose and slams into Red's truck hitting him in the chest and killing him.

In Section 21, Red floats above his body when he dies. He had always thought he would die in one of his muddy fields. He realized he had his big toes again which he had lost at the age of 20.

In Section 22, when Declan wakes he realizes he's overslept. He wonders where everyone is. He checks in at the bar to see if Grace is there. She isn't but one of the men begins to make comments about her. Declan hits the guy and a fight starts. The boy whose father beats him is there and fights on Declan's side. Stella breaks up the fight and orders them all out of the bar. Outside, Declan asks the boy to come with them on the boat. At the boat Declan discovers that the boy who says his name is Nicholas has the same attitude as Grace. He believes they will get along fine. After Nicholas gets permission from his father, he sets off with Grace and Declan.

In Section 23, Worried Man continues telling Daniel the stories of the original people of Neawanaka. One of the stories he tells is of how he met his own guardian spirit. He had walked for days when he finally saw a huge Heron which became his guardian spirit. His colors are blue and white, the colors he saw as Heron flew away over the mountain.

In Section 24, the sea is the first thing that Daniel sees when he wakes up. He also sees a carved sea lion, a gift his mother made for the doctor. Daniel believes the sea lion is looking at him.

In Section 25, Declan, Grace and Nicholas fish all night. Meanwhile at the doctor's house the doctor keeps Daniel awake to check his mental status. As Declan and the crew get caught in a storm, the doctor reads to Daniel to soothe him to sleep. He reads



about a storm at sea where the crew gets back to land safely. In the end of the section Declan and the others get back to land safely but their ship is wrecked.

In Section 26, Michael waits at the dock for Declan and Grace's boat so he can tell them about their father. He thinks of the times he has been the bearer of bad news as well as the times he's been able to share in good news. He finds the spot where the boat crashed on the shore and tells Grace and Declan what has happened.

In Section 27, the nun's funeral is described. It was carried out according to her wishes with each member of the town reading part of a passage from Acts.

In Section 28, Maple Head and No Horses visit Daniel. Daniel is still sleeping, so No Horses asks her mother to tell her about the old days. They discuss what the people of those days used to make with different types of wood.

In Section 29, Owen holds Daniel in his lap on the deck of the doctor's house. He tells Daniel a story about Timmy Cooney. He tells about all the people that his great grandfather buried and put stones over their graves. His great-grandfather always refused to move stones from fields because he was afraid the stone might be marking a grave. He and his family members also sang laments for all of the dead people.

Analysis

The story of another tragedy is recorded as Red Hugh O'Donnell is killed. Notice the epithet that is included with his name almost every time his name is mentioned in the novel. He is said to be Red Hugh O'Donnell "chief of the clan, hard of hand and head, who asks no help or quarter" (104). Although Red had been known for his cruelty when he died, his body was restored and his soul floated up to heaven as it should have instead of getting stuck like the old nun's.

Notice the way the phrases from the opera Michael listens to are woven into the story of the cop telling Grace and Declan about their father's death. It is one way that art is integrated into the story. Just after he has told the siblings what happened to their father Tosca says a line quietly, "he's dead, now I forgive him" (116). After the way their father has treated them, the reader has to wonder if Red's children will be able to forgive him even after his death.

As the character of the doctor is more fully developed, notice there are more religious references. The Acts of the Apostles, a chapter from the Christian Bible, as well as the apostles themselves are among the references made. In past sections of the novel it has been mentioned that the doctor smoked 12 cigarettes each day, one for each of the 12 apostles. The author goes into more detail about the doctor's smoking habits and when he smoked the cigarette named after each of the apostles. It is indicated that even when the doctor smoked 14 cigarettes a day he never smoked the thirteenth cigarette because he couldn't stand to smoke a cigarette after the man who betrayed Jesus. He finally cut down to 12 cigarettes, one for each of the 11 original apostles and one for Matthias, the apostle who replaced Judas.



The doctor leads a very ordered life as is shown by his cigarette smoking. He smokes each of his cigarettes at the same time of day in the same order every day. Peter is the first cigarette of the day; John the fourth and Thomas is the seventh. The doctor's bedtime routine is also the same. In Section 19 of the second part of the novel the doctor's bedtime routine is described in the exact words used to describe it in Section 34 of the first part of this book.

Returning to the theme of religious references notice that in Section 25 as Grace and Declan are fighting the storm at sea, the doctor is reading a story about a storm at sea from the book of Acts in the Bible. As the author has done in other parts of the novel the story of Grace and Declan's fight with the sea is interspersed with the story that the doctor reads Daniel from the book of Acts. Both stories tell of a successful escape from the storm. Notice also that during the nun's funeral it is passages from the book of Acts that she wanted read. She requested various members of the village read so that there would be many voices praying for her.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the death of Red Hugh O Donnell? Is there anything of significance about the way in which he died?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the nun chose the passage from Act where the apostles began to speak in tongues as the one to be read at her funeral? Why is it significant that a variety of people take part in the reading?

Discussion Question 3

What does the sea lion represent in this section of the novel?

Vocabulary

cognizant, infinitesimally, pliability, exuberant, charismatic, envisioned, emanated, acuity, tempestuous, implores, premonitions, meticulous, sentient, chaotic, poultice, laments



Part II, Section 30-40

Summary

In Section 30, Daniel and the man who sells boxes get to know one another. Daniel learns the man will die in about 16 days. The man tells Daniel stories about his family.

In Section 31, No Horses reduces what is left of her oak man to a pile of chips. She does so with a big piece of spruce and an even bigger piece of alder. No Horses walks to try to calm herself. Owen knows something is wrong but doesn't know what it is.

In Section 32, Grace visits Owen. She asks him to say a prayer in Irish at her father's funeral. He learns that no one else in Grace's family speaks the language. Owen is rattled after her visit. He struggles to think about his work but his mind bounces between Daniel, Owen and Grace.

In Section 33, the reader learns that Owen can play several songs on the fiddle. He'd pull down his instrument every once in a while and play around with it.

In Section 34, No Horses finds herself at her parents' house during a walk. She talks with her mother about Daniel as they rock together. Her mother tells her the story of Asin a wild woman of the woods.

In Section 35, as Cedar sits in his office he thinks about how little money people around him have. He thinks of the way that those who have salaries have only small salaries. Some people, like Owen, are paid through the barter system. He wonders how all of the people get by with what they make. He considers that all of the people he knows are just one bad accident away from financial ruin.

In Section 36, for Red Hugh O'Donnell's funeral Owen thinks carefully about the prayer he will say. Because he knows no one will understand the prayer in Irish, he decides to say what he thinks.

In Section 37, when Grace asks Owen for a translation of the prayer he gives her an edited version. Meanwhile, Declan is talking to Cedar about fish. He mentions that his father left them with nothing. He also tells Cedar he doesn't understand how his mother could have left her children.

In Section 38, Worried Man and Maple Head walk home together. They courted on foot, the narrator notes. They discovered the house in which they now live as they walked together. As they walk home, they talk about the nature of time. Worried Man believes that if they could understand and manipulate time they could make life better. He thinks he knows where time's delivery system is located. He tells May he has to go there.

In Section 39, Moses sees No Horses with her head down. He can't see her face but a shiver of fear goes through him. He hums Psalms 34.



In Section 40, the narrator describes how it is raining on all of the residents of the town.

Analysis

The stories continue in this section of the novel particularly as characters tell stories with the intent to comfort others. The man who sells boxes tells Daniel stories of this family as Daniel rests. Maple Head tells No Horses the story of Asin, a wild free woman who felt there was something missing in her life but couldn't pinpoint what it was. Maple Head believes No Horses is like Asin. It is through No Horses' story that the reader feels the real sense of desperation. No Horses was already hurting emotionally before her son's injury but now seems completely lost in her pain. She is unable to work and spends a good deal of her time walking. Her husband Owen senses there is something wrong with his wife but doesn't know what it is wrong or what he should do to help her. Moses the crow feels fear as he watches No Horses. He sings to her the thirty-fourth Psalm, a psalm to comfort the broken hearted.

Adding to the theme of desperation in the story is the death of Red Hugh O Donnell and the void that is left after his death. Even though he didn't seem to love his children in the traditional sense, he was the only parent they had left. Their mother had left two years before the death of their father. Declan is left as the head of a family consisting of a younger sister and two younger brothers. He shares with Cedar that their situation is dire as their father left them with nothing. Remember that it was in this same section that Cedar thought about how poor the people of Neawanaka were. Many had barely enough money to get by while others took payment for services on the barter system. He thinks of how the entire town is on the brink of financial ruin. This idea that disaster could come at any moment as the result of a sickness or accident deepens the feeling of despair and desperation in the novel.

In the theme of public works Worried Man indicates to his wife that he believes he knows where the mechanisms that control time are located. He tells her that he needs to go there. Worried Man reaches this conclusion following a conversation with his wife in which they decide that if they were able to manipulate time they could possibly change the world and the outcomes of people's lives. This idea of a search for time gives the story the feel of a fantasy, something not real.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think of Worried Man's decision that he needs to go on a search for the mechanisms that control time? What might life be like if such a thing existed?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way the feeling of desperation and depression has grown in this section of the novel. How has the author developed this tone?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss No Horse's sense of desperation. How do you think her situation should be handled?

Vocabulary

sinuous, affronted, asprawl, contentious, chrysalis, recalcitrant, plundered, rapacious, outmoded, bilingual, incontrovertible, enmity, capacious, fulminating



Part III, Section 1-17

Summary

In Section 1, the narrator describes Cedar's office in the public works department. It appears messy but he knows where everything is. His projects that day include work orders as well as a variety of tasks he has deemed need doing.

In Section 2, Worried Man is typing in his notes for his time project. He concludes that time is a substance since it can seem to speed up in some cases and slow down in others. He believes that he can perhaps be the one to uncover the secret of time because he is not a genius as all of the other people who have studied time and time travel have been.

In Section 3, the doctor invites the man who sells boxes to have a cigarette since he is dying anyway. He tells the man of his time in the war when he smoked cigarettes all of time because of the stress. He was 20 years old when he was sent out to collect the pieces of men and try to put them back together.

In Section 4, Worried Man shows Cedar a map of the mountain where he believes time is stored for their area. Cedar agrees that Worried Man makes a good case but is skeptical of the trip he has planned. Worried Man believes they have to go on the trek to find where time is stored because it would be the greatest public work of all time.

In Section 5, the narrator discusses how the river thinks and includes some of the thoughts of the Mink River.

In Section 6, the priest is surprised to see Rachel and Timmy, Grace O'Donnell and Owen during mass on the feast of St. Columba. He talks about the story of St. Columba. Through the course of his life Colm, as the man was really known, discovered that his greatest enemy was himself.

In Section 7, Rachel and Timmy leave the church and have sex in an alleyway. Grace is hateful to a visitor. Owen walks to his wife's studio at the public works department. No Horses suggests going to see Daniel but they wind up locking themselves into her studio after some sexually suggestive talk.

In Section 8, Michael, Sara and the girls go to the beach on a whim. Sara asks Michael why he likes Puccini's *Tosca* so much. As he tries to explain one of the girls spills their milkshake. After things calm down, Sara asks him why he loves her. After the girls have gone to the water Sara apologizes and tells him she knows they can't afford the baby she is carrying. She asks him what she will do if he decides to leave her.

In Section 9, Nicholas is being beaten by his father. After the boy breaks free and runs away, his father thinks about how much he hates the way he treats his son.



In Section 10, Cedar and Worried Man continue to discuss the proposed trip to discover the source of time. As they are talking Worried Man senses fear. He tells Cedar to run to the trailer park, a girl is being hurt in the last trailer, a white one with a green door. When he arrives, Cedar sees that a man in a big brown coat has a 12-year-old girl pinned against the sink. Cedar is beating the man when Worried Man pulls up in his truck and pulls Cedar away.

