

One Came Home Study Guide

One Came Home by Amy Timberlake

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Contents

One Came Home Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 – 5.....	5
Chapters 6 – 10.....	9
Chapters 11 – 15.....	12
Chapters 16 – 20.....	15
Chapters 21 – 24.....	18
Characters.....	21
Symbols and Symbolism.....	24
Settings.....	27
Themes and Motifs.....	29
Styles.....	34
Quotes.....	35



Plot Summary

“One Came Home” is a historical mystery by Amy Timberlake. It follows the journey of thirteen year-old Georgie Burkhardt as she tries to determine if her older sister Agatha is really dead. When the novel begins, a funeral is being held for Agatha. Though Georgie does not believe Agatha is actually dead, she secretly worries that it is true. She leaves her hometown of Placid, Wisconsin, for Dog Hollow. Dog Hollow is located eight miles past where a girl’s body was discovered in Agatha’s blue-green ball gown. Georgie reluctantly allows nineteen year-old Billy McCabe, a past suitor of Agatha’s, to accompany her.

Georgie finds Billy both handsome and annoying. She knows that he asked eighteen year-old Agatha to marry him, but her sister had turned him down numerous times. Agatha had ultimately fallen for thirty-five year-old Benjamin Olmstead, owner of the local hotel and a massive library. The library gave Agatha a window into the world and into education at a time when most women did not attend university. Georgie wondered if the library might have been the reason that Agatha wanted to marry Benjamin.

While Agatha was engaged to Benjamin, Billy McCabe kissed her. At the time, Billy was engaged to a local girl named Polly. Georgie saw the kiss and told Benjamin about it. He promptly broke the engagement. Ten days later, Agatha left town with a group of traveling pigeon followers who had followed flocks of wild pigeons to the area to hunt them. Shortly thereafter, a girl’s body was discovered by Sheriff McCabe (Billy’s father), who had gone looking for Agatha.

Georgie and Billy travel to Dog Hollow to talk to people who remember seeing Agatha. They discover the spot where the body was found, but they find no clues there. When a general store owner explains that Agatha was in the company of disreputable people who usually go to see Mr. Garrow when they pass through town, they visit Garrow Farm. There, Garrow and his wife deny knowing Agatha, but they do say that their own daughter, Darlene, has eloped. Ironically, Darlene very much resembles Agatha.

On their way back from Garrow Farm, Georgie and Billy come across Mr. Garrow’s counterfeit money operation, and Billy is captured by Mr. Garrow and his associate, Roy. Mr. Garrow breaks Billy’s ribs. Georgie shoots Roy’s thumb off. Then, she shoots the gun out of Mr. Garrow’s hand and frees Billy. She leads him back toward Dog Hollow.

On the way back, Billy believes that he’s dying. So, he confesses that he kissed Agatha in hopes of Georgie seeing them. Ideally, Georgie would tell Benjamin Olmstead about the kiss. Then, the wedding would be called off, and Agatha could be Billy’s once more. Instead, Agatha refused Billy and said goodbye. Georgie is very angry when she hears the story. On the way to Dog Hollow, she runs into Benjamin and his groundskeeper, who take Georgie and Billy to town, where Billy’s injuries are treated. A posse goes out after Garrow and Roy. An account of their capture, including Georgie’s shooting, winds up in all the papers. These stories prompt Agatha, who is now living as a student in



Madison, to write home to her family, apologizing for leaving without saying anything. She also apologizes to Benjamin. Georgie and her family are angry at Agatha's behavior, but they are thrilled she is alive. They forgive her.

As the novel ends, Billy marries Polly and moves to Minnesota. Agatha and her family keep in touch regularly. Georgie later finds out that the dead girl found near Dog Hollow was Darlene, who had intended to elope with her boyfriend. However, she was stopped by Mr. Garrow. Trying to wrestle her father's gun from under some saddle bags to ward him off, Darlene accidentally shot herself. She was wearing Agatha's gown, a gift to her from Agatha when they met during Agatha's time with the pigeon people. Appropriately, the name on the tombstone is changed from Agatha's to Darlene's. Since Darlene dies from an accidental, self-inflicted wound, Georgie never shoots a gun again.



Chapters 1 – 5

Summary

Chapter 1 – On Wednesday, June 7, 1871, thirteen year-old Georgina “Georgie” Louise Burkhardt attends the funeral of her older sister, eighteen year-old Agatha. Georgie believes the funeral, overseen by Reverend Leland, is lunacy. Georgie remembers the events. Having run off with pigeons –two men and one woman –Agatha was chased after by Sheriff McCabe to Dog Hollow, where he found a badly decomposing body shot in the face, wrapped in fabric from Agatha’s blue-green ball gown. Georgie’s mother, Dora, confirmed the body was Agatha’s, though Georgie believed there was not enough left of the body to make a positive identification. She urged her grandfather, Grandfather Bolte, the best tracker around, to try to find Agatha, but Bolte refused. Georgie then reflected on how her father is believed dead by many, having gone off to find gold in Colorado. He has not been heard from in ten years.

At Agatha’s funeral, Georgie sees how nineteen year-old Billy McCabe and thirty-five year-old Benjamin Olmstead, owner of the Olmstead Hotel are being civil to each other. In the past, they were rivals for Agatha. While dating Olmstead, Agatha and Billy had kissed –something which was seen by Georgie and reported to Olmstead with the belief that Olmstead had a right to know. At the time, Billy was seeing Polly Barford, whom he is now set to marry.

Chapter 2 – At the funeral along the Wisconsin River, Georgie sees her mother holding a scrap of Agatha’s ball gown, which causes Georgie to reflect on “that day”. At the end of each March, wild pigeons flock in along the river. Georgie remembers the previous March, 1871, when more wild pigeons than ever seen before flew into the area, blotting out the sun, making Georgie believe a catastrophe would come. Many people in Georgie’s town –Placid, Wisconsin –were terrified by the sight. But Agatha walked into the swirling mass of pigeons with a parasol umbrella, enjoying the event. Georgie remembers how Agatha motioned for Georgie to join her, but she refused. It makes Georgie cry at the funeral,

Chapter 3 – Down by the Wisconsin River, Georgie shoots bottles with a Springfield rifle near the abandoned pigeon people's camp. Georgie is determined to find Agatha. She knows she will need a horse for this. She remembers how Agatha wanted to attend the University of Wisconsin at Madison, but was refused by Grandfather Bolte, who believed that Agatha merely wanted to find a husband –which could be found in Placid for free. Georgie remembers how Agatha received the blue-green ball gown for Christmas, and wore it to the New Year’s Ball at the Olmstead Hotel. There, she danced with Billy, making most people in town believe that they would be engaged by the end of the month.

Georgie hated the idea because Billy wanted to move to Minnesota. They never got engaged, and Agatha ended up seeing Olmstead instead. The kiss between Agatha and



Billy happened in May, and Agatha became furious with Georgie for having told Olmstead. Agatha later told Georgie a story from the Seneca Indians which recounted how each spring, men would claim some young pigeons, while leaving the pigeons alone the rest of the year. The men would follow their feathers as though a path, step by step, feather by feather.

Georgie hoped that things had gotten better between her and Agatha, but ten days later, on May 25, Agatha left. Georgie knew this because Agatha had taken all the money she had saved in her secret tin under a floorboard. While out searching for clues, Sheriff McCabe and Grandfather Bolte had found a field hand who had seen Agatha head off with three pigeoners. McCabe had then personally gone after Agatha and come back with a body.

Chapter 4 – At night, Georgie composes a list of the things she'll need for her journey to find Agatha, though she doesn't know much about traveling at all. She has only ever been to one other town. She uses U.S. Army Captain Randolph B. Marcy's book, "The Prairie Traveller: A Hand-Book for Overland Expeditions" as a guide. This includes what kind of food to bring, how to pack it, and what sorts of clothing and other personal items to bring, such as soap, knives, and linens. Georgie will take all of this from her family's store, leaving an IOU.