In Section 11, Rachel is worried because she's missed her period. Meanwhile Sara plants a vegetable garden even as she feels her baby moving and throws up because of morning sickness. Rachel also throws up. Rachel's mother calls her but Rachel slips out the door. She runs past the spot where Sara is planting her garden.

In Section 12, Michael takes the man in the brown coat into custody and the girl is sent to the doctor for an appointment. At dinner that night Cedar and Worried Man tell Maple Head what happened. Cedar worries that he is getting too angry considering how he beat the man so badly. He wonders if Worried Man is right when he says they should stop meddling in other people's lives. He tells May the man was the girl's father. He is in jail. The girl is staying at the doctor's house. Maple Head decides to visit her when she goes to see Daniel.

In Section 13, the doctor tells Kristi that she will be staying with him for a while. He introduces her to Daniel and the man who sells boxes.

In Section 14, Maple Head goes to see Daniel and Kristi. As she walks, she thinks about her husband and his dreams. She tucks Daniel in and then introduces herself to Kristi. Kristi seems hesitant at first but then asks if she could tuck her in as well.

In Section 15, Owen and Daniel sit on the doctor's deck together. Daniel asks his father to talk about his grandmother, the one who lives in Ireland, and his grandfather, who died working on the road. Daniel learns that his grandmother still writes to Owen but that Owen doesn't write back, nor does he believe he has any hope of being able to visit her in Ireland because they have so little money.

In Section 16, Cedar and Worried Man continue to talk about the trip that Worried Man wants them to take. Cedar makes Worried Man promise that he will talk to May about the trip.

In Section 17, No Horses is not in bed when Owen wakes. When he goes out to check the mail he finds her sitting outside. She tells him she can't get out of what she calls "the black room." He takes her into the house and puts her to bed. All the time he is getting her ready for sleep she is crying.

Analysis

In this section of the story No Horses seems to have reached the depths of her desperation. Her symptoms sound very much like those suffered by a person with major depression. She tells Owen she feels as if she is in a "black room" that she can't get out



of. She is tired, wakes early and can't go back to sleep, cries and is unable to concentrate on her work. Owen is scared by his wife's sudden admission to him that something really is wrong with her.

Also suffering with a deepening sense of desperation in this section is Cedar. He has scared himself with his sudden bout of anger that caused him to really hurt the man who had his daughter pinned against the sink. He voices his concerns to Maple Head that he is at the point where he might start doing more harm than good. He remembers a time when it was easy for him to hurt people. Cedar tells Maple Head he doesn't want to go back to being the man he was before.

When Owen talks to his son about his life as a child and young person, and his decision to leave his family his story also has a sense of desperation. Owen's father was said to have purposefully worked himself to death building a road that went nowhere. This action denotes a sense of desperation on the part of Owen's father. When his father died at the age of 60 Owen decided he could no longer stand to live with his mother in Ireland. He also admitted to not liking himself then and wanting to get out of Ireland. This feeling of being trapped denotes a sense of desperation on Owen's part. Notice also that he touches on the theme of stories in the novel as he tells Daniel that he wanted to tell and write his own stories.

As Cedar and Worried Man discuss Worried Man's idea that they should travel to a mountain where he believes time is stored, notice that Worried Man tries to present his idea as a natural part of the job in public works. He baits Cedar by telling him all of the good that could come from their trip if they were able to discover where time was stored and how to manipulate it. Even so, Cedar worries that one or both of them will get hurt during the trip which he describes as being dangerous. Notice how dedicated Cedar is to his town and the people of his town. He's already been accused by Worried Man of meddling where he had no business to meddle but a map of the town on the ceiling of Cedar's office represents his desire to keep the town and its residents always in the center of his vision. It is indicated that Cedar has "sworn with vows immense and binding to protect and advance and celebrate and defend" the people and attributes of the town.

A note on the structure of the novel also deals with the theme of religious references in the novel. Notice that while Kristi is looking for the doctor to find what room is her's, the doctor reading from the Book of Job from the Christian Bible. The passages of Job, which tell the story of a man whose life is full of troubles and laments to God wondering when his troubles will be over, are interspersed with Kristi's movements through the doctor's house as she looks for him. The image formed is one of Kristi looking through a dark house (her own dark life) to a figure of hope and possibility (the doctor) just as Job did through his own suffering.

Notice also that while this story is told in the present tense, the narrator also has knowledge of what will happen in the future. For instance, in Section 8, even though Michael and Sara's girls are being careful not to spill their milkshakes, the narrator shares with the reader that one of them will do so in about four minutes time. Notice



also the capitalization of “Extra Careful” in the description of the girls’ intent not to spill their shakes. The capitalization gives an additional emphasis to the actions of the girls.

Notice also as Michael and Sara talk he calls her *mia sirena*, a reference from *Tosca*. This phrase will be important later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the relationship between Michael and Sara. Do you see any reality in Michael’s actions that he wants to leave Sara? Why do you think she is so unsure of his love?

Discussion Question 2

Research the symptoms of major depressive disorder. Do you think No Horses’ symptoms fit the description of depression? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think that Worried Man will be able to convince Cedar to go along with him on his journey to find time? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

appertaining, smelt, ephemeral, codicil, malleable, ruminative, succeed, topographical, purview, tactile, homily, austere, brusque, chalice, paten, minutiae, sacristy, feints, bucolic, famished, supplication, verve



Part III, Section 18-28

Summary

In Section 18, the narrator tells how Nora had won state titles while in school for her ability to run fast. It had been thought that she would have a chance at a track scholarship. She instead went to a small arts college that had no sports program, but she kept running anyway.

In Section 19, Rachel goes to the doctor's office and discovers that she is pregnant. She refuses to tell the doctor her name or let him file insurance for her.

In Section 20, Worried Man meets Maple Head after school is over and offers to walk her home. As they walk he tells her about the trip he has planned with Cedar. He asks for her blessing but she refuses to give it. She tells him that he would be putting himself into deliberate danger especially just after he had a heart attack. She tells him to do whatever he wants but not to expect her to support him.

In Section 21, Daniel asks for a story as Worried Man tucks him into bed. Even though Worried Man is rattled after his conversation with Maple Head he starts to tell Daniel about when the People first began to celebrate the Fourth of July holiday but changes to the story of his father and how he came to marry a woman from another group of people with whom the People often were at war.

In Section 22, No Horses spends a few days alone up the coast. She wonders if she is insane. Owen tries to work but can't. Instead he goes to the public works building, kneels down in the grass and cries as Cedar watches.

In Section 23, Kristi meets Moses and is amazed that he can talk even though he is a crow. She asks about the woman who taught him how to talk. Moses tells her about the nun and begins to cry. Kristi comforts him.

In Section 24, Moses and Kristi continue to talk on the deck even after the man with eight days to live and Daniel have gone inside. Moses describes to her the characteristics of crows that set them apart from other birds.

In Section 25, the man who beats his son goes to the priest for advice. When he begs the priest to tell him if there is something that can help him the priest can say only "yes."

In Section 26, while Michael takes the girls to the beach, Sara takes a walk and unconsciously ends up at Anna's house. Sara asks the woman if she will teach her how to sing part of the opera "Tosca." Anna asks her to sing for her with the creek as her accompaniment. Sara is both excited and disturbed by the experience. When she arrives back at home her husband and daughters are singing the opera together.

In Section 27, the narrator describes a moment when the whole town is singing.



In Section 28, back in her studio, No Horses sits down and tries to cry but no tears will come. She wonders why she is so sad. In her thought she decides she needs Alder wood because it is said to be a healing wood.

Analysis

Desperation continues to deepen in this section as No Horses loses even the ability to cry. She wracks her mind trying to find some reason for her unhappiness and something that will make her feel whole again. Desperation is also shown by the man who beats his son as he turns to the priest in hopes of getting help in controlling himself. Even though the priest wants to say something to reassure the man he can't think of an easy answer. He finally simply says "yes" to the man's desire to know if there is something that can help him change his anger and his relationship with his son.

The theme of art as therapy is expanded in this section of the novel as a variety of people, ranging from Sara specifically to the entire town in general, find comfort in music. Without intending to, Sara finds herself in front of Anna Christie's house. She asks the woman for voice lessons. She wants to learn to sing part of "Tosca" the opera that her husband loves so much. Sara believes that being able to sing parts of the opera would be a meaningful gift to her husband. Music is also important in Section 27. This section is one of those where the entire town is connected by music. The people and even the animals, Moses and the female bear with her cubs, are singing. This section describes a connection between all of the people in the town and also describes the way that music can soothe and connect people.

One of the structural aspects of the novel that the author uses often is that of the use of multiple adjectives with a single noun. One example of this occurs in Section 26. One of Michael's daughters is described as laughing "with such a peal of hilarious clear clean unadulterated unmodulated unselfconscious artless merriment." In this particular example there are seven adjectives used to describe the form of merriment she displays when she laughs.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the way the men reacted to Moses' tears and the way Kristi reacted to them. Why do men and women often react so differently to another's pain?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the priest's reaction when the man who beats his son comes to him for help. Why is it so hard for the priest to respond to the man?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the importance of music in this section of the novel.

Vocabulary

astute, compunction, facile, careens, decocted, ague



Part III, Section 29-37

Summary

In Section 29, Owen and the Worried Man visit the holy mountain. Owen learns from Worried Man that Cedar was in the war. When Owen seems to be trying to discourage Worried Man, Worried Man tells his son-in-law that he knows the danger in what he is doing but tries to express how important the trip is to him. Even though it will be a hard journey, Worried Man knows it is one that he has to make.

In Section 30, the man with six days to live is talking to Daniel about the things that matter to him. These things include his daughters learning to read and his wife.

In Section 31, Kristi's father was released from jail after no charges could be brought against him, but two days later the district attorney's office sent the case to a grand jury. They did indict him and a warrant was filed for his arrest. Michael is now cruising trailer town looking for the man whom he knows could be anywhere.

In Section 32, Cedar hears Nora screaming and runs to her studio. She tells him that she can't stand the black snow any more. She asks Cedar if there is any hope for her. He makes her go out for a walk. He tells her about a boy he knew in the war who lost his way just like No Horses did. He tells her that boy found his way back and that Nora can do so as well.

In Section 33, after a day of packing shingles Rachel wants the smell off her. She goes to the river. As she swims she thinks about whether or not she wants to have the baby. She dives down to the bottom of the river where she has a cramp. After several more cramps she miscarries the baby.

In Section 34, the author describes how the tiny baby the size of a finger travels down the river to the ocean.

In Section 35, Stella thinks of what has become of her life. She had dreamed of a family and work she enjoyed. When her parents died she bought the pub with her inheritance. She had imagined it would be a place full of fun and happiness but instead she has felt more and more alone.

In Section 36, Worried Man begins gathering supplies for the trip to Wyeast.

In Section 37, Cedar walks No Horses to the doctor's office, but since the doctor is not there they continue walking down the beach. He tells Nora that he has also had times when he was dark. He tells her that work, friends and paying ferocious attention to things were the activities that helped him to recover.



Analysis

The use of stories as a way to help a person understand that others have survived similar troubles is defined in this section of the novel. Cedar tells Nora stories of people he has known before who have traveled to dark places and have lost themselves but have survived the darkness. Cedar is able to comfort Nora by telling her how those people rebounded from their depression and how she will be able to rebound in the same way. These examples describe how a person can learn from the stories of another and can take comfort in the idea that others have suffered through similar circumstances and have survived. Cedar also suggests practical solutions to help ease Nora's depression. These include walking, working and immersing oneself in his family.

In the theme of religious references, notice how Worried Man quotes to himself passages from the book of Ecclesiastes from the Bible as he packs for his trip. The use of passages from Ecclesiastes is significant because it details a search for knowledge, the kind of journey that Worried Man believes that he and Cedar are setting out on. Notice also that Owen goes with Worried Man on a dry run to the mountain. Owen tries to discourage his father-in-law and the reader has to wonder if someone hasn't asked Owen to intervene in an attempt to change Worried Man's mind. It is because of this trip that the reader learns that Worried Man does have a good grasp on how dangerous the journey is that he plans to take. By not taking the trip he feels he would be giving in to old age and fear - a surrender he doesn't want to make.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Owen tries to discourage his father-in-law from making the journey to Wyeast? Do you think Worried Man's explanation of why he needs to go to the mountain satisfies Owen?

Discussion Question 2

How does Cedar use stories to help No Horses understand that other people have felt what she is feeling and have recovered?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Rachel's miscarriage. Do you think it was fated that she'd lose the baby? How is the loss of the baby a blessing to her?

Vocabulary

sinuous, inculpatory, adamantly, impaneled, saunters, inchoately, verve, ferocious



Part III, Section 38-47

Summary

In Section 38, the narrator shares with the reader that Maple Head has been working on writing the history of Neawanaka for more than 20 years.

In Section 39, the priest rechristens Declan's repaired boat. The rechristening turned into a big affair. Michael the cop even allowed the pub to remain open past its traditional closing time. When he did make it close he took all the drunks home in his patrol car.

In Section 40, Michael continues to keep his eye out for the man in the big brown coat. He believes the man will want revenge, possibly on Cedar or Worried Man so he patrols past their houses with his lights off.

In Section 41, Maple Head has read every account written of the beginning of Neawanaka. It appears from her research that the town began at a "place where a spring emerges from the side of a hill that looks like a woman's breast."

In Section 42, Grace and Nicholas go out on the boat alone while Declan tries to sell his father's milk cows. She admits that it was her dad who liked the cows. All the children hated them.

In Section 43, Declan learns that his father's cows and land are worthless. The land isn't zoned as residential land so houses can't be built there. Since the dairy market is down the banker whom Declan talks to doesn't think anyone would even like the cows donated to them. He is so angry when he gets home that he shoots all of the cows.

In Section 44, the narrator describes the pain in Daniel's legs and Daniel's attempt to contain the pain.

In Section 45, when Declan calls Cedar and Worried Man to tell them about what happened to the cows they confer with Maple Head and come up with the idea of a free town-wide picnic.

In Section 46, Declan tells Grace and Nicholas that after the picnic he plans to take the boat and fish in deep waters where he can catch fish that will earn a better living. He talks about trips lasting a week or more. When Nicholas says he'd have to check with his father Declan gives him a hard time. Grace warns him to back off but he doesn't. Because of his heckling Nicholas says he won't be on the boat after the picnic. Grace, who is angry with her brother, says she won't be there either.

In Section 47, the employees of the shingle factory get the day of the picnic off from work. Timmy and Rachel go to the cabin to make love. The manager of the factory studies his books and fights with the decision that he may have to close down the factory. Timmy asks Rachel to marry him. She says no.



Analysis

As the author weaves together the stories of the people who live in Neawanaka he seems to be developing a new plot line with Michael and the man in the big brown coat. Michael senses that the man is still around the area and that he is seeking revenge for the beating that Cedar gave him. He hopes that the man will not take out his revenge on Cedar, Worried Man or Maple Head.

Even though Declan had joked after his father's funeral that his father left his children with nothing, the reality of how little they had does not sink in until he gets an appraisal from the bank saying that both his land and his cows are useless. Declan had hoped to be able to sell the cows and the land to help support his family. He is so frustrated when he goes back home that he shoots all of the cows. He feels he has no hope and no where to turn.

Another man who finds himself in a situation of desperation is the manager of the shingle factory. He remembered when he took out a bank loan to start the plant. Now as he looks over the books he comes to the conclusion that he may have to close the plant. Even so, the manager tells himself that he will not close the factory. Notice how this section of the novel, Section 47, runs parallel to Timmy and Rachel's lovemaking. Each action done by Timmy and Rachel is mirrored by a similar action by the manager of the factory. While the actions are parallel, the emotions and tone of the different stories run opposite of each other. Timmy and Rachel's actions lead to the high point where Timmy proposes to Rachel but Rachel crushes Timmy by refusing him. The manager's action lead to a low point where he comes to the realization that he might have to sell his factory but he turns his own story around by telling himself that he won't sell.

Another structural aspect of the novel to notice can be found in Section 38. In this section the author describes all of the different places that Maple Head has worked on the manuscript for her history of Neawanaka. After the first four sentences of this section the sentences settle into a pattern. The next four sentences begin with the words "sometimes she writes" while the next 16 sentences start with the phrase "She has written." The final sentence is a long, run-on sentence describing all the things that Maple Head is trying to incorporate into her book. The pattern seems to reference the way that Maple Head has been persistent, organized and unrelenting in her desire to write about the town in which she lives.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Nicholas and Declan. Discuss Nicholas' respect for his father even though his father beats him. How did Declan handle his own father's cruel treatment of him?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the decision of the men in the public works department to have a community-wide picnic with the meat from Declan's cows. How is this the ideal solution for the problem? What does it say about the community?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the history of Neawanaka that Maple Head is trying to put together. How is Neawanaka like any typical small American town? How is it different?

Vocabulary

prevalence, paucity, poignant, morphing, incapacitated, riverine, addled, nativity, offal, serpentine, bugling, ruminant, brigade, astute, reputedly, tendrils, filigreed



Part IV, Section 1-16

Summary

In Section 1, the narrator describes the noises as Neawanaka wakes for a new day.

In Section 2, Owen gets up early. It is the day of the picnic, the day No Horses is supposed to return to work and the day he is supposed to bring Daniel home from the doctor's house. It is also the final day he has to prepare equipment for Cedar and Worried Man to go on their trek up the mountain. When Moses asks how Nora is Owen says she seems better because she has finally shown a desire to work again but that she still seems lost.

In Section 3, Worried Man and the doctor walk together and share thoughts on how tired they are of pain. The doctor makes the comment that in most cases there is nothing they can do to help the person in pain.

In Section 4, Cedar thinks about the odd things the people in Neawanaka do in order to make extra money. He remembers George Christie who had built a cedar cabin because he dreamed of it housing a logging museum. He finally had to burn the wood the cabin was made of in order to heat his home.

In Section 5, George Christie and Nora work together unloading the wood for the grills at the picnic. George is surprised she can easily identify the different woods. He learns that she carves wood. He offers to get her a piece of cedar to carve.

Meanwhile, in Section 6, Michael walks the perimeter of the football field on which the picnic will be served. The other members of the town are busy with their own jobs in preparing for the picnic.

In Section 7, Worried Man and Cedar find a table at which they can split their customary bottle of beer and salmonberries. They remember in the past that big meals would always be served before men went out on a major trip. They also talk about how long they've been friends and how many beers and salmonberries they've split between the two of them.

In Section 8, the doctor thinks he is seeing a vision when he gets his first glance of Stella in the pub when he comes for the beer. She shares with him that she no longer likes owning the pub when he asks. In return she asks him if it is awful when he loses a patient. He admits it is but says it is good to talk about it. Even though they both tell each other they should deliver the beer they stand and look at one another.

In Section 9, the animals smell the grilling meat. Some make their way toward the football field while others move further away from it.



In Section 10, Owen and Grace stop by her house to get her tools on the way to get more tables. Grace asks about how he came to be in America and he tells her. She also asks about Daniel and Nora.

In Section 11, the narrator describes the people of the village as they enjoy the picnic. Michael continues to walk the field. He notices a coat hung on a chair that appears to be turned inside out. When he checks that coat more closely he sees it is a brown coat.

In Section 12, Declan talks to the doctor about the man who sells boxes. The doctor mentions to Declan that the man, who has only one day left to live, loves the sea. Declan agrees to take the man out with him when he goes to fish the next morning.

In Section 13, Declan continues to talk to the doctor about his views on fishing.

In Section 14, Maple Head tells her daughter that she has decided to make her own journey to the beginning of the Mink River. She invites No Horses to come along with her. No Horses agrees to go.

In Section 15, the town folk begin to leave and cleanup begins at the picnic site. As the night deepens Anna Christie suddenly stands up and begins to sing.

In Section 16, Michael is waiting for someone to claim the brown jacket. A man finally picks it up and Michael recognizes the man as Kristi's father. He follows the man as he sets off down a trail in the woods.

Analysis

After so much foul luck the people of the town seem to be rebounding in the section of the novel. Expanding on the theme of desperation is the idea that there is always something that will come along to pull a person, or a town full of people, out of his misery. In this case it is the community picnic that seems to help the people of the town reconnect and rejuvenate. During the course of the picnic George Christie makes a business proposition to No Horses, a business that would benefit the both of them. Notice that it is just before No Horses and George Christie talked with one another that Cedar had been thinking about the logging museum it had been George Christie's dream to open. He'd even built a cabin to house the museum but when times got tough he had to chop up the cabin for firewood to heat his family's home. This background helps the reader to understand just how hard life has been on the Christie family. Also in this section, the doctor meets Stella and sees her in a different light. The two, who were lonely before, start a relationship. The doctor's desperation is relieved because Stella provides an outlet through which he can talk about his practice and his patients.

Meanwhile, the story line about Kristi's father is developed and expanded. Michael knows the man will need food and suspects he'll show up at the picnic. Using his police skills Michael locates the jacket the man wore even though Kristi's father had turned it inside out in hopes that no one would recognize it. The reader gets a foreboding feeling as Michael sets in to wait for the man to reclaim his coat.



Although it is her husband who is technically employed by the town's public works department Maple Head decides to do a little public work of her own. She decides to go on a journey to find the beginning of the Mink River. Not only does she invite her daughter along for the journey she also hints that it will be a public works project. She believes that the beginnings of rivers are sources of healing and restoration. If she and Nora can find the beginning of the Mink River she thinks they might be able to help other suffering people who could go there as well.

Note also in this section the way in which Anna Christie caps off the evening of the community picnic. Without being prompted she stands and begins to sing. The joy of her voice seems to express what all the others who attended the picnic are feeling about the evening. Finally, notice Cedar's ability to speak to animals. It was noted in the section where Daniel was hurt that Cedar was able to call the bear and enlist that animal in helping to carry Daniel up the cliff. In this section Cedar again speaks to the animals, this time two wasps. These yellowjackets, which were potentially dangerous to a person allergic to their stings, are persuaded to leave the grilling area and go home when Cedar speaks to them.

Discussion Question 1

How does the picnic revive the spirits of the people of Neawanaka?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think it is a good idea for the dying man to go out on the boat with Declan? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is your opinion of the new relationship between Stella and the doctor? Will they be good for each other?

Vocabulary

recalcitrant, redolent, promulgation, endemic, perimeter, purview, presages, trysts, epiphany, breeched, evanescent, amorphous, turbulent, voracious, corroborate, vortex



Part IV, Section 17-33

Summary

In Section 17, Grace gets drunk and is escorted out of the pub. Nicholas finds her throwing up on the patio. He tells her he wants nothing from her when she asks angrily what he wants. Nicholas asks her to trust him when he says he doesn't want anything from her. She curses him and then cries. They sit silently together.

In Section 18, Niall and Peadar got drunk on beer after the picnic. Peadar suggests they go surfing. Niall gives up after he gets rolled the first time. Peadar notices someone walking along the beach when he goes out a second time. When he looks at the wave he sees a white shape swim by him.

In Section 19, Peadar realizes he's seeing a shark. He hangs onto his board in fear and is rolled by the wave. He gags on sea water. Something grabs his left arm and he fights back even though he is being pulled up on the beach. Michael has pulled him from the water. He tells the boy to be calm and breathe but that he has to go.

In Section 20, Michael is following the man in the brown coat. He tries to think where the man might have gone and follow as quietly as possible. He lets his mind wander a moment thinking of a line from one of the books he read his girls when he feels a gun press against his right ear and a man's voice tell him not to do anything heroic.

In Section 21, George Christie presents No Horses with his idea that they should go into business together. He can find her good wood and she can carve it into keepsakes and novelties. They would split the proceeds fifty-fifty. Nora tells him she will think about the offer.