Georgie goes to rent a horse from the McCabes, who raise them. Billy says he won't be a party to Georgie's plans to go to Dog Hollow. He notices a storm is coming and tells Georgie to go home. She refuses and offers him valuable gold Bechtler dollars, which Billy relents to accepting. Georgie instructs him to deliver the horse, saddle, reins, and other supplies to Mount Zion Cemetery on Saturday night.

Chapter 5 – Over the next two days, Georgie squirrels away supplies and leaves a note for her grandfather and mother. At the cemetery, Billy arrives with a mule named Frederick instead of the promised horse. He insists the animal is only on loan and returns Georgie's money. He then helps Georgie load up supplies onto Frederick, because Billy is going along as well. This annoys Georgie, and she tries to dissuade Billy from going. Billy will not be convinced. As they travel, Georgie is struck by how handsome Billy is. Camping out that night in a lean-to, Georgie believes she smells rotting pigeons.

Analysis

When the novel "One Came Home" begins, most of the major themes are readily present to the reader. Among them is the theme of family –and family, to Georgie, means everything. She looks up to her big sister and loves her mother and grandfather deeply, for they are the only family that she has. Her father is long gone, and so she values them all the more. Georgie has long opposed Agatha's courtship with Billy on the grounds that Billy wants to move to Minnesota –away from Georgie.



This explains in large part why Georgie is so quick to refuse to believe that Agatha could possibly be dead. There are also other curious facts which confuse Georgie and reinforce the idea that Agatha could not possibly be dead. Here, the theme of mystery is introduced into the novel. Numerous questions are raised, all of which will be answered in due time. These include Agatha's reasoning for leaving, why she decided to head out with pigeon people, and why she didn't tell anyone she was going.

Other questions related to clues are also raised by Georgie, which are enough to strike reasonable doubt in the minds of the reader. The body found on Miller Road has no face, so positive identification is not truly possible. The only identifying feature of the body is the dress in which the body is discovered. Furthermore, Grandfather Bolte, the best tracker around, is not the one to have found the body or gone after Agatha. There are too many unknowns for Georgie to be certain that her sister is dead.

She decides she will find out herself. Here, the themes of journey and coming of age also come together for the reader. Georgie is thirteen years old, and while in many ways she is mature for her age—from her ability to handle a firearm to her working in the family general store—she is also inexperienced in many other ways. For example, she has never traveled far. She has only been to one other town; so, she has little idea of the world beyond Placid.

Here, the reader should note the symbolic importance of the name "Placid," meaning peaceful, perfect, and calm—a stand-in for the Garden of Eden and childhood. Her life has been full of primarily good things, and her leaving Placid—leaving Eden—will expose her to the horrors of the world. As she moves into her teenage years (essentially womanhood in the 1800s), she will also leave her placid childhood behind.

This journey will not just be one of travel, but one of growth and coming of age. The journey is about Georgie's development as a person, as well as the experience she will gain. She will rely on a frontier survival book and her own instincts to get along on this mission—though she is joined by Billy as she leaves town.

While Georgie appears content with Placid before her sister's disappearance, Agatha herself does not seem altogether content to remain in the small Wisconsin town. Indeed, she has bigger dreams which include college—something out of the question, according to her grandfather. However, his insistence on Agatha not attending college has nothing to do with sexism or prejudice on his part. He insists because he knows something Agatha does not (which will be revealed at the end of the novel).

Nevertheless, Agatha is still determined to fly. Here, the arrival of the wild pigeons becomes vastly important symbolically. The wild pigeons are free to fly as they choose, while Agatha is not. The scene where she steps out into the whirlwind of pigeons demonstrates her desire to fly, but her inability to do so. But for a brief moment, she feels as if she is as free as the birds are circling her—something not lost on Georgie, who does not join Agatha as beckoned. The reader will also recognize the importance of the Seneca story about following a path in life feather by feather. Feathers are symbolic of birds and flight.



There are also other mysteries which stand out in the reader's mind as this section of the novel concludes. These include why Billy kissed Agatha when they were both engaged to other people; why Agatha should have chosen to be with a man almost twice her age rather than someone merely a year older; and whether or not Georgie's revelation of the kiss to Benjamin Olmstead truly had anything to do with Agatha's departure.

Discussion Question 1

For what reasons does Georgie believe her sister is not dead? Do you believe these are sufficient reasons to doubt that the body brought back to Placid is Agatha's? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Georgie believe Agatha may have left because of her?

Discussion Question 3

Though Georgie has little experience in the world, she is determined to journey to Dog Hollow and beyond to learn what truly happened to her sister. How does she propose to do this? Do you believe this is a safe thing to do? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

mournful, proximity, rectification, lunacy, eulogy, condolences, firmament, dissipated, catastrophe, portent, pivoted, magnanimous, equitable, chastisement, plausible, beleaguer, itinerant, fanciful, desiccated, perishables, mitigate, clamp, diminutive, amenities, obstinate, vicinity, decorum, impels, contrition, infinitesimally, methodology, veneration, elucidate, undulate, travailed



Chapters 6 – 10

Summary

Chapter 6 – Georgie remembers the arrival of the pigeons to Placid. She remembers seeing the first pigeon scouts arrive in February and how Agatha had turned down Billy's proposal for marriage that same day.

Chapter 7 – Georgie is annoyed when Billy cooks her bacon for his breakfast. She is annoyed that Billy always seems to do whatever he wants. She realizes the trip must mean something important to Billy for him to have come along. When Georgie exits the lean-to, she sees that the entire area is covered in feathers from a massive bird-hunting operation. It puzzles her why the feathers have not been collected for pillows or mattresses. The area, she thinks, must have been visited by wild-game dealers who sell their kills in the cities, as opposed to pigeon people who use every part of a pigeon. The feathers on the ground make Georgie reflect on the Seneca story about following a path feather by feather.

Georgie remembers how in April Mr. Olmstead requested Grandfather Bolte's permission to court Agatha –and Bolte happily agreed. Agatha appeared to take a quick liking to Olmstead, which worried Georgie. She came to believe that Agatha was using Olmstead merely for his massive library. Sometime later, Georgie saw Agatha and Billy kiss –while Billy was courting Polly. That month also saw the arrival of hundreds of pigeon followers from all over the United States.

Chapter 8 – In the present, Georgie and Billy follow the path of the pigeon followers to Prairie du Chien on Miller Road. Traveling through the woods, they come across a nesting site that has been decimated by hunters. A cougar bears down on Georgie, who has fallen behind.

Chapter 9 - Georgie goes for her gun, but it falls to the mucky ground. She then throws "The Prairie Traveler" at the cougar, which swats the book away. Georgie throws everything she can at the cougar, which lies down in the middle of the road before walking off. Billy arrives and helps Georgie collect her things. She then begins crying, and Billy holds her.

Chapter 10 – Camping out along the banks of the Wisconsin River, Georgie bathes and washes her muddied possessions. While she makes dinner, Billy bathes. When he returns, Georgie notices how handsome he looks. She asks him why, if he is engaged, he has come on a trip with a girl to find another girl. Billy says he is no longer in love with Agatha, but Georgie suspects he is hiding something. Billy reveals that he hated Olmstead for courting Agatha, and that he had been seeing Polly with the hopes of making Agatha jealous. Georgie remembers how, in the past, Olmstead broke off the engagement with Agatha following the kiss. Georgie remembers how Agatha left town



not long after. Georgie also remembers seeing a large book in Olmstead's study that her sister was working on, which contained colored renderings and descriptions of birds.

Analysis

As this section of the novel begins, the reader should note with interest that the arrival of the pigeons near Placid also coincides with Agatha's rejection of Billy's marriage proposal. Agatha clearly has plans that are bigger than Placid (or Minnesota), and the freedom of the birds in arriving mirrors Agatha's own freedom in turning down Billy—not because she opposes marriage, but because she wants more out of life than merely being a homesteader's wife. The reader should also note Georgie's observation that, like the Seneca story, Agatha picked out her path in life feather by feather. It is through this that the reader also begins to see the theme of feminism emerge.