In Section 22, the man walks Michael back along the river until they get to his car. Before he climbs the steps to get to his car Michael tries to turn around to look at the man but the man keeps him from doing so.

In Section 23, Cedar divides up the leftover food from the picnic and takes it to the doctor's house, the adult center, the homeless shelter and the union hall. He takes the last jug of ale and pours it over the old nun's grave.

In Section 24, Cedar goes home. The narrator describes his home in detail.

In Section 25, once Michael and Kristi's father are in the patrol car the man tells Michael to drive. The dispatcher calls Michael with a complaint about kids on the beach. He calls her Lizzie when he responds.

In Section 26, the dispatcher, whose real name is Ellen, knows something is wrong when Michael calls her Lizzie. She tries to get in touch with Jimmy, the other officer, but



can't. She instead talks to Roger, the night watchman. They arrange to get as many cars as they can out looking for Michael.

In Section 27, the dying man smiles on Declan's boat even though he has only hours to live. Declan lets the man help him fish. He catches a salmon.

In Section 28, Stella and the doctor are sitting on his deck talking. He tells her about his garden. Stella tells him she'd like to own a vineyard with fruit trees and a grove of spruce trees to sell at Christmas. She suggests the O Donnell land might be good for what she has planned.

In Section 29, after Nora and Owen kiss Daniel goodnight, Nora takes off running. She dives into the river. She is surprised when a man enters the river with her. They wind up kissing on the shore.

In Section 30, Maple Head woke early to prepare for her trip. She left Worried Man sleeping.

In Section 31, Kristi's father doesn't want to shoot Michael but he also doesn't want to go back to jail. Michael realizes the man is directing him to drive him out of the county. He thinks what he could do to keep from having to drive the man out of the county. As he is considering his options Moses flies in through the window the man has opened and hits the man in the face. The gun goes off and the car crashes.

In Section 32, Worried Man is pouring himself coffee when he smells fear. Maple Head rushes to him and he tells her he is sensing two men in a car in bad shape. She is unable to get in touch with Cedar so she calls the police department instead. At that time Owen and Cedar arrived at Worried Man's house for their journey to Wyeast. Cedar decided they should send Moses to look for the men which is how the bird came to distract Kristi's father. No one ever knew why he decided to attack the man but his thoughts were on the nun as he did so.

In Section 33, Daniel wakes and wheels himself out onto the deck of the doctor's house. Kristi soon follows. They notice the empty corner when the man who sells boxes used to sit. Kristi asks what his name was. Daniel said he didn't know and would prefer to keep it that way. Daniel also tells Kristi that he will be going home that day. Kristi offers to help him.

Analysis

The story of Michael the cop climaxes and is resolved in this section of the novel. It is Moses the crow who comes to the cop's rescue, or at least keeps him from being killed by Kristi's father. Even though the cop and Kristi's father had just been involved in a bad car wreck in which a gun had gone off the author focuses the reader's attention on the crow. He suggests that the crow didn't survive the incident by including phrases like "no one ever knew why" (263) he decided to fly for the car instead of going back to Owen



and “his last thoughts of the old nun” (263). Perhaps the lesson here is that all creatures, even animals can give back to help another who is in need.

Notice Michael’s dedication to the people of his town as he stopped to help Peadar even though he was chasing a possibly dangerous criminal. He was able to save the boy from death and injury both by drowning and by the threatening shark but he lost track of the man he was chasing. It was perhaps because he lost sight of the man, combined with the fact he let his mind stray for just a minute that gave the kidnapper the chance to get the best of him.

Notice in this section the way that Nicholas reaches out to Grace even after she pushes him away. He does not get angry with her like some men have when she pushes at him but instead understands her pain because he knows what she’s feeling. The two show the drastically different ways people can respond to a similar situation. Both of them grew up with abusive fathers. Although Nicholas continued to respect his father Grace grew disrespectful of hers. Nicholas chose to take a different path in his life instead of being like his hateful, angry father. He has instead chosen to be understanding and compassionate. Grace, however, has given in to anger and hate. She strikes out at anyone who tries to befriend her, believing they only want something from her.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Daniel preferred not to know the name of the man who sells boxes?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author develop the story of Michael and Kristi’s father?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Moses as a heroic character. Why do you think he did what he did to save Michael?

Vocabulary

oedipal, melds, dissonance, bacchanal, disheveled, insouciant, melodramatically, basalt, jurisdiction, infinitesimally



Part V, Section 1-12

Summary

In Section 1, the doctor senses his life change when he sees two brothers walking toward the ocean from the window of his kitchen.

In Section 2, Maple Head, Cedar and Owen arrive at the doctor's house with Michael who is unconscious and bleeding. The doctor examines him and determines he has severe bruising to his chest and several fractures but that he will heal and be fine. The man with the gun also has fractures.

In Section 3, the man who sells boxes dies. Declan helps the man stand for a minute before his death. Declan then gives the man a burial at sea.

In Section 4, Grace and Stella are sitting together in the bar. Stella is giving the pub to Grace in exchange for the O Donnell land.

In Section 5, the reader learns that Moses survived his heroic ordeal but that he lost both his wings. Owen tried to rig up new wings for Moses but the bird decided he might like to see what it was like to be on land for a while.

In Section 6, Kristi and Daniel struggle to get Daniel's wheelchair up the path, then Kristi loads him into a sled to lower him down the staircase on the other side. She pulls him to the edge of the sea and doesn't stop when he tells her they should go in the water. Daniel rocks in the sled on the water.

In Section 7, No Horses agrees to go into business with George Christie.

In Section 8, Worried Man looks over the equipment they will be taking up the mountain with them making sure he isn't forgetting anything. Owen and Cedar stop to pick him up. When Owen drops them at the mountain they put on their packs and look over their plan.

In Section 9, Maple Head and No Horses also start on their journey. They spend their time enjoying nature and each other's company.

In Section 10, because their time on the mountain has gotten short, Worried Man and Cedar decide to split up in their search for time. They are each supposed to send up a flare at noon to indicate they are safe.

In Section 11, Billy is exploring a cave when he hears a voice.

In Section 12, a female bear and her cubs wonder about the meaning of the noise that Maple Head and No Horses make when they laugh.



Analysis

In this section of the novel the theme of desperation is expanded as the author shows that situations that bring desperation to one can be another's salvation. It is in this section that Grace and Stella exchange what has made them most desperate. Interesting is that while each woman feels what she is giving up is a burden, the other feels it is a blessing. Both try to explain to the other why they disliked their property so much. Stella tells Grace about drunks and fights, dirty bathrooms and little profit while Grace tells Stella the land she's buying is all mud and muck. Both of them, however, have their hearts set on a dream. Stella wants to plant fruit trees and try to start a vineyard. Grace hopes to turn the pub into an old-fashioned pub where the emphasis is not on drinking but on talking. Will their dreams succeed or will they end up like George Christie who had to burn the cabin he built for his logging museum for firewood? It is the condition of human life. Dreams sometimes lead to desperation. Just when a person thinks things can't get any worse, something comes along to pull him out of the depths of that desperation.

Significant also in this section is Moses' decision not to fly anymore. Because he knows he will never be able to fly as he did before he lost his wings Moses decides to try out life as a land creature for a while. In a situation where he could have become desperate and depressed, Moses instead chooses to see his loss as a chance to have a new adventure.

Finally, notice the contrasting religious references in this section of the novel as Worried Man and Cedar prepare for their trip. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, says Worried Man" (279). This verse from Matthew is fitting not only because he and Cedar are about to start a trek up a mountain but also because he thinks that because he has faith he will be able to find the mechanism of time, he will find it. In contrast however, "Whosoever toucheth the mountain shall surely be put to death, thinks Worried Man" (279). Notice Worried Man does not express this verse from Exodus, also about a mountain, out loud. His thought of the verse, gives the reader a sense that something bad will happen on the trip, especially since it brings to mind all of the bad things others have suggested could happen to Worried Man and Cedar during their trip.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Maple Head and No Horses' trip into the mountains. Although she never listed it as a reason for wanting to go, do you think Maple Head might have wanted to make the trip because she knew it would be therapeutic for her daughter?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think something bad will happen to Worried Man or Cedar during their trip up the mountain? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Does Moses' reasons for not wanting new wings make sense to you? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

palpable, hale, oblique, conveyance, extricate, contemplate, crampons, carabiners, rivulets, copse, petroglyphs, motley



Part V, Section 13-23

Summary

In Section 13, the voice tells Worried Man that he will be entering the seventh stage of life soon. The voice says he has been sent to tell Billy that he will have a stroke that will paralyze his entire body but his mind will remain active. The voice indicates the disability will be a gift and that Billy's job is to determine the nature of the gift. He tells Billy that only one other person in his town, a woman, has been given a message like the one Billy is getting. Worried Man tries to bargain with the voice and even though the voice says he is unable to negotiate, the two reach a compromise that Billy will be allowed to keep his ability to speak and move his left hand.

In Section 14, Cedar goes about poking into caves wondering if he shouldn't have discouraged Billy from the trip. At the end of the section he wonders where Billy is.

In Section 15, the doctor reads a passage from Job. He is surprised to hear another voice in his house. He responds to Stella that he would like a cup of tea.

In Section 16, Cedar finds Billy. Billy tells him he's had a stroke and the only things working are his head and hand. Cedar carries him to the lodge to call Owen. As Cedar gets Billy over his shoulder he notices with his peripheral vision a glint of metal in the back of the cave. He later suggests to May it was a big machine or spool of some sort.

In Section 17, Nora tells her mother she can now see windows and doors in her black room. She asks her mother what she should do if the darkness comes again. Her mother admits that she also had dark times but that she learned to look for the windows and doors.

In Section 18, Declan remembers how he used to always be interested in boats. He remembered a line about boats from a book that Grace had read to him. She'd read hundreds of books to him over the years. He wondered what he had ever done for Grace and that maybe life had been harder for her than for him and the boys.

In Section 19, Owen and Daniel made a robochair for Worried Man so he could get around. It is complete with heating and air conditioning as well as a robotic arm to help him reach things.

In Section 20, Maple Head gives her class a final project to write about things they believe but don't make sense.

In Section 21, Sara works in the garden as Michael watches from his wheelchair. Sara's water breaks. He comes up with a plan for her to hand him the phone through the window so he can call for help but Sara says there's no time. She gives birth to the baby right there. Her sisters come to see her and ask what her name is. Even though Michael had wanted to name the baby Albina Sara says that her name is Mia Serina.



In Section 22, Grace hopes to turn the bar into a true pub where talking, not drinking, is the main activity. She brainstorms ways she can make the pub less of a bar and more of a gathering place.

In Section 23, Owen tells Daniel about the land they are walking through in Ireland. He asks if Daniel's legs are sore and offers to carry him. They walk to the house where Owen's mother lives.

Analysis

It is the healing that sometimes comes after desperation that is addressed in this section of the novel. For example, even though his parents despaired over him Daniel's legs have healed to the point he can walk again. Another sort of healing is also described during this section of the novel. For reasons unspecified Owen decides to make contact with his mother again. She and Daniel take a trip to Ireland to visit the woman whom Owen has not seen or even written to in years. This trip signifies the beginning of the healing stage in Owen and his mother's relationship.

Significant also in this section is Billy's experience in the cave. People who love Billy have warned him against going on his trip up Wyeast because they were afraid something would happen to him. They had believed he would be negatively impacted by his trip. Something does happen to Billy during the trip. He suffers a stroke. Instead of being a negative experience, he is challenged by a disembodied voice to find the gift behind his inability to move. The voice indicates to Worried Man some things, even strokes, should not be seen as negative as even troubles can be turned into gifts. Note that even though the voice applauds Billy for his kindness and his life well-lived, this well-lived life doesn't excuse Billy from trouble.

The author also leaves the reader with the possibility that Worried Man came very close to meeting his goal of finding the mechanisms of time when he had his stroke. Cedar later reports to Maple Head the while he was in the cave getting Worried Man out he saw something like a metallic spool or piece of machinery glinting in the back of the cave. Cedar seems to have no interest in going back to see if something was really there but the author does indicate that both Cedar and Maple Head thought more than they probably should have about what Cedar actually saw in the cave.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Cedar actually saw something in the cave when he was carrying Worried Man out? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

The voice mentions to Worried Man that only one other person in his town had gotten a message like the one Worried Man received. Who do you think that person was? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Owen went home to Ireland to see his mother?

Vocabulary

commend, plaudits, digress, lucid, compromise, pithy, sentient, garrulity, hoary, fissure, obscure, intrepid, eschewed, pristine, lintel, supine, peripheral, gluttonous, magnanimously, coherence, substantive, infatuation, dissemination, perpetuation, incapacitated, imprecation, paramount



Part V, Section 24-36

Summary

In Section 24, Worried Man makes a tape recording for Daniel telling him what he knows about Cedar's time in the war. This tape is narrated from Worried Man's point of view. He says that all Cedar has said to him about the war is that it changed him entirely. Worried Man says that Cedar left the war wanting to "build rather than destroy." He also comments about a bad scar that Cedar has that encircles his neck.

In Section 25, the narrator describes the technique Maple Head developed for getting Worried Man out of his robosuit at night. Finally one night Maple Head asks her husband what happened inside the cave. After he tells her, he apologizes for being so selfish. May admits that the day he left for his trip was the first day in their married lives that she felt like she didn't care anymore.

In Section 26, George Christi encourages Nora telling her that their plan for their business will work out and showing her all the orders he's already gotten.

In Section 27, Grace starts a betting pool for people to choose the day they believe the rains will start.

In Section 28, Stella asks the doctor what the worst thing was that he had to do in his medical career. He tells her that it was sewing a man back into his skin. He said the patient wound up with only one bad scar around his neck. The patient did not complain much about his condition when he woke from the coma he'd been in several days later, and the doctor did not explain what had happened to him. While he said he'd thought the man would have retreated emotionally he instead felt even more responsible for helping other people than ever before. When Stella asks if the doctor stays in touch with the man the doctor says that he does and that Stella knows him also. He goes on to describe the man whom Stella recognizes as Cedar.

In Section 29, Michael receives a medal from governor of Oregon for going above and beyond the call of duty.

In Section 30, Cedar tells Nicholas that he has prepared paperwork allowing Nicholas to take over the public works department. Nicholas tells Cedar he has decided instead to go to college. Cedar arranges so Nicholas can work at the department during the summers and also up until the time he begins his college courses. Nicholas also tells Cedar that his father had changed when Cedar asked if Nicholas had talked to his father about his decision.

In Section 31, after George and Nora get their company started George tells Nora she needs a representative to meet customers and finalize orders. Nora offers to do that work saying that she needs to take a journey on her own and that this one would be just



the thing. She promises to make sure there are plenty of carvings done before she leaves.

In Section 32, as the doctor is smoking his next-to-last cigarette for the day Sara and the girls are making soup and the priest is preparing his sermon for All Soul's Day.

In Section 33, Daniel makes a recording for a history project. This recording is made in the first person from Daniel's point of view. He tells what he wants to be when he grows up and then tells why he has decided he doesn't want to leave Neawanaka as much as he once did. He's learned to appreciate the people because they helped him after his accident. He explains the town is in the process of finding its new place since fishing and logging don't support families any longer. Kristi, he says, believes the town will be the storytelling capital of the world. Daniel also says that he and his father are building a funeral canoe for his grandfather, Worried Man, who tells lots of stories.

In Section 34, Moses shares with Owen that crows, unlike humans, know that stories don't have beginnings or endings but just go on and on. Moses also tells Owen that some stories can only be told by certain species under certain circumstances.

In Section 35, May, Billy, Nora, Owen, Daniel, Kristi, Nicholas, Cedar and Moses all eat All Saint's Day dinner at Maple Head and Worried Man's house. The narrator describes the many different directions the conversation takes including the public works department and sea lions.

In Section 36, the rain begins on All Soul's Day.

Analysis

Significant in this final section of the novel is Moses' comment to Owen about stories. The crow says that while humans believe stories have beginnings, middles and ends crows know that stories go on and on and on endlessly. There is a good deal in this story that indicates that what Moses says about stories is true. The nun's story is carried on through Moses as he tells people about her kindness. Those who tell stories about Moses will include the nun in those stories and so on and so on. Each person and circumstance is in some way connected to each other, as is each story.

In this final section of the novel it appears that much of the desperation felt in Neawanaka during the summer has been relieved. Grace is satisfied trying to come up with ways to make her pub less of a bar and more of a social hangout. Michael has received commendations for his heroic deeds. Stella is beginning work on her orchards and vineyard. The doctor is no longer lonely. No Horses is overcoming her depression. The threat of the coming rainy season indicates that just like the weather, rain and storms will come again in the lives of the people of Neawanaka.

Up to this point in the story Cedar has been a mystery. All the reader, and most of the characters, have known about him is that he decided to change his style of life and work for good after he left the war. Cedar claims to have no memory of what happened to him



before Worried Man fished him out of the Mink River. The doctor, however, knows a good deal more about Cedar than any one else. It is during this section of the novel that he shares with Stella how he sewed Cedar back into his skin during the war. The author doesn't include information as to what happened to Cedar to result in his injury. It is also indicated that Cedar doesn't know just how close he came to death. The doctor never told him exactly what happened to him. The thing the doctor finds extraordinary about is the man's ability to bounce back after his experiences in the war. Although some men might have pulled away from other people the doctor indicates that Cedar devoted himself to others and their well being.

Discussion Question 1

Worried Man says in a tape to his grandson on page 303, "I believe it is an error to wonder about what you do not know, at the expense of savoring the excellence of what you do know." Discuss this quote.

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Daniel decides he wants to stay in Neawanaka even after he grows up?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Neawanaka has a future as a storytelling capital? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

irascible, articulated, culling, eminent, perceptible, conspired, arduous, aegis, excoriate, itinerary, filigree, deluge



Characters

Daniel Cooney

Daniel Cooney is the son of Owen and Nora “No Horses” Cooney. He is the grandson of William “Billy” aka “Worried Man” and May “Maple Head” Mahon. He is in his grandmother’s sixth grade class at school. Daniel has hair that is three colors: brown, red and black. He wears it in three braids like his hero Cú Chulainn, a legendary Irish warrior.

Daniel is late for dinner one day and, therefore, he rides down the dirt path even faster than usual. He falls over a cliff and his braid catches on a branch. As a result of his accident both of Daniel’s legs are shattered. He has to have casts put on both legs and lives at the doctor’s house for constant care. While he’s staying at the doctor’s house Daniel befriends both the man who sells boxes and Kristi. After Worried Man’s stroke, Daniel helps his father make a robosuit for his grandfather.

Later, Daniel goes with his father to visit his grandmother in Ireland. Despite the injuries to his legs, Daniel still hopes to become a professional bike racer.

Cedar

Cedar is one of the two men who works at Neawanaka’s public works department. He and Worried Man, the other employee of the public works department, are best friends. After having been in the war and seeing so much destruction Cedar has vowed to do no more harm, to only build people up. Worried man thinks that his friend meddles too much in other people’s lives.

When Cedar beats Kristi’s father so badly after he finds the man abusing his daughter, he tells Maple Head that he is afraid that he is getting to angry to do any more good. He fears he will begin hurting people even though he doesn’t want to do so.

Toward the end of the novel the reader learns that the doctor saved Cedar’s life during the war. The doctor tells Stella how he had to sew a man back into his skin. He says the man had vowed after he survived the surgery to spend the rest of his life doing good.

William “Billy” Mahon aka Worried Man

Worried Man is one of the men who works at Neawanaka’s public works department. He is best friends with Cedar. He is the husband of Maple Head, father of No Horses and grandfather of Daniel.

Worried Man is unique because he has the ability to sense when other people are in pain. He senses his daughter’s pain as she struggles with her depression. He is also the



one who senses Kristi's fear and pain when her father is threatening her. He gets Cedar to the trailer in which Kristi lives before her father can hurt her.

In the course of his trek up Wyeast Mountain Worried Man is greeted by a disembodied voice that tells him he will have a massive stroke. Even though the voice says it has no authority to negotiate with him, Worried Man is able to upgrade his condition after the stroke from full paralysis and the inability to talk to the ability to talk and to move his left hand.

Owen Cooney

Owen Cooney is Daniel's father and No Horses' husband. He owns the Auto and Other Repair shop where he works on a variety of different things. Moses a crow watches him while he works. Shortly after his son Daniel is hurt, Owen is comforted by Grace. He becomes infatuated with her.

It is Owen who No Horses first tells about her depression. He understands that she is hurting but doesn't know how to help her.

Owen is one of the men in the story who records oral stories for Daniel. One of the stories he records is about his father Timmy Cooney. Because he is able to speak Irish, Owen is asked by Grace to say a prayer in Irish at her father's funeral. Owen tells his true thoughts about the hateful old man when he prayed but when Grace asked what he had prayed about, he told her an edited version.

After his father's stroke Owen created a robosuit for his father so he could still get around despite his paralysis.

Nora "No Horses" Cooney

No Horses is the daughter of William "Billy" aka "Worried Man" and May "Maple Head" Mahon. She is the mother of Daniel and wife of Owen. She was given the name "No Horses" because her mother went into labor with her when she began laughing because she learned how her husband had allowed all of the family's horses to be stolen.

No Horses is an artist. She sculpts art out of stones and wood. About the same time as her son's bicycle accident No Horses is stricken with a deep depression. She struggles to work her way out of her depression with the help of her family. It is during a trip with her mother that she finally begins to feel her depression lessen.

At the end of the novel No Horses goes into business with George Christie making wooden keepsakes for tourists.



Moses

Moses is the name of the crow who was taught how to talk by a nun. She had seen the crow fall from a tree just after it hatched. The nun took Moses to Owen who fixed up a variety of splints and slings to help him heal.

After the nun learned that she was going to die, she sent Moses to live with Owen because she didn't want him to see her as she got sicker and died.

It was Moses who found Daniel after his bicycle accident. He also found Michael after he was kidnapped by Kristi's father and saved Michael by flying through the window. Moses broke his wings during the rescue. Even though Owen wants to create new wings for Moses, Moses decides he wanted to see what life was like without being able to fly.

Grace O Donnell

Grace O Donnell is the only daughter of Red Hugh O Donnell. She has three brothers: Declan, Niall and Peadar.

Grace is an angry young woman. She cusses often and has a tattoo that reads "KISS MY ASS." She often goes to the bar where she meets men just to have sex. Afterward she hates herself. Grace works with her brother on his fishing boat.

Grace befriends Owen after his son, Daniel, was hurt. Their relationship gets close to becoming an infatuation for both of them. When her brother, Declan, decides he wants to go out for weeks at a time fishing, Grace decides not to go with him. Instead, she takes over the bar from Stella and makes it into a pub.

Red Hugh O Donnell

Red Hugh O Donnell is the father of Declan, Grace, Niall and Peadar. He is described as being "hard of hand and head, chief of the clan, asking no help or quarter, quick to lash fools and children with his long white rod" in various places in the novel.

O Donnell was bitter because his wife had walked out on him and his children two years prior. He had always thought he would die in the mud of his cow pastures but instead he was impaled by a log from a log truck he was following as he hurried to deliver his milk.

In contrast to the pious nun whose soul got stuck on the ceiling fan when she died, cruel Red's soul floated up to heaven as it should have.



Declan O Donnell

Declan O Donnell is the oldest son of Red Hugh O Donnell. He is the one who is left in charge of his family of three siblings after the death of his father. Even though his father had raised dairy cattle Declan does not like cattle and would prefer to make his living by fishing.