Interestingly enough, while Agatha turns down Billy's marriage proposal, she seems to take an immediate liking to Benjamin Olmstead. Considering that Benjamin still lives in a small town despite being extraordinarily wealthy, marriage to him would undoubtedly mean that Agatha would remain in Placid most of the time. Nevertheless, she falls for Olmstead quickly. Georgie believes that Agatha is only using Benjamin for his extensive library in the hotel.

Feminism can also be seen in the fact that it is Agatha's personal choice to turn down Billy. While Benjamin solicits Bolte's permission to court Agatha, it is again Agatha's decision to be courted. She is not forced into an arranged marriage of any sort, but rather willingly begins seeing Benjamin.

As Georgie later finds out when she tells Benjamin about the kiss between Agatha and Billy, Benjamin's extensive library has also served as a makeshift art studio and office for Agatha. Agatha has been working on an illustrated book about birds. Georgie doesn't recognize the implications of this.

Benjamin is a cultured man who possesses tremendous knowledge. Denied college, Agatha sees a sort of freedom through Benjamin—someone who will support her interests and her dreams. It is not difficult to see why Agatha falls for him. She is not using him for his books as Georgie suspects. Benjamin's breaking off of the engagement, and Agatha's subsequent fleeing, are proof that she truly has fallen for Benjamin. She would not have fled otherwise.

As Georgie remembers the past, she also sets her mind to the task at hand, and here, the themes of coming of age and journeying again come to the fore. Already on her trip, Georgie has begun to experience things she never has before—such as boys. She cannot help but be both attracted to, and annoyed by Billy. These are perhaps the same traits that Agatha saw in Billy as well, leading to her turning down his proposal of marriage.

Georgie must also face down a wild cougar, the horrible aftermath of a pigeon slaughtering operation, and getting along in the world without her parents. Some of



these events, such as the confrontation with the cougar, understandably leave Georgie shaken. After all, she is only thirteen and has never been on a journey of this nature before. These events also increase her courage and her understanding of the dangers of the world –something she did not have before. As a result she grows as a person both in character and maturity.

Georgie also finds herself confronted with another mystery as well. She begins to question why Billy has truly come along on the journey. At times, she believes it is because he may secretly hope Agatha is still alive, and at other times, she believes that he may simply want to get her back if she is still alive. Georgie finds it strange that a man engaged to a girl should be off on a journey with another girl when he should be preparing for his marriage. While Billy certainly has his charms, Georgie's suspicions prevent her from trusting him completely.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Billy say he has come along on the trip? Why does Georgie believe he has come along on the trip?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe that Agatha turned down Billy's proposal of marriage, only to agree to court with Benjamin a short time later?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the dangers and new experiences that Georgie has so far confronted? Choose three. Explain what they are and how Georgie handled them, and how these have helped her character to grow.

Vocabulary

volley, theorizing, configuration, ruminates, abrupt, extricated, exactitude, consternation, ablutions, asphyxiation, putrescence, rapidity, despondent, hullabaloo, lollygagging, loitered, dirge, ordure, presumptions, unperturbed, audibly, oblivious



Chapters 11 – 15

Summary

Chapter 11 – Georgie and Billy arrive in Dog Hollow, a beautiful town through which the Smoke River, a branch of the Wisconsin, flows. Georgie is given money to buy some bread and cheese. She asks the local general store workers if they have seen Agatha, and shows them Agatha's photo. They are aware of the body found on Miller Road, eight miles from town. The store owner says that Agatha was traveling with a man who gave his name as Metcalf, and sold pigeon dung medicines to the general store. The owner doubts the man's real name was Metcalf, or that he was a good man. Georgie travels all over town seeking information, and finds a man who did see Agatha come through with another woman and a man.

Georgie then sees Billy leaving the Western Union office, and realizes that Billy has been telegraphing messages to his father and her grandfather. Billy admits this. It angers and upsets Georgie when she learns that Billy has been paid to chaperone her to prove that Agatha is dead. Over dinner, Billy explains his father provided him with a sketch of the crime scene up the road. Georgie then relates her information about Metcalf –something the sheriff did not uncover. Billy later says the kiss between he and Agatha was a goodbye, not the start of something new. Georgie is suspicious of this. She also worries that she is the cause of her sister running off.

Chapter 12 – The place along the road where the body was found is so plain that Billy and Georgie miss it before retracing their steps and finding it. It is beside a rocky hill which Georgie climbs, falls from, and hurts her face. Georgie thinks the place is too unremarkable to die in. She and Billy use the diagram to map out where the body and its parts were found.

Chapter 13 – Georgie feels defeated as she and Billy return to Dog Hollow and eat lunch. She realizes the entire trip truly was to get her to accept that Agatha is dead. Georgie still feels as if she is responsible for the death, but Billy angrily tells her he will not listen to this. Georgie suddenly thinks of something. She runs to the general store and asks where the pigeons have gone. The owner is reluctant, but tells Georgie the less-than-reputable people Agatha was traveling with probably went to the Garrows property up on the river bluff. Billy reluctantly agrees to go to the bluff with Georgie, and telegraphs their plans home.

Chapter 14 – Georgie and Billy travel to the Garrow family property on Old Line, a road that intersects with Miller Road. There, they meet Mrs. Garrow. She denies knowing Metcalf. Billy asks if she saw an eighteen year-old girl with auburn hair. Mrs. Garrow believes he is talking about her daughter, Darlene, who eloped some time before with Morgy Harrison of Owatonia. Georgie then shows Mrs. Garrow Agatha's portrait. She says she does not recognize Agatha. Neither does Mr. Garrow. They send Georgie and Billy on their way, telling them to come back the way they came, for Old Line no longer



exists beyond the farm. As she leaves, Georgie realizes that one of the Garrows' little girls has a blue-green ribbon in her hair. Georgie takes the ribbon as she gives the girl a piece of licorice.

Chapter 15 – Georgie and Billy follow Old Line past the farm despite warnings from Garrow not to do so. They believe it will save them time returning to Miller Road. Old Line becomes small very quickly, and is hedged in by trees. Over dinner that night, Georgie tells Billy she believes that Mr. Garrow did recognize Agatha's photo, and reveals the ribbon from the little girl's hair. Billy confesses he secretly hopes Agatha is still alive. Georgie finds it all strange that two auburn-headed girls are missing –her sister, and Darlene.

Billy begins to cry, and Georgie realizes he is still in love with Agatha. She lies to him, telling him she is ready to go home. Billy then tells Georgie he lied about wanting to make Agatha jealous with Polly. Georgie tells him that he cannot marry Polly because if he waits, someone like herself will come along. Georgie's marriage proposal stuns her. Billy shakes it off, saying that Polly will be a better wife than he deserves. While taking a walk, Georgie falls into a cave. There, she discovers a five-dollar note, which she brings back to Billy.

Analysis

Through Georgie's persistence –through her love of family and especially her sister – she is able to determine that Agatha was indeed in Dog Hollow, and that she was traveling with a man who gave his name as Metcalf. This is something that Sheriff McCabe did not discover –and something that Georgie believes adds up in her own favor. Georgie's persistence is admirable, as is her love of family which fuels it.

Georgie is angered, however, when she learns that Billy is being paid to escort her on her journey. She also later learns that, according to Billy, the kiss shared between he and Agatha was not meant to be the start of something, but was meant to be a goodbye. Georgie at this point is highly distrustful of Billy, and does not accept his explanation at all. This provides another avenue for Georgie to come of age in that she is dealing with a disingenuous person. She knows she can't be won over merely by his good looks.

Georgie's independence and determination also reinforce the theme of feminism. Armed with new knowledge and experience –from Metcalf to Garrow to Billy's chaperoning – Georgie is determined to find answers. She resolves that she is in charge, and that she will see things through, no matter what she has to do in order to accomplish this.

Some of the mysteries that Georgie has been confronted with begin to come unraveled in this section of the novel as she grows in character, and her stature as a person also increases. Billy begins to treat her as an equal to a limited degree. This is demonstrated when he open weeps in front of her over Agatha. Billy also admits he hopes that Agatha is still alive. In a tender moment, Georgie's compassion for Billy overwhelms her, and



she essentially proposes marriage to Billy, which Billy brushes off. It is clear that he experiences little growth in character.

Georgie is also quite certain that the Garrows are lying about having seen Agatha. That their own daughter with auburn hair has gone missing also catches Georgie's interest – as does the blue-green ribbon in the hair of one of the daughters of the Garrows. To Georgie, this is proof that Agatha was in the area, at least –and that further searching is warranted.

Discussion Question 1

How does Georgie respond to the idea that Billy is along on the trip as her chaperone? Why does she respond this way? Do you believe her response is justifiable? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Is Georgie trusting or suspicious of Billy? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Billy cries in front of Georgie?

Vocabulary

tributary river, productivity, inedibility, articulation, trundling, chaperone, subjecting, exerting, palatable, tentatively, fanciful, unabashed, fidgeted



Chapters 16 – 20

Summary

Chapter 16 – Billy and Georgie investigate the cave. It is full of money. They find a printing press, and realize that Mr. Garrow must be a counterfeiter. Georgie believes that Garrow sells the money at a percentage of its face value, an observation which impresses Billy. Billy worries their campfire might have been seen, or that the counterfeiters might discover them in the cave, so they flee. Billy takes along one of the printing plates as evidence. They travel through the night and don't sleep until the dawn.

Chapter 17 – When Georgie wakes up, she sees that Billy is still asleep. She decides to walk along the river with his repeating rifle. She hears shots, and goes back to investigate. There, she discovers Billy has been tied up by Garrow and a henchman in a bowler hat named Roy. They demand to know where Georgie has gone, but Billy tells them she ran off. Garrow discovers the printing plate and kicks Billy in his ribs so hard they pop. Georgie takes aim at Garrow and Roy, who now holds her Springfield rifle. She imagines killing them, but wonders how this will weigh on her soul when she meets God one day. Georgie then shoots Roy's thumb off, knocking the Springfield from his hand. Georgie shoots Garrow's revolver from his hand. She then shoots Roy's hat off, and he and Garrow flee. Georgie then throws up and rushes to help Billy. She thanks God as she goes.

Chapter 18 – As Georgie and Billy head back to Dog Hollow for a doctor, Billy falls off his horse. He tells Georgie that the kiss between him and Agatha was planned. He wanted Georgie to tell Olmstead, so it would end the marriage –but it was Agatha saying good-bye to Billy, not Billy saying goodbye to her. He wanted Agatha back. Billy says the real reason he came along on the journey was to make up for what he did. Georgie is furious, but she knows he needs help. She rushes to the road when she hears a wagon passing. It is Benjamin Olmstead and his groundskeeper.

Chapter 19 – Olmstead and his groundskeeper bring Georgie and Billy to Dog Hollow, where Olmstead puts Georgie up in the American House Hotel. Billy has been treated, and will be staying at the Hotel for one week while he recovers. Cleaned and in fresh clothing, Georgie goes to the Dog Hollow train stationmaster, who explains he does remember a girl like Agatha, but refuses to answer any questions about Darlene Garrow, calling it all gossip. Georgie then meets with Olmstead.

Olmstead reveals that the local sheriff, a federal marshal, and a posse have gone after Garrow and Roy. He also reveals that Billy has confessed the entire playacting kiss. Olmstead is also impressed at how Georgie has handled herself against such ruthless men like Garrow and Roy. Olmstead then sadly relates that Grandfather Bolte has passed away.



Chapter 20 – Grandfather Bolte's body is buried. Georgie is sad she has missed his final days on Earth. Her mother is thrilled to see her back, however. Aunt Cleo has come to visit from upstate New York. While resting, Georgie considers that Darlene must have been killed in Agatha's place. Georgie believes that her entire journey has been for nothing, but knows she has grown as a person.

Analysis

Georgie's coming of age continues strongly in this section of the novel as her journey continues. She encounters a life-or-death situation with Garrow and Roy, counterfeiters obviously quite willing to kill to protect their secret. Only Georgie's quick work with a rifle, as well as her courage and resolve are able to change the situation in her favor.

Here, she grows as a person for she is able to act under pressure, and she is able to make a moral choice not to kill but to wound and drive enemies away. Her exposure to men who operate illegally, and are willing to kill Billy in cold blood, is certainly an awakening experience for Georgie as well. Her quick action also demonstrates that, though she is a girl living in a time dominated by men, she is easily able to hold her own—a notch not just for her feminism, but for her as a human being.

Billy's injuries, however, are serious. Believing he is about to die, Billy reveals that Agatha did not want the kiss. He reveals that the kiss was intended as a goodbye by Agatha, and that she really did want to marry Benjamin. Furthermore, Billy explains he used Georgie by intentionally acting out a scene in front of her, which he knew she would take word of to Benjamin. Billy wanted Agatha back, and was willing to do whatever it took to get her back. This both confuses and deeply shocks Georgie. It is clear to her that there are even bad people in Placid—and good people, like Agatha and Benjamin, are often hurt as a result of their bad behavior.

Georgie is thrilled to see Benjamin as he travels to Dog Hollow. She feels horrible for what Billy has done to both Benjamin and Agatha. The reader here can at last determine the final reasons why Agatha should so willingly turn down Billy's proposal. He is not a mature or good person. It is also evident why Georgie should so quickly fall for Benjamin, because he is a good person, and is very mature.

Indeed, this underscores the theme of feminism as well in that Agatha has clearly made her own choices. These choices come by way of her decision to reject Billy and engagement to Benjamin. They are no man's choices. Yet Billy undermines this decision, and Georgie realizes she should have spoken to Agatha first before going to Benjamin.

The theme of family here takes a tragic note, however. Georgie heartbreakingly shifts to the idea that her sister is probably dead, and is further heartbroken to discover that her grandfather has also passed away. What Georgie has valued more than anything else—her family—is now mostly gone. Georgie wishes she could have been around for her



grandfather's final days, something which haunts her until she comes to some important realizations in the final chapter.

Discussion Question 1

What realizations do Georgie and the reader come to regarding Agatha's decision to turn down Billy and accept Benjamin's marriage proposal?

Discussion Question 2

How does Benjamin react to Billy's confession? Why?

Discussion Question 3

How does Billy's confession make Georgie second-guess her decision to tell Benjamin about the kiss? Do you believe she was right in having told Benjamin in the first place, or should she have gone to Agatha first? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

precludes, irksome, pique, eddied, ingenuity, trepidation, genuflecting, profane, idiosyncrasies, agitation, deduce, instantaneously, insurmountable



Chapters 21 – 24

Summary

Chapter 21 – Though Olmstead tries to protect Georgie from the public, her exploits at helping to bring down a counterfeit ring –done on the day of her grandfather’s funeral – make headlines. She becomes relatively famous for what she has done, but she is angry because no one asks about Agatha. Georgie learns that her mother and Sheriff McCabe are engaged and set to be married soon.

Billy’s return to town is awkward for Georgie. He thanks Georgie for saving his life, and apologizes for everything. Georgie tells him to leave. She never sees him again, for he marries Polly that summer and leaves for Minnesota. Aunt Cleo decides to remain in Wisconsin permanently. Georgie later pays back the store for the supplies she has taken, and then saves up and officially buys the mule she has ridden on during her adventure.

Chapter 22 – Georgie goes to work full-time in the Bolte General Store. She, as well as everyone in her family, wonder about whether Agatha is truly dead or not. Georgie also comes to realize that, while Placid may not have been enough for Agatha, it is more than enough for her. Georgie also writes letters to Mrs. Garrow, and to the University of Wisconsin seeking more information about her sister.