When he goes to a banker to have his land and cattle appraised he finds his father's estate is worth nothing. Because he is frustrated by this appraisal Declan goes home and shoots his father's cows. As a result of his ill fortune, however, those who live in his town get a free community wide picnic.

The Man Who Sells Boxes

The man who sells boxes is also known at different points in the novel as the man who has x-number of days to live. The man has an inoperable tumor in his stomach and is given three weeks to live.

The man makes friends with Daniel while they stay at the doctor's house together while Daniel recuperates from his bicycle accident. The man who sells boxes loves the sea so the doctor talks Declan into taking the man out on his fishing boat with him. The man goes out with Declan on the boat. He dies on the boat after he has a good day helping Declan fish. Declan buries him at sea.

Stella

Stella is the lady who owned the pub at the beginning of the novel. She had always dreamed of having a family and a good life but she'd never achieved her dreams. When her parents died Stella used her inheritance to buy the pub. She had thought it would be fun to own a pub but has discovered that she has become more and more lonely as the years have gone by.

She finally sells the pub to Grace in favor of starting a vineyard on the land where Red Hugh O Donnell had once kept his cows. Stella and the doctor also begin a relationship.

May aka Maple Head

Maple Head is the wife of Worried Man and friend of Cedar. She is the sixth grade teacher at the school in Neawanaka. She also actively supports her family and tries to help her daughter overcome her depression.

Despite her desire to support her husband and his dreams Maple Head refuses to give her blessing to her husband when he tells her that he wants to climb Wyeast to find where time is stored. In her free time Maple Head is compiling a history of Neawanaka.



Michael the Cop

Michael is the man who has served Neawanaka as a policeman for 16 years. He is tired of his job and tired of the brokenness he sees everyday, but he has four more years to work before he can draw his pension. He is married to Sara. They have two daughters with a new baby on the way.

Michael loves the opera “Tosca” by Puccini. He plays it repeatedly in his car. He is injured in the line of duty after he is kidnapped by Kristi’s father when he was attempting to locate and arrest the man.

George Christie

George Christie is the man who founded Neawanaka’s public works department. He had been a logger but gave up the job when he saw his partner get decapitated.

He approaches No Horses with the idea that he could provide her with wood from which she could carve souvenirs which could be sold in gift shops. The two do go into business together by the end of the novel. He has the amusing quality of talking endlessly to No Horses about his business proposition and then chiding her for talking too much.

The Doctor

The doctor is single and has about given up on having a relationship when he meets Stella. The doctor cares not only for Daniel and Kristi at his house but also the man who sells boxes as that man died because of the tumor in his stomach.

As the novel progresses the reader learns that the doctor had been in the war with Cedar. He had done an amazing surgery on Cedar by stitching Cedar back into his skin after he was badly injured.

Rachel

Rachel is a girl who works at the cedar shingle factory. As a birthday gift for her boyfriend she decides to have sex with him. The two begin having sex regularly and Rachel winds up pregnant.

Before she can decide if she wants to keep the baby she has a miscarriage. She continues to see Timmy. He proposes to her but she turns him down because she wants to quit working at the factory and go to college.



Nicholas

Nicholas is the boy who is beaten by his father. He joins Grace and Declan working on the boat at one point. After Worried Man has his stroke Cedar offers Nicholas a job at the public works department, but Nicholas tells Cedar he will be going to college.

Nicholas is an exceptional boy because he still has respect for his father despite the way his father treats him.

Kristi

Kristi is the name of the 12-year-old girl attacked by her father. While her father is in jail Kristi stays at the doctor's house where she makes friends with Daniel and the man who sells boxes.

Once when the doctor is talking to Stella about his feelings of inadequacy because he is not always able to help all of his patients, he uses Kristi, a girl who is broken internally in ways he can't fix, as an example of a patient he has been unable to help.

The Voice

An unidentified voice speaks to Worried Man in a cave on Wyeast a mountain where he had gone to look for time. This voice tells Worried Man that he will have a stroke and be completely paralyzed.

Even though the voice claims it doesn't have the power to negotiate with Worried Man about the condition he will be in after his stroke, the voice agrees to allow Worried Man to be able to talk and move his left hand.

The Man Who Beats His Son

The man who beats his son is a sad character. He loves his son and knows he is hurting the boy and their relationship by the way he treats him but he can't stop himself. He doesn't stop beating the boy when Cedar threatens him. He does, however, go to the town's priest wanting to know if there is anything that can help him stop abusing his son.

Sara

Sara is Michael's wife. She feels insecure in his love and worries that he will leave her. During the course of the novel she gets pregnant with their third child. She worries because she knows they can't afford the baby. When the baby is born she suggests they name the baby Mia Serina, a phrase from Michael's favorite opera "Tosca."



Peadar

Peadar is the 16-year-old son of Red Hugh O'Donnell's. Peadar and his brother Niall were in charge of grilling at the community picnic. After the picnic Peadar suggests he and Niall go surfing together. Peadar sees a shark and is almost killed but he is rescued by Michael.

Anna Christie

Anna Christie is described as being a "huge wooden woman." She is married to George Christie and has twin daughters. Anna is known for her beautiful singing voice. However, she had a spell in which she was a drunk. During this time her family almost fell apart.

Timmy Cooney

Timmy Cooney is Owen's great-grandfather. Owen tells stories about his great-grandfather, who lived during the time of the potato famine in Ireland, to Daniel while Daniel is recovering from his injuries from a bicycle accident.

Niall

Niall is the 14-year-old son of Red Hugh O'Donnell's sons. He helped his brother Peadar grill at the community picnic. Niall went surfing with Peadar after the picnic but was not in the water when Peadar was almost killed by the shark.

Ellen

Ellen is the name of the dispatcher to whom Michael speaks the night he had been kidnapped by Kristi's father. Ellen knows that something is wrong when Michael calls her "Lizzie" when he talks to her by phone.

Old Nun

The old nun is the woman who found Moses and nursed him back to health. When she died her soul got stuck on the ceiling fan instead of floating up to heaven.

Timmy

Timmy is the boy that Rachel dated. She gave herself to her as a gift on his twentieth birthday. He later proposed to her but she turned him down.



Young Female Bear

After Cedar speaks to a young female bear in her language, she carries Daniel up the cliff after his bicycle accident.

Mia Serina

Mia Serina is the name that Sara gives to her third daughter. The name means “my heart.” It is a phrase from the opera “Tosca” that Michael loves so much.



Symbols and Symbolism

Daniel's Braids

The three braids in Daniel's hair represent the family's Irish heritage because they are similar to the black, brown and red braids worn by Daniel's hero Cú Chulainn a legendary Irish hero.

Daniel's Bicycle

Daniel's bicycle is symbolic not only of one of his great loves but also of the way that he got hurt. After Daniel's accident Owen works to fix Daniel's bicycle with the hopes the boy will be able to ride it again.

Funeral Canoe

Funeral canoes are representative of the funeral tradition in No Horse's family. They were traditionally filled with food and stories for the deceased person and then hung in a tree. Daniel tells in one of his tape recorded stories that he and his father are building a funeral canoe for Worried Man.

Ceiling Fan

This ceiling fan represents the small things in life that can hang one up. It is on the ceiling fan in her hotel room that the old nun's soul gets stuck. Fixing the fan was one of the things that the nun had on her to do list. It seems to indicate that no matter how prepared a person is for death, there are always things that get forgotten. It is also ironic that it is the nun's soul that gets stuck on its way to heaven since she served God all her life and probably never dreamed she'd get stuck on a ceiling fan instead of going to heaven.

A Statue of a Sea Lion

When Daniel wakes after the surgery on his legs this wooden carving of a sea lion is by his left hand. It is a gift from his mother to the doctor. Daniel believes the sea lion is watching him when he first sees it. He dreams about the sea lion.

A Big Brown Coat

This big brown coat worn by Kristi's father is what Michael looks for when he is trying to locate and arrest the man. The coat represents the man.



A Bottle of Beer

A bottle of beer symbolizes Cedar and Worries Man's friendship. They also shared a bottle of beer during their lunches together.

Robosuit

This robosuit symbolizes freedom for Worried Man after he had his debilitating stroke. Owen and Daniel put together the suit for Worried Man to allow him to move around despite his paralysis.

Scar Around the Neck

The scar around Cedar's neck is a symbol of the change in his life after he left the war. The scar came from the surgery where the doctor had to sew Cedar back into his skin. Even though Cedar didn't remember what happened to him during the war the doctor did. The doctor said it was at the time that Cedar survived his injury and surgery that he dedicated his life to helping others.

Maps on the Ceiling

These maps on the ceiling of Cedar's office are a symbol of his dedication to his town. Cedar has maps of Neawanaka posted even on the ceiling of his office. This way, when he looks at his ceiling he is still reminded of, and immersed in, the town he has sworn to work for and protect.



Settings

Neawanaka, Oregon

The fictional city of Neawanaka, Oregon is the town in which this story is set.

The School

It is at the school in Neawanaka that Maple Head serves as the sixth grade teacher. Several scenes take place in her classroom.

Auto and Other Repair

Owen's shop is called Auto and Other Repair. It is where he spends his days with his pet crow Moses. He repairs a variety of different things including automobiles and other machinery. It is in this shop that he and his son Daniel put together the robosuit for Worried Man.

The Beach

After Daniel and Kristi make their escape from the hospital they go to the beach. It is on this same beach that Michael saves Peadar from drowning when he is following Kristi's father. It was on that same beach that Owen and No Horses met for the first time.

The Doctor's House

The doctor has two beds in his house for patients who needed special care. Both Daniel and the man who sells boxes stay at the doctor's house. Daniel recuperates there while the man who sells boxes stays there until he dies. After Kristi is rescued from her father, she also stays at the doctor's house.

Department of Public Works Building

The Department of Public Works building is described as being a long, low building that appears almost as if it is going to slide off into the ocean. It is at this building where Cedar and Worried Man work together for nearly 40 years. It was also in this building that Worried Man had his heart attack.



No Horses' Studio

No Horses' studio is attached to the Department of Public Works building. It is in this studio that she does her sculpting and carving. It is when she is sitting on the deck of her studio that Worried Man senses a woman's pain and realizes it is his daughter.

Mink River

It was on the banks of the Mink River that Worried Man and Maple Head first met. It was also from the Mink River that Worried Man rescued Cedar, the man who would become his best friend.

Wyeast

Wyeast is the name of the mountain that Worried Man convinces Cedar they needed to explore to look for a place where time is spooled. It is while he is in a cave on this mountain that Worried Man encounters a voice that tells him he will have a stroke.

The Old Hotel

The old hotel is the place where the nun who saved Moses lives and dies. It is in her room in this hotel that her spirit gets caught on the ceiling fan.

Trailer with a Green Door

Worried Man senses pain coming from a trailer with a green door and sends Cedar to find out what is happening. The trailer is where Kristi lives with her father. Cedar stops the man from attacking her.

A House in Ireland

Near the end of the novel Owen and Daniel make a trip to visit Owen's mother in Ireland. She would not move because she had never left that place her entire life and believed she would die if she did. Owen had not seen her or even written to her since he moved away when he was a young man.



Themes and Motifs

Stories

Stories and the impact that stories have on people's lives as a way of recording history, remembering the present and aiding in the healing process is an important theme in this novel. The entire book is written as a story. It is a frame story in the aspect that the story of the lives of the people in Neawanaka includes a variety of individual stories along with the group story. These stories teach important lessons about one's past, help a person connect with their ancestors and can even help those who hear the stories to learn, grow and heal.

One of the first aspects of importance about stories is that they can teach a person about their past and their family's past. Daniel asks his grandfather and his father for stories about his family's past. He wants to know how his parents and his grandparents met. He wants to know how his mother got her name. Worried Man tells Daniel stories about the original people who settled in the their town, while Maple Head searches out the true story of the town's beginnings.