Chapter 23 – On July 24, 1871, a letter arrives from Agatha. She is a student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, is working as a clerk at a store, and she has seen the newspaper stories. She explains she left for university when Benjamin broke off their engagement. She says she left town with pigeon people, and gave her ball gown to Darlene for a wedding dress. Agatha writes that Grandfather was right about universities not educating women in the way that they should. She also begs them to apologize to Benjamin for her, and asks them all to write as soon as they can. Georgie, her mother, and Aunt Cleo are all stunned and angry, but forgive her because they are thrilled she is alive.

Chapter 24 – Georgie, her mother, Aunt Cleo, and Agatha, write back and forth frequently. Mrs. Garrow comes to visit her daughter’s grave. It is revealed that Mr. Garrow opposed Darlene’s marriage to Morgy. When Darlene went to take his rifle from under his saddlebags to protect herself against him, she accidentally shot herself. A new tombstone is erected on Darlene’s grave. In October, fires break out in Chicago and along the Wisconsin shoreline. Survivors flock to live in the countryside. Some settle in Placid. Georgie herself never hunts again after her adventure.

Analysis

While some of Georgie’s family are now gone –Grandpa Bolte’s passing away and Agatha’s now living in Madison –Georgie is thrilled to see her family expand with Sheriff



McCabe and Aunt Cleo. She is likewise thrilled to see Billy depart Placid for Minnesota, which is one less thing she has to deal with on a daily basis.

Georgie also comes to important realizations herself, primarily about her journey. At first, she believes the entire journey has been for nothing. She believes that the journey has merely been a trip. Yet, she understands upon reflection that the journey has been immense and important in her own life, for she has grown as a person and she has experienced much of the world.

Georgie has learned that being a woman (or, in her case, a young girl) does not necessarily relegate her to any position in life. She is a capable, confident, independent person who is able to handle pressure and perform well. She has learned much about human nature –from Billy to Garrow to Agatha to Benjamin. She recognizes that not all people are good, and not all people are bad. She likewise comes to value family even more than she already did, and realizes that Placid is big enough for her to be happy.

Georgie also understands now that she and her sister are different in certain ways. Placid is enough for Georgie, but was not enough for Agatha. Given the truth of the kiss with Billy, it is left uncertain if Benjamin and Agatha will reconnect, or if Benjamin, as a part of Placid, is not enough for Agatha.

Indeed, Agatha's decision to strike out on her own –to follow the path, feather by feather, beginning with following the flight of the wild pigeons –is a clear display of feminism and independence. As the reader will remember, Bolte's decision to refuse Agatha the chance to go to college was sound. Bolte understood that, in that day and age, while a woman might gain something of an education at school, her primary purpose was to find a husband at school –something which Agatha learns the hard way. This makes her falling for Benjamin early on all the more clear: he is not willing to take her education, or her exposure to the world, for granted, or as merely a means to find a wife. His indulgence in her desire to learn and use his library was borne out of love for her, and his desire to support her dreams and aspirations was clear.

As the novel ends, all of the mysteries of the novel are resolved. The girl found on Miller Road was actually Darlene, who accidentally shot herself. Darlene's determination to run away from home causes Agatha to have sensed a kindred spirit in Darlene. As such, Agatha gave Darlene her ball gown to use as a wedding dress. Agatha's decision to leave town did not have to do with Georgie's revelation of the kiss, but Benjamin's breaking off the engagement –a clear sign that Agatha did have genuine feelings for Benjamin. Agatha also sends along her apologies to Benjamin –perhaps a clear sign that she still loves him, though again, her future with Benjamin is left unclear.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Georgie believe her journey has, at first, been for nothing? What changes her mind? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Georgie's journey has ultimately been for nothing? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the truth behind Agatha's decision to leave town? Can she be faulted for not saying anything to anyone about her departure? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

mementos, spiteful, abounded, elaborately, guffaw, chortling, acquiesced, clairvoyant, heedless, missives, afflicted, divine, malefactor, metaphorically, allotted



Characters

Georgie

Georgina “Georgie” Louise Burkhardt is the main character and narrator of the novel “One Came Home” by Amy Timberlake. Georgie is an intelligent, pretty, moral, and kind thirteen year-old girl who lives in Placid, Wisconsin. She is the sister of Agatha, the daughter of Dora and a man who hasn’t been heard from in ten years, and is the granddaughter of Grandfather Bolte. Georgie has been raised by her grandfather and mother to be able to handle work in the family store, at home, and in the outdoors, such as being able to use a rifle. Georgie loves her family, especially Agatha, dearly. She thinks the world of Agatha, and hates the fact that Agatha might marry Billy, who wants to move to Minnesota.

Georgie is relieved when Agatha instead becomes engaged to Benjamin instead, but is horrified to see her sister kissing Billy during this time. Georgie reports this to Benjamin, who breaks off the marriage, causing Agatha to flee town. A short time later, a body believed to be Agatha’s is found, causing everyone except Georgie to believe that Agatha is dead. Georgie then begins a journey, retracing Agatha’s footsteps, and seeking to determine on her own if Agatha is truly dead or still alive. She is accompanied by Billy, and along the way, develops an unreturned crush on Billy, faces down a cougar, shoots and drives away murderous counterfeiters, and saves Billy’s life. At the end of her journey, she grudgingly accepts that Agatha is probably dead.

Georgie, however, comes to realize that her trip has not been worthless as she originally figures, for she has grown tremendously as a human being. She is now more capable, confident, and independent. She is thrilled to learn later that Agatha is still alive, and is now living and working in Madison, Wisconsin. She has also grown closer to her family, and comes to realize as well that Placid is a place that is big enough to make her happy.

Agatha

Agatha Burkhardt is the beautiful, intelligent, artistic, and compassionate older sister of Georgie. At eighteen, Agatha is a dreamer who wants more out of life than merely running a store or being a wife: she wants to learn things, and do something important with her life. She is denied college by her grandfather, who tells her that college for women is merely about marriage, not a real education –something which Agatha learns the hard way. Courted by Billy, and proposed to by him for years, Agatha consistently turns him down, for Billy wants to move to Minnesota to be a homesteader. She also recognizes his immaturity and self-centeredness.

When Benjamin Olmstead seeks to court Agatha, she quickly falls for him due to his kindness, culture, and desire to help her pursue her dreams. Agatha is compromised,



however, by an unwanted kiss from Billy, which ends up ruining her plans for marriage. Heartbroken and seeking a chance to strike out on her own, Agatha leaves town with pigeons, and without a word, ultimately moving to Madison. She is believed dead. There, she learns of Georgie's quest to find her in the newspapers, and quickly writes home to let her family know she is okay. She also sends along her apologies to Benjamin.

Billy

Billy McCabe is a nineteen year-old boy and son of the local sheriff in Placid. Billy is handsome, but is very immature and highly self-centered. Consistently rejected in his own marriage proposals by Agatha, Billy schemes to break off her engagement to Benjamin Olmstead. He becomes engaged to Polly to make Agatha jealous, and when this does not work, kisses Agatha when he knows Georgie is watching, intending to break up the engagement. Billy is stunned when Agatha leaves and is presumed dead. He is hired by Grandfather Bolte to accompany Georgie on her quest, though Billy is out for more than just money. He wants to justify himself, if possible, for what he has done.

Billy ultimately confesses this much to Georgie after he is injured. But rather than being truly apologetic, he seems more inclined to provide excuses and half-truths, and becomes the enemy in the eyes of Georgie. He later leaves for Minnesota, having married Polly.

Benjamin Olmstead

Benjamin Olmstead is the thirty-five year-old owner of the Olmstead Hotel in Placid, Wisconsin. He is gentle, kind, intelligent, well-cultured, and has a magnificent library. He obtains Grandfather Bolte's permission to court Agatha, and is delighted when Agatha falls for him. He endeavors to support Agatha's dreams of an education and doing something important with her life, including by allowing her free reign of his library, which she uses to begin writing and illustrating a book about birds. When Benjamin learns of the kiss between Agatha and Billy, he quietly breaks off the engagement. When he learns that Agatha is dead, he is deeply saddened. It is later unclear how Benjamin handles Agatha's apologies once she is revealed to be alive, and whether or not a reunion between the two occurs.