The healing power of stories is another important aspect of storytelling that is evidenced in the novel. Even while Daniel is still unconscious after his accident his grandfather tells him stories. Worried Man believes these stories will help his grandson heal. He tells stories about the People, those who first lived in Neawanaka. Owen tells stories of his great-grandfather, a man who lived during the time of the Irish potato famine. The man who sells boxes also comforts Daniel by telling him stories of his family. Meanwhile, the doctor sometimes reads to Daniel from the Bible, also a book of stories, to calm him and help him recuperate.

Stories not only tell a person about his heritage but can also help a person learn from experiences others have had. For instance, Cedar tells No Horses stories about men he knew in the war who had lost track of themselves and suffered depression as No Horses did. He is also able to tell her how these men were eventually able to break out of their depression and come back to themselves. Maple Head also tells her daughter stories of when she found herself suffering with spells of darkness. These stories help No Horses to understand that she hasn't been the only one who has suffered depression and that the dark feelings will eventually lift.

Religious References

A deep understanding of religion - so deep that it infiltrates a person's life and comes out through everyday references - is a characteristic of several of the characters in this novel. Though few people in the town of Neawanaka appear to attend church regularly, they seem to all have some understanding of religion. The book is filled with religious references ranging from the names of the doctor's cigarettes to the verses that come to



Worried Man's mind before he and Cedar leave on their journey to find the mechanisms of time. Often, parts of the novel are interspersed with scripture as characters go through situations similar to those suffered by Biblical characters.

When Maple Head is trying to comfort No Horses during her bout of depression she refers to religion as being a thing man might have created to help comfort himself during times of trouble. "This why people invent religions, to map doors and windows maybe" (294) she says to her daughter. Her idea is that religion is a way for a person to gain hope in difficult situations.

Of all the characters in the novel it is the doctor who seems to be the most religious, at least in a scholarly way. He reads his Bible regularly. He also has a close relationship with all of the disciples. He's named each cigarette that he smokes through the course of the day after one of the 11 original disciples and the disciple that took Judas' place after he betrayed Jesus. Notice that when the doctor wants to calm Daniel and get him back to sleep, it is a passage from the Bible that he reads.

An especially interesting Biblically related section of the novel is that where Grace, Declan and Nicholas are caught in a storm at sea while fishing. In Part 2, Section 25 as their boat is tossed the doctor is reading similar passages in his Bible about a boat caught at sea. The author intertwines the reading from the Bible with what is happening to Grace and the others almost as if it were one story even though the two events happened thousands of years apart.

Also in the theme of religious references, notice that Worried Man has both a positive scripture about mountains and a negative scripture about mountains come to mind as he and Cedar are about to set off up Wyeast. The scriptures are significant because the mountain has been described as being a holy mountain. The first scripture that Worried Man thinks about, the one that he quotes aloud to Cedar, is a passage from Matthew in which Jesus tells the disciples that even if they have a tiny amount of faith, they can command a mountain be moved. The second verse, the one that Worried Man chooses to keep to himself, warns men against touching a holy mountain. It is this quote that makes the reader wonder if Worried Man and Cedar should really be taking their trek up the mountain.

Desperation

Desperation is a symptom of the human condition but a symptom that can pass over time according to this novel. The characters in this novel suffer from desperation caused by a variety of different circumstances. Some feel despair because they suffer from depression, while others despair because they don't earn enough money to properly care for their families. Others feel the despair of unexpected pregnancies, while some despair because they are in a job they don't like.

Although the people of the town of Neawanaka often suffer desperate situations, the author portrays the town and its people as being able to bounce back from their



troubles. Characters often find clever ways to turn their problems into blessings. For instance, Declan shot all of his father's cows when he learned they were worth nothing. The shooting of the cows was an act of desperation on Declan's part. Instead of leaving them to rot in the field Declan called the men of the public works department who suggested that they have community-wide picnic with the meat from the cows. When Moses loses his wings after he saved Michael, he told Owen he knew he'd never fly as he had before so he wanted to see what life would be like on land.

No Horses is a character that is particularly hard hit by desperation in this novel. During the course of the story she develops a severe case of depression. Her world is so dark she cannot see any way out. Her feelings of desperation keep her from being able to work and even care for her family. No Horses' depression does eventually lift and she is able to return to her life as it was before.

Both Sara and Rachel feel desperate about their unplanned pregnancies. They are desperate for different reasons, however. Sara knows her family cannot afford another baby. She also knows the despair her husband, Michael, is already feeling at his job as a police officer. He has only four more years to serve before he can begin drawing his pension but isn't sure if he can make it through those years because he is so tired of seeing the brokenness in people that he sees every day on his job. Rachel's pregnancy makes her feel desperate because she had never intended to get pregnant. She is married and doesn't want to be a single mother like her mother was. Before Rachel is pushed to choose whether she wants to keep her baby or not she suffers a miscarriage.

Another cause of despair in this novel is caused by the inability to care for and protect one's family. Owen despairs because there is nothing he can do to help Daniel, his son, get better after his bike wreck. He is also not able to help his wife, No Horses, overcome her depression. Michael despairs because he is unsatisfied with his job but knows he needs it in order to take care of his family.

Public Works

Public works is more than just filling in potholes as it can be used to describe any work that a person does for the common good. Public works is an idea that is given a bit of a twist in this novel. Most towns have public works departments but few are like the one in Neawanaka. The men who work at the department try to fix more than just the city's roads and sidewalks. In this novel examples of public works include archiving stories, teaching people how they should live and searching for ways to better humanity in general.

As the town's two public works employees, Worried Man and Cedar are interested in all sorts of projects that will benefit the town and its people. Their scope includes keeping up with an oral history of the town. Worried Man makes audio recordings of stories of his people and his past while Cedar makes tapes of the songs of birds. Cedar believes the animals have just as important a story to tell as the people.



In addition to their work as historians, the two men, particularly Cedar, believe part of their job includes confronting people who need to change their abusive or destructive behavior. For instance, Cedar confronts the man who beats his son and advises him he will lose his son if he doesn't stop abusing him. Cedar and Worried Man also talk to Grace about her unseemly behavior. Although Cedar believes that talking to people about their bad behavior is his calling, Worried Man often tells Cedar that he is instead meddling in other people's lives in a way that he shouldn't.

Another aspect of public works as described by Worried Man and Cedar is their belief that they are tasked with the job of making people's lives better. When Worried Man decides he is being called to go to Wyeast to find where time is stored he calls it a matter of public works. He believes he will be able to help and heal people by being able to manipulate time. Similarly, when Maple Head decides to find the source of the Mink River she too calls it a public work. She believes the people will be able to receive healing if they can visit the river's source.

Art as Therapy

The therapeutic value of art in cases of depression and despair is argued through this novel. There are a variety of art forms discussed as the novel progresses. These include carving, music, literature and storytelling. All of these forms of art serve as a form of therapy in one form or another.

When talking to her daughter about depression, Maple Head makes a very deep statement about the connection between art and therapy: "This is why people invent religions, to map doors and windows maybe. Maybe that's what art is in the end" (294). Maple Head makes the point that art, like religion, may be an outlet for depression and desperation. Art is activity created by people to help them have an outlet to express themselves even if the feelings they are expressing are sad ones.

Carving is No Horses' chosen form of art. It seems contradictory, however, that when she becomes depressed and needs this artistic outlet the most, she cannot access it. In her frustration she whittles the pieces of wood on which she is trying to work to toothpicks. It is only after her depression begins to be relieved that she is able to begin to enjoy that particular form of art again.

Another character who turns to art in her depression is Anna Christie. Anna is a singer who has a beautiful voice. Though she once drank, she has learned to begin channeling her feelings through her voice. Anna Christie gifts her community with her singing when she serenades them during the community picnic. Although her song may not lift her spirits, the spirits of those around her are lifted by the beauty of her voice.

Michael the cop uses music as a form of escape. He listens to the opera "Tosca" as he patrols in his car. He finds comfort in the familiarity of the songs and story to which he listens as he goes about a job he no longer finds satisfying.

Storytelling is also a form of art. The characters both give and receive comfort through their acts of telling stories. No Horses, for instance, is comforted by Cedar's stories of people who have survived depression. Meanwhile, Worried Man and Owen comfort Daniel when they tell stories to him at his bedside as he recuperates from his bike accident.

Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the third person point of view of an omniscient narrator. The narrator tells the story as if he were telling it directly to the reader. The style feels as if the story is being told face-to-face. The narrator knows the thoughts and emotions of all of the characters including animals, the river and even trees. Although the narrator tells the story from a third person point of view there are sections of the novel that are told from the first person point of view of particular characters. First person narrators in the novel include Worried Man, Owen and Daniel. Most of these first person sections occur when the characters are recording stories for the oral history project.

Language and Meaning

Because this is a book basically told as a story and its main theme is storytelling, the book is written in a way so as to make it as story-like as possible. The author calls upon a large variety of literary devices in order to make the writing interesting and lively, in the style of a storyteller. One of the first aspects of the writing that makes this book very story-like is that every thing is given its own personality. Bears, trees and even rivers are given the chance to speak for themselves during the course of the novel. Personification on a more specific level can be found in the following quote: “Cold winds of winter stick exploratory fingers through the windows” (305). The winds are given the characteristics of have fingers and also of being inquisitive. Another example: “The room remembers when it happened” (27). The room is personified by writing about it as it had the ability to remember when an event occurred.

Simile and metaphor are used often in the course of the novel. “Mouth on her like a mean dog” (47) is an example of a simile, a comparison that uses the words like or as. The quote: “A new crow is an awkward cake from the bakery of the Lord” (48) is an example of a metaphor, a comparison where no connecting words are used. “Moses a black arrow” (81) is another example of a metaphor. Alliteration is another literary technique the author uses often. In alliteration the author uses words with similar sounds together in a sentence or phrase. “Tender tentative tendrilled” (253) and “sunder, thunder, and plunder” (317) are both examples of alliteration. The author also often repeats a specific word in a sentence for emphasis. “Her black hair a black tent in the black night” (72) is one example of this use of repetition.

The author also has the habit of referring to certain characters by descriptive phrases rather than just their names. For instance Michael is often referred to as Michael the cop. Red Hugh O Donnell is referred to as Red Hugh O Donnell hard of hand and head, who asked no help or quarter, quick to lash fools and children. Some characters are not given names at all they are only known by their most defining characteristic. Nicholas’ father is called only the man who beats his son, for example. The doctor and the priest



are other examples of characters who are known only by what they do. One of the more interesting character references deals with the man who sells boxes. After he is diagnosed with an inoperable stomach tumor he is referred to by the number of days that he has left to live. He is the man who has x-number of days to live.

This laid back storytelling style of the novel can be seen in other ways through out the book. In some places the author includes sentences that are so short and clipped that they don't have verbs. "Grace on the boat with her older brother Declan" (46) for instance. Other sentences are run-on sentences that stretch sometimes more than a page in length. Others are just brain twisters that make the reader stop to think about what he has just read. "Fern skirts girdle female trees" (p. 49) is one example of these brain twisters.

Structure

This 319-page book is divided into five large parts. The longest part is Part 3 at 73 pages while Part 4 is the shortest at 42 pages. Each of these parts is divided into multiple small sections. Part 1, for example, contains 49 small sections. Each section is designated with a number. The section numbers start over at the beginning of each new part of the novel. The short sections are self sufficient and are often written so they could stand alone as a short story, essay or character sketch.

The story is told in the present tense. This use of the present tense makes it appear as if the narrator is telling the reader the story face-to-face. Even though the story is in the present tense it appears the narrator is indeed omniscient and even knows things that will happen in the future as in a few places he tells the reader what will be happening in the next few minutes. The story is basically told in a linear format with events being described in chronological order. The exceptions are the few fast forwards included by the narrator as well as the numerous stories told by the characters about ancestors and past events.



Quotes

No buildings on the National Register of Hysterical Places, though there are some old houses, the oldest of which finally collapses on page 141; no cheating ahead to watch it slump like ice cream at noon, please.”