Grandfather Bolte

Grandfather Bolte is the father of Dora, and the grandfather of Agatha and Georgie. Bolte is a kind, practical man, who is known as the best tracker around. He refuses to let Agatha waste her money on college, knowing that girls and men alike in that day and age only see education for women as a sham to find a husband. He is deeply saddened by Agatha's death, and pays Billy to accompany Georgie on her own quest to determine the truth for herself. Grandfather Bolte passes away while Georgie is on her journey.



Dora

Dora Burkhardt is the mother of Agatha and Georgie, and is the daughter of Grandfather Bolte. Dora is a practical woman who loves her family deeply, and has lived as a single parent for ten years after having been abandoned by her husband. She later remarries Sheriff McCabe.

Sheriff McCabe

Sheriff McCabe is the local law enforcement for Placid, Wisconsin, and its surrounding environs. He is tough, yet kind, and is dedicated to his work in law enforcement. He is the father of Billy McCabe, and is the man who first goes after Agatha when she goes missing. It is Sheriff McCabe who discovers Darlene's body on Miller Road eight miles past Dog Hollow, and who brings it back to Placid for identification. Sheriff McCabe later marries Dora.

Mr. Garrow

Mr. Garrow is a disreputable farmer who lives near Dog Hollow, operating an illegal ring of counterfeiters. He is cruel and bloodthirsty, and badly injures Billy. He has his revolver shot out of his hand, and is scared off by Georgie, thus saving Billy's life.

Darlene

Darlene Garrow is the beautiful and sweet daughter of Mr. Garrow, who meets Agatha when Agatha is traveling through. Darlene plans to elope, but is blocked by her father. Sensing a kindred spirit in Darlene, Agatha gives Darlene her gown for use as a wedding dress. Darlene later accidentally kills herself when she attempts to run away from her father.

Roy

Roy is Mr. Garrow's disgusting and coldblooded bowler hat-wearing associate in the counterfeiting ring. He has his thumb shot off by Georgie when he attempts to help Garrow kill Billy and find Georgie.



Symbols and Symbolism

Feathers

Bird feathers –especially from wild pigeons –are seen throughout the novel. Symbolically, they represent flight and freedom in some instances, and imprisonment and death, ironically, in others. In the Seneca Indian story, feathers are followed as a path in life, with feathers representing choices and freedom. Agatha is later observed to be following her path in life, feather by feather, in free flight to make her own choices. Georgie later comes across a mass of feathers while pursuing her sister's trail. The area had previously been a camp not for pigeoners, but for city-based hunters interested in the birds only for their carcasses. The birds have been trapped and wrongfully exploited in this instance, and their feathers represent, in irony, that which could not save them – flight.

Pigeons

Pigeons, especially wild pigeons, are frequently seen in the novel as symbols of freedom and flight. Agatha looks with envy upon the arrival and departure of pigeons as they move freely from one place to the next. She longs to have that kind of freedom, to go somewhere else. When she leaves town, she hops in with some pigeoners who are following the trail of the pigeons. In essence, Agatha symbolically becomes a part of the flock, and flies to freedom.

Books

Books are carefully kept, read, and collected by Benjamin Olmstead at his hotel. Books are also voraciously read and studied by Agatha. Benjamin's culture and knowledge, gained in large part from books, are one of the reasons that Agatha falls for Benjamin. He allows her unchecked access to the books, and supports her efforts to learn more things and educate herself.

Agatha's book

Agatha's book is a large volume full of illustrations and poetic descriptions of birds. It is clear that one of her dreams is to write about birds, a dream which Benjamin gladly and happily supports. Agatha's book is first encountered by Georgie when she goes to meet with Benjamin over her sister's kiss with Billy.



Ball gown

A blue-green ball gown is created for Agatha by Dora to be worn at the New Year's Ball at the Olmstead Hotel. Agatha later gives the dress to Darlene when she senses a kindred spirit in Darlene, and knowing that Darlene does not have a wedding dress. Darlene sweetly cuts some of the fabric from the gown to give to her younger sister for use as a ribbon. When Darlene is accidentally killed, the gown becomes the feature which confirms in Dora's mind that Darlene is instead Agatha.

"The Prairie Traveller"

"The Prairie Traveller: A Hand-Book for Overland Expeditions" is a survival manual by U.S. Army Captain Randolph B. Marcy that is kept in Georgie's house. She consults and brings the book along on her adventure to find her sister, gleaning important and useful information from it, such as what to pack for the trip, and how. The book becomes a projectile against the cougar, and is later destroyed by Roy.

Henry Repeating Rifle

A Henry Repeating Rifle is carried by Billy on his journey with Georgie. The rifle can fire seven shots, the shells of which are ejected by level-reloading action. Georgie puts the gun to good use in saving Billy's life when she shoots Roy in the thumb, shoots Garrow's revolver out of his hand, and drives both men off.

Springfield Rifle

A Springfield Rifle is wielded by Georgie in target practice, and on her journey to find out the truth about Agatha. Georgie's training with the Springfield Rifle – a single-shot, muzzle-loading weapon – means her accuracy is exceptional, and helps her to be able to later wield the Henry Repeating Rifle to save Billy's life. The rifle is damaged when she shoots it out of Roy's hand, taking his thumb along with it.

Revolver

A revolver – a six-shot pistol – is carried by Garrow as he attempts to find Georgie and kill Billy. Georgie shoots the revolver out of Garrow's hand to save Billy, knocking Garrow over and scaring him away.

Telegrams

Telegrams are sent by wire at Western Union Telegraph offices between the various towns in and around Dog Hollow, including Placid. Billy sends telegrams back to Placid

as he and Georgie travel, letting his father and Grandfather Bolte know about the progress they are making, and what their plans are.



Settings

Placid

Placid is a small town in Wisconsin, near the Wisconsin River, and is home to Georgie, Agatha, their family, as well as to the McCabes and Benjamin Olmstead. Placid has justly earned its name: it is a quiet, peaceful town full of good and kind people. Placid is everything that Georgie wants out of life, but it is not enough to make her sister, Agatha, happy. For Agatha, Placid does not give her enough opportunities (though her mind changes when she falls for Benjamin Olmstead, who can offer her more).

The symbolic importance of the name “Placid” itself, meaning peaceful, perfect, and calm –is clearly a stand-in for the Garden of Eden and childhood. Georgie’s life has been full of primarily good things, and her leaving Placid –leaving Eden –will expose her to the horrors of the world. As she moves into her teenage years (essentially womanhood in the 1800s), she will also leave her placid childhood behind.

Dog Hollow

Dog Hollow, Wisconsin, is a town located about two days’ ride from Placid. Dog Hollow appears to be a little larger than Placid, and is where the pigeoners and hunters have traveled to in order to follow the pigeons, along with Agatha. It is eight miles beyond Dog Hollow where Darlene’s body is found and believed to be Agatha’s; and it is to Dog Hollow that Georgie and Billy travel to get to the truth behind Agatha’s disappearance. In Dog Hollow, Georgie learns the name of the man traveling with Agatha, and later learns the man had business with the Garrows out beyond Miller Road on Old Line.

Old Line

Old Line is an old road that leaves and later rejoins Miller Road near Dog Hollow, Wisconsin. Old Line is a rocky and difficult path to traverse, as it leads up into the hills near Smoke River. It is along the Old Line that the Garrows have their farm, beyond which the Old Line nearly disappears in the woods.

Miller Road

Miller Road is a major thoroughfare that runs through the towns of Placid and Dog Hollow, and beyond. It is along Miller Road, eight miles outside of Dog Hollow, that Darlene’s body is discovered and mistaken for Agatha. It is also along Miller Road that Georgie and Billy travel in order to reach Dog Hollow, and later, where Georgie brings the injured Billy to find Benjamin Olmstead traveling to Dog Hollow.

Garrow Farm

The Garrow Farm is located on Old Line, off of Miller Road, near Dog Hollow, Wisconsin. The farm is located on the other side of the hills, rather than overlooking the river, as though it is intended that the farm be hidden. Its crops are terraced rather than arrayed across open fields. It is at the Garrow Farm that Agatha meets and gives her ball gown to Darlene for use as a wedding dress; and it is at the Garrow Farm that Georgie and Billy ask after Agatha. It is also while at the extent of the Garrow Farm that Georgie stumbles upon Mr. Garrow's counterfeiting operation in a cave in some rocky hills.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of age is an important theme in the novel “One Came Home” by Amy Timberlake. Coming of age involves the personal, spiritual, moral, or emotional growth and maturation of an individual often based on real world experiences, events, or mistakes. In the novel, it is Georgie who comes of age in many ways.

When the novel begins, Georgie is a sweet, intelligent, practical, and pretty thirteen year-old girl who has spent nearly her entire life in Placid, Wisconsin. She has been raised to tend the house, the store, and to handle herself outdoors with firearms. Though she has limited experience of the world beyond Placid, she is nevertheless content and happy with her own world. However, the departure and supposed death of Agatha shakes the town up, and shakes Georgie to her core.

Georgie believes that Agatha is not dead, and so sets out to find her, even though she has only ever been to one other town besides Placid. She is completely inexperienced in life outside of Placid, and so she believes she will get along with a survival guidebook and her instincts. She is later joined by Billy, and though she gets to the truth of Billy’s part in Agatha’s leaving, she does not come to any solid answers about Agatha herself.

Georgie believes at first that her journey has been for nothing, but then realizes how much she has grown as a person. She is now more courageous and confident in herself, having faced down counterfeiters, cougars, and death. She has become more self-reliant, independent, and capable in handling difficult situations and experiences beyond her immediate control, such as when Garrow attempts to find and kill her.

She also realizes she is now a more moral person, having seen the darker side of mankind through illegal activities and cold-blooded behavior. This is true not only of Garrow, but of Billy. While Billy is handsome, his self-centeredness and narcissism are heavily-detering features that first drive away Agatha, and later, Georgie. She has likewise come to value her family even more than she did before, as well as to appreciate her home in Placid as she never has before.

Likewise, Georgie comes to understand that she and her sister are two different people. While Agatha may find Placid too small for her, her desire to live elsewhere doesn’t mean she doesn’t love Georgie any less. Georgie, likewise, realizes that everything she herself wants in life is in Placid –and this doesn’t diminish her relationship with her sister at all.

Finally, Georgie has learned to be more careful, and more considerate, when dealing with certain situations. She now considers her telling Benjamin about the kiss between Billy and Agatha to have been a mistake, and that she should have approached Agatha



first, for the truth. Nevertheless, she endeavors to make things right by telling Benjamin the truth about Billy's motives, and later, carrying to Benjamin Agatha's apologies.

Feminism

Feminism is an important theme in the novel "One Came Home" by Amy Timberlake. In the novel, the author advances feminism in both subtle and overt ways, and defines feminism through the events of the novel as not only equality between the sexes, but as the ability for women to make their own choices and choose their own paths in life.

Though Agatha comes from Placid, a small town where marriage, children, homemaking, and perhaps working in a store or local business is the extent of life possibilities, she has bigger dreams which include an education, and doing something important. Agatha's options appear incredibly limited, especially with Billy, who wants to marry Agatha and homestead with her in Minnesota. Agatha takes her destiny into her own hands by repeatedly turning down Billy's proposals of marriage, infuriating Billy.

Agatha has saved up enough money for tuition for one year of college, for which she asks her grandfather permission to attend. Bolte refuses, saying that college is not what Agatha believes it to be. At first, the contemporary reader will see this as sexism, but as Agatha later finds out, this is not the case. College is viewed by both men and women primarily as a way for women to find husbands. Education takes a distant second. Agatha relates later on in the novel that her grandfather was completely right. The reader realizes that it is not Bolte that is sexist, but the college education system.

Agatha once again takes her destiny in her own hands by choosing to be courted by Benjamin Olmstead, and ultimately, falling for him and agreeing to marry him –at her choice. She sees how deeply Benjamin cares for her, and wants to help her pursue her dreams. She achieves this in large part by learning from him and studying with his library –and beginning her own book about birds. When Billy compromises Agatha's future, she sets out on her own for Madison, where she not only seeks to attend school, but works as a clerk in a store, all of it her choice.

Georgie herself is one to make her own choices and decisions as well, and is entreated to an equality that many girls elsewhere at the time do not have. Georgie is taught to shoot weapons, and is given responsibilities at the family store, whereas many other girls are confined entirely to feminine and domestic activities at her age. Georgie's insistence on going to discover what has truly become of Agatha is not met with heavyhandedness, but indulgence.

During the trip, it is Georgie who faces down a cougar and counterfeiters and saves Billy's life by driving off the counterfeiters and bringing him to Miller Road –all things that, given the times, Billy should be doing for Georgie, rather than Georgie for Billy. Indeed, the efforts of Georgie and Billy are not decided upon by Billy, but by Georgie. When Georgie returns to Placid, it is Georgie's decision to put down her rifle and never pick it up again, and to seek a more quiet life in Placid.



Journey

Journey forms an important theme in the novel “One Came Home” by Amy Timberlake. In novels, journeys are far more than merely travel or physical destination, but are about what is learned and experienced along the way. While the journey in the novel is ostensibly to travel to Dog Hollow and determine whether or not Agatha is truly dead, it has three other deeper purposes.

First, the journey serves as a coming of age process for Georgie. Georgie, who is relatively naïve and inexperienced in the world beyond Placid when the novel begins, ends up in situations she would have never dreamt of before. She must face down a cougar, bloodthirsty counterfeiters, and save Billy’s life by taking the lead after he is injured. She likewise comes to learn that, just because someone like Billy is handsome, doesn’t mean he is a good person. Indeed, her experience with Garrow and Roy underscore this point, that not all people are good at heart. The journey also makes her reflect on her own actions and mistakes, such as having told Benjamin about the kiss between Agatha and Billy without confronting Agatha, first.

Second, the journey is not just a trip to determine whether or not Agatha is dead, but why she left. As Georgie travels along, she reflects on, and learns more about the past and its implications on the present. She learns that Agatha did indeed have real feelings for Benjamin, and was looking forward to marrying him. She learns that the kiss between Agatha and Billy was totally unwanted by Agatha, and that Benjamin’s subsequent breaking off of the engagement was the final straw for Agatha, who heartbroken and embarrassed, leaves town. She explains this drove her to want to study at a university, and that she gave up her ball gown to Darlene.

Third, the journey is an attempt by Billy to somehow both excuse his part in things, and also to attempt to make some half-hearted attempt at redeeming himself. Billy spends much of the journey giving Georgie half-truths and vague explanations for not only why he is on the trip, but for his part in things as well. At other times, he outright lies to Georgie, inventing excuses for himself and his past actions. Billy, believing he will die, finally comes clean, telling Georgie that he hoped the kiss between he and Agatha would end Agatha’s marriage to Benjamin, and would bring Agatha back to him. The plan only half-worked, and his apology only seems to be half-sincere at best.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “One Came Home” by Amy Timberlake. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in various ways.

With their father gone for ten years –more or less abandoning them –Georgie and Agatha both place great emphasis and value on their mother and grandfather, and



especially on each other. Georgie, more so than anyone else, looks up to her sister, and considers Agatha not only her sister, but something akin to her best friend. They spend as much time as they can with each other, though as Agatha ages and begins spending more and more time with Billy, Georgie becomes jealous and worried.

Georgie is especially worried that Agatha will move away with Billy, for it is no secret that Billy dreams of homesteading in Minnesota. Georgie is later thrilled when Agatha becomes engaged to Benjamin Olmstead, because it means her sister will be remaining in town. However, Georgie also comes to suspect that her sister has less-than-honorable intentions, using Benjamin for his library. She later learns this is far from true, however. When she sees Agatha and Billy kiss, she is horrified at what has happened, and seeks out Benjamin to tell him.