-- Narrator (Part I, 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: Significant in this quote is the way the narrator speaks directly to the reader about the book as he requests the reader not look ahead to a reference he makes to something coming up in the novel. Note the colloquial use of the reference to the National Register of Hysterical Places instead its formal title of the National Register of Historical Places. The quote also includes a simile, a literary device used often throughout the course of the novel, as the author describes a house as slumping like ice cream at noon.

But we also are prey to what I might call a vast and overweening ambition. I mean, really, to preserve history, collect stories, repair marriages, prevent crime, augment economic status, promote chess, manage insect populations, run sports leagues, isn't that a bit much? We even give haircuts.”

-- Worried Man (Part I, 1 paragraph 51)

Importance: Worried Man talks to his friend Cedar and tries to explain to him that their job description may go beyond the normal duties of traditional public works employees.

And there is of course an amazing amount of wood growing here — spruce and alder mostly, although there's some big cedar and hemlock still in the more remote ravines where loggers couldn't and still can't easily log. And there are more bushes and plants than you can shake a shrub at, most of them providing some sort of food or use, and there are grouse in the spruce thickets also, and a little quail with a topknot that makes really good eating if only you can catch it, so all in all there is enough food to get by, and enough material to easily build shelter, and weather that doesn't set out grimly to kill you, as Cedar says of some other weathers he has known, so people have lived here probably from the first couple of days after the glaciers slid away muttering, or from the first day that a little boat filled with exhausted people from Elsewhere landed on the beach or in the mouth of the Mink River.”

-- Narrator (Part 1, 3 paragraph 3)

Importance: This sentence is an example of the run on sentences that the author uses frequently throughout the course of the novel.

He realizes quickly that groups of words are more powerful than the individual words are and one bright summer afternoon when she is bent over her desk in the window he floats over from the top of the refrigerator to her desk and says to her pain mud mother.”

-- Narrator (Part 1, 23 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote is significant because it describes the point at which Moses the



crow began talking in full sentences. In the quote he basically calls the nun who nursed him back to health his mother.

At the end of the straight section of the path there's a tight turn to the left where the hill runs out of hill and there Daniel slows down a little, leery of missing the turn, which would mean a hell of a fall, and he puts both feet down to use his heels as rough brakes, and he makes the turn cleanly, skidding and skewing only a little in the needles, but just as he comes out of the turn and leans forward again to get back into overdrive for the last slightly uphill portion of the path his long red braid catches for maybe a tenth of a second on a prickly spruce branch, which is enough to make even Daniel lose his balance, and the uncontrolled front wheel of the bike skews to the left and Daniel skews to the right, and the bike slams shuddering to a stop and Daniel flies over the edge of the cliff with his backpack flapping and his braids going in three directions and his mouth open but no sound emerging whatsoever."

-- Narrator (Part I, 35 paragraph 1)

Importance: The quote describes the circumstances of the accident that smashed both of Daniel's legs.

He feels a smooth tube attached to the wall, and then he feels the rough wood of the wall itself, but not until he edges along to the next corner does he realize that the tube is Cedar's rain gauge, that the wall is faced all around with cedar shakes, that his hands are upon the Department of Public Works, and that the young woman in throbbing pain on the deck is his daughter."

-- Narrator (Part I, 36 paragraph 5)

Importance: Worried Man has been tracking the pain of a woman through the woods. He panics when he realizes that the woman whose pain he's been sensing belongs to his own daughter.

So very many it would take a million years to tell a millionth of their lives and we don't have the time, worse luck, for their stories are riveting and glorious and searing."

-- Narrator (Part I, 38 paragraph 1)

Importance: The narrator tries to explain how much time would be needed in order to tell all the stories of the people in Neawanaka.

And this time she leans her face back to accept his kiss and they kiss gently, she floating in his long arms, the towel floating in the soapy water, the girl floating inside Sara."

-- Narrator (Part II, 1 paragraph 14)

Importance: Notice how the use of the repetitive use of the word "floating" in this sentence gives the elements of the sentence a feeling of connectivity.

Wars on land at sea in the air in the mind. Our stories are all of wars. We are all war stories. If violence is epidemic then it must be a disease. Must be curable. A good



doctor could cure it.”

-- Narrator (Part II, 19 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote, recorded by the narrator as the doctor smokes his last cigarette of the day, demonstrates the stream of consciousness writing in some parts of the novel.

Michael sings along with her and the music swells and throbs bravely but he thinks darkly how often he has been the singer of death songs to people who find his presence on their doorstep no consolation at all. Many times he has delivered bad news to men and women and children and his news cut a ragged wound in them that would never heal all the rest of their lives and he knew it and they knew it.”

-- Narrator (Part II, 26 paragraph 1)

Importance: Michael thinks about the times he’s had to deliver bad news to families, the part of his job that he hates the most.

Off she goes and back goes Owen to his bench and he tries to bring his mind down on his work like a burning stone but his mind rattles and swerves from his wife to Grace to his son to Grace to his wife to Grace to old Hugh O Donnell ah jeez the old bastard what am I going to say over that cruel old bird with never a good word for anyone and his hand as hard as his head and me saying a prayer there’s a laugh I haven’t said a prayer in earnest for a thousand years I bet since I was a boy younger than Danno and kneeling on that hill praying desperate that the old man and the mother would find some shred of joy between them and not crack apart into two islands cold as the tits of the queen of the sea leaving me alone between ’em alone floating alone.”

-- Narrator (Part II, 32 paragraph 63)

Importance: This quote demonstrates the author’s use of stream of consciousness writing in his novel. The narrative of this sentence follows Owen’s thoughts as he tries to get himself steadied after Grace’s visit.

We’re all a car wreck or a disease or a wrenched back or a black funk or a badly hurt child or a bitter divorce away from disaster.”

-- Narrator (Part II, 35 paragraph 15)

Importance: Cedar thinks of how everyone in his town seems to be just one bit of bad luck away from financial ruin.

I don’t understand why my mom left her children. I could see her leaving Dad, he was a hagfish, but not us, we were anchovies and herring. We were little fish. How could she do that? Where did she go?”

-- Declan (Part II, 37 paragraph 9)

Importance: After his father’s funeral Declan talks to Cedar about his mother. He admits that he is still hurt and confused that his mother could leave him and his siblings.



I'm no cop, he says. I'm no judge. I'm the public works guy. Sewers and water mains. Highway maintenance and storm drains. That's what we are supposed to do, not fix people's lives. Billy's right. I got some kind of god complex or something."

-- Cedar (Part III, 12 paragraph 12)

Importance: After his encounter with Kristi's father Cedar talks with Maple Head about his concern that he has no right to meddle in people's lives even though he does so with the intention of helping them.

And now I have to go back. We have to go back. That's where the time is, Cedar. I know it. I am absolutely sure."

-- Worried Man (Part III, 16 paragraph 4)

Importance: Worried Man tries to convince Cedar that they have to make a trek to Wyeast Mountain because he believes that is the location where time is stored.

Sometimes you have to make journeys that are hard. There are all kinds of hard journeys. This one isn't as hard as most. Your greatgrandfather walked through a vast hunger. My grandfather watched his people vanish before his eyes. Your son will have a hard journey. My daughter is on a hard journey. But we make our journeys. We have no choice. We can't hide from who we are. That's no life at all. You know that."

-- Worried Man (Part III, 29 paragraph 34)

Importance: Worried Man explains to his son-in-law Owen why he wants to make the trip to Wyeast Mountain even though he knows it will be difficult.

The pub was the last outpost of the defiant, with a handful of huddled patrons; but even Stella, not usually prone to prevailing sentiment, sat in the yellow kitchen behind the bar and stared out to sea and wondered at the wander of her life. As a girl she had hoped for only as much as anyone else: someone to love and be loved by, work that mattered, a child or three to be amazed and exhausted by, a home in the wild world where she would feel rooted and safe, warmed and webbed; but the story of her life was fits and starts, roads that led nowhere, lovers who lied, jobs taken out of desperation, insurance lapsing unawares, cars born four presidents ago."

-- Narrator (Part III, 35 paragraph 1)

Importance: When Stella bought the pub she hoped the job would be fun and her patrons like her family. Over the years, however, she has become more and more disappointed with her job and her life.

Suddenly a line from one of the books he reads to the girls at night pops into his mind: goodnight stars goodnight air goodnight noises everywhere and he smiles thinking how many hundreds of times he has said those words and then suddenly the icy barrel of a pistol is in his right ear and a calm voice is in his left ear: don't move don't make a sound don't be a hero."

-- Narrator (Part IV, 20 paragraph 1)



Importance: Michael is distracted just for a second by a phrase from a book her reads to his daughters at night. It is at this instant that Kristi's father pushes a gun to his ear.

I see, says the doctor, who does see. One thing he has learned in his practice is to hear what his patients don't say; which is, he has often thought, more telling than their tales."
-- Narrator (Part IV, 28 paragraph 18)

Importance: As part of his job the doctor has learned to hear both what his patients say and what they don't say. In this instance he is applying what he's learned as a doctor to his new relationship with Stella.

I have been sent to tell you that you are about to have a massive stroke, which will damage your body permanently, as it were, but leave you lucid, if speechless. In short you keep your head but lose your voice and body. This will seem like a blow but it's a gift. I am afraid I cannot explain further. Your task in your time remaining is to discover the nature and character of the gift, and then use it to the best of your considerable ability."

-- The Voice (Part V, 13 paragraph 9)

Importance: When Billy enters a cave to see if time is there he instead hears a disembodied voice telling him he is about to have a massive stroke.

Cedar, who has terrific peripheral vision still, notices and doesn't notice the startling depth of the cave as he hoists Billy to his feet and wraps him around his back; and later he will wonder if he saw or dreamed or wished to see a glint of metal in the rear of the cave, some kind of silvery flash, as if some big machine was huddled there; or an immense spool of some kind, as May would quietly say one afternoon, neither of them saying anything about it again, but both thinking about it more than they would ever admit."

-- Narrator (Part V, 16 paragraph 38)

Importance: Although he didn't look closely, Cedar believes he might have seen some sort of machinery and spool as he helped Worried Man in the cave after his stroke. The glimpse of silver makes him and the reader wonder if Worried Man might have found where time was stored.

Sometimes we had no money and no prospect of ever having money and that wears and eats at you. Sometimes we were ill and hungry and the rain was relentless and I couldn't see any way we would ever get out. Love doesn't save anybody. But I found doors and windows."

-- Maple Head (Part V, 17 paragraph 17)

Importance: In this quote Maple Head talks to her daughter Nora about her own experience with depression.

All he has said to me is that being inside a war changed him utterly, that it wasn't one memorable event but many small moments that built up to be a mountain in him, and



that he emerged from the war sworn to build rather than destroy.”
-- Worried Man (Part V, 24 paragraph 1)

Importance: Worried Man describes in one of his tape recorded stories for Daniel how being in the war affected Cedar. After the terrible things that Cedar saw he decided he wanted to use his life building things and people up instead of destroying them.

You might think that a man who had survived a traumatic event of that enormity, and suffered loss on what can only be accounted an epic scale, would retreat into some sort of emotional refuge, or erect sturdy defenses against any hint of pain, or decline any and all responsibility for other people for the rest of his life; but indeed the reverse was true, and his sense of responsibility grew so vast and thorough that I sometimes wonder if it has bred its own set of problems. A most remarkable case.”
-- The Doctor (Part V, 28 paragraph 1)

Importance: The doctor talks to Stella about the surgery he had to do on a patient from his war days. Even though the doctor never mentions a name, the reader recognizes that the man about whom his is speaking is Cedar.

There are such astounding seeds of grace and courage in us, says the Governor, that you cannot, in the end, surrender to despair.”
-- Governor of Oregon (Part V, 29 paragraph 1)

Importance: In his salute to Michael the cop the governor not only describes the good in Michael but also the good found in all of the people of that town. It is because the people of Neawanaka have such courage that they have not surrendered to the bad luck and difficult times through which they have suffered.