When Benjamin breaks off his marriage plans with Agatha, Agatha –heartbroken and humiliated –leaves town and is later believed dead. Georgie is heartbroken herself at this, and she secretly blames herself for what happened. This is in large part why she can't accept the fact that Agatha might be dead, and so commits herself –out of love –to finding the truth out about Agatha, which she eventually does.

Georgie learns that Benjamin had intended to do everything he could to make Agatha's dreams come true, and this was especially important to Agatha after she was denied the chance to go to college by her grandfather. Her grandfather, despite the modern conceptions of the reader, was not acting out of a place of close-mindedness, but out of genuine concern and understanding for Agatha. Bolte knew that colleges in that day and age were less interested in educated women than finding wives for them. Women themselves went to school not for degrees, but for husbands. Benjamin, learned and with a good library, could actually help to educate Agatha in the way she wished to be educated. Agatha learns in Madison that her grandfather was right.

Having learned of all of the tragedy befalling her family –from the disappearance and apparent death of Agatha, to the subsequent death of Bolte –Aunt Cleo leaves New York to move to Wisconsin to be with her family. Georgie is thrilled to learn that Agatha is alive, and that her family is expanding not only due to Aunt Cleo's arrival, but Dora's marriage to Sheriff McCabe.

Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel "One Came Home" by Amy Timberlake. Mystery –the unknown –provides a constant measure of suspense and drama as the plot of the novel unfolds. There are no shortage of mysteries and questions raised, all revolving around the disappearance and apparent death of Agatha.

When the novel begins, so do the mysteries. Georgie's contention that a funeral is being held for her sister whom she does not believe is dead confounds the reader, and unveils the mystery of Agatha's disappearance and death. First, Georgie questions whether or



not her sister is actually dead, and questions whether or not her grandfather should have been the one to go after Agatha.

This brings to mind numerous questions and mysteries regarding Agatha's departure. First, why did she leave at all? Second, why did she choose to leave with pigeons? Third, if the body discovered was indeed Agatha's, why was she wearing the blue-green ball gown intended for only special occasions on a lonely stretch of road near Dog Hollow? Given that the dress is the only thing used to truly identify the body, Georgie wonders if, in fact, the body is Agatha's at all, and if Agatha is actually alive somewhere else.

Other mysteries ultimately pop up in conjunction with Georgie's investigation. Some of these mysteries are not fully solved –such as who exactly Metcalf is, and what exactly his business with Garrow is (though it is suspected it has to do with Garrow's counterfeiting operation). Other mysteries also come to the fore –such as whether or not, as Mrs. Garrow contends, Darlene's death was truly accidental and self-inflicted, or whether her death was actually murder at the hands of Mr. Garrow.

Finally, there is the mystery of why Billy has decided to accompany Georgie on her journey. His appearance on the journey also brings to question his role in the past as well –including the kiss that Georgie saw shared between both him and Agatha, and his engagement to Polly at the same time. Billy is not forthcoming with answers until the very end of the journey when he believes he is dying.

Styles

Point of View

Amy Timberlake tells her novel “One Came Home” from the first-person, omniscient point of view of Georgie Burkhardt, the principal protagonist. It seems that Georgie is relating her personal story to a close friend as she addresses the reader as “you” at various places. Since Georgie is making a personal decision as a young woman to tell her experiences, the first-person narrative point of view supports one of the he novel's themes about feminism.

Language and Meaning

“One Came Home” by Amy Timberlake is written in language that is historically accurate. The language which the author chooses keeps in line with the 13 year-old main character Georgie's level of education. For example, Georgie uses words such as firmament, beleaguer, infinitesimally, etc. in her casual conversation. Therefore, some of the vernacular that was common by mid-nineteenth century standards might be obscure to the novel's targeted young adult audience of today.

Structure

Amy Timberlake divides her novel “One Came Home” into twenty-four chapters. Each chapter deals with a specific segment of the plot, with most being wholly dedicated to the present, while some are dedicated nearly entirely to past events or occurrences. This simple and straightforward layout of the novel in terms of chapter structure allows the reader to pay attention on the plot and allows focus on past and present events as those weave back and forth in the chapters. This also allows the author to deepen certain mysteries, explain others, and create new mysteries as the present unfolds against the past –such as Billy's true motives for the kiss with Agatha.



Quotes

So it comes to this, I remember thinking on Wednesday, June 7, 1871. The date sticks in my mind because it was the day of my sister's first funeral and I knew it wasn't her last –which is why I left.

-- Georgie (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, Georgie sets the stage for the entire novel to follow. Her sister, Agatha, is buried at the beginning of the novel –though Georgie believes her sister is not actually dead, which is why she embarks on a journey to find out the truth behind her sister's disappearance.

I wanted to be like Agatha. Wherever she was. And I would find her.

-- Georgie (Chapter 3 paragraph 2)

Importance: Georgie is explaining two very important things. First, she reveals just how much she loves and admires Agatha to the point of wanting to be like her. This demonstrates the familial loyalty between them. Also, Georgie is revealing the depth of her determination to find the sister that she loves so very much.

Feather by feather she picked out her path.

-- Georgie (Chapter 7 paragraph 85)

Importance: Georgia is referring to the feathers in a Seneca Indian story. Feathers are symbols of flight and freedom. Each feather is a metaphor for each life choice that Agatha makes. Her choices are acts of freedom that stem from her self-determination. Agatha's leaving the village was one such choice.

Whatever Billy was hiding, it was not a meeting with Agatha. It was something else.

-- Georgie (Chapter 10 paragraph 47)

Importance: Georgie quickly begins to suspect Billy's motives for coming along on the trip. She knows he is hiding something. This distrust makes her suspicious of his character as a person.

It was a nowhere place. It wasn't even in Dog Hollow. It was a half day's ride out of Dog Hollow.

-- Georgie (Chapter 12 paragraph 1)

Importance: Georgie and Billy come across the place where the body of who is presumed to be Agatha was found. There is nothing unusual or remarkable about the place, which somehow disappoints Georgie. She believes there should be more to it because Agatha was such an important person to her.

Knowing things does not mean you understand them.

-- Georgie (Chapter 12 paragraph 13)



Importance: From the beginning, Georgie has wanted to know whether or not Agatha is really dead. At this point, she has come to believe that Agatha is dead; however, she does not understand why she is dead.

I will never rest easily until I know what happened. If this amounts to nothing, I will go home.

-- Georgie (Chapter 14 paragraph 3)

Importance: Despite believing that Agatha is probably dead, Georgie now needs to understand why. To do this, she will have to seek out information from the Garrows. If this lead goes nowhere, then she will admit defeat and go home –but she will at least try, first. Here, Georgie’s love for her sister and her determination are underscored by her desire for the truth.

If this is made from Agatha’s dress, how did it come to be in that little girl’s hair?

-- Billy (Chapter 15 paragraph 21)

Importance: Billy questions how a ribbon, made from Agatha’s dress, came to be in the hair of one of the daughters of the Garrows. Georgie believes this is proof that Agatha did indeed come to the Garrow Farm, and that the Garrows are lying about having seen Agatha. This is enough for Georgie to want to continue to find answers.

Eventually, there’s nothing to be done with a body but bury it.

-- Georgie (Chapter 20 paragraph 1)

Importance: At home, Georgie reflects not merely on burying her grandfather, but on letting the past go. What has happened to Agatha has happened, and the past must be let go, or symbolically buried in this explanation. There are only so many answers, and only so much now that can be done –and that is for Georgie to move on.

Feather by feather, she had made her way.

-- Georgie (Chapter 23 paragraph 36)

Importance: Here, Georgie confirms that not only is Agatha alive, but that she has made her own choices and found her own way –in Madison. Georgie and her family are all thrilled that Agatha is alive, having determined her own life. This further underscores the theme of feminism in the novel, and how important it is that the lives people live are their own.