

# **The Story of Edgar Sawtelle: A Novel Study Guide**

**The Story of Edgar Sawtelle: A Novel by David  
Wroblewski**

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## Plot Summary

David Wroblewski's "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" has been described as a modern American retelling of Shakespeare's "Hamlet." The novel deals with the life and events surrounding Edgar Sawtelle, a mute teenager who has the special ability to wordlessly communicate with dogs through hand signs.

Edgar lives in northern Wisconsin with his mother Trudy and father Gar on the Sawtelle family farm where they raise a fictional breed of dogs. Edgar's Uncle Claude comes to stay at the farm for a while following his leaving the Navy. However, old animosity between Gar and his brother Claude resurfaces, resulting in Claude's murdering Gar.

Gar's ghost appears to his son and Edgar is determined to confront his uncle, but accidentally kills family friend and local veterinarian Doctor Papineau. Edgar then flees with three dogs into the wilderness, ultimately returning home determined to evict his uncle. Yet in the end, Edgar is killed by Claude and Claude is killed by a collapsing barn. Many of the dogs then head out into the wilderness like Edgar had before, determined to take their chances.

# Prologue

## Prologue Summary

In 1952, in Pusan, South Korea, an unidentified male in a Navy peacoat seeks out an old herbalist. He asks the herbalist if there is a kind of poison that can be administered to a rat, that would kill the rat instantly, making sure the other rats are unaware anything has happened. The herbalist suggest arsenic, but the unidentified Navy male wants something quicker, stronger, and without side effects. The herbalist then kills a dog with another unknown poison, killing the dog instantly. He gives the man the poison, who gives the herbalist penicillin in exchange.

## Prologue Analysis

The stage is set for the novel with the appearance of a Navy seaman who obtains a vial of lethal poison while stationed in Korea. Readers who are aware with Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and the understanding that "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" is an American retelling of the novel will immediately recognized the dark and dangerous act of securing poison, as Hamlet's father is killed by poison. The careless foreign attitude with dogs (using one dog to test the efficacy of the poison) is contrasted later with the tender care and love for dogs exhibited by the Sawtelle family, who raise them.



# A Handful of Leaves

## A Handful of Leaves Summary

Edgar's grandfather John buys the Wisconsin land that becomes the family farm in 1919. John and his wife begin raising a new breed of dog on their farm after John reads about Gregor Mendel's experiments with crossbreeding peas.

John also wonders about the former owner, Schultz, who left the farm after four years because he was lonely. The land is described as being somehow not quite right. John and Mary have two sons who are very different from one another. One of the sons, Gar, is Edgar's father. Edgar's mother is Trudy, a single foster child. They are friends with local veterinarian, Dr. Papineau. Trudy ends up managing the dogs and training them. She has two miscarriages and a stillborn baby before Edgar is born in May, 1958.

## A Handful of Leaves Analysis

A history of the Sawtelle family is presented, along with the information that the dog breed they raise they have invented. It is also hinted at in this chapter that the land the Sawtelles have purchased is somehow not right, and the reader senses herein that the Sawtelle rootedness to the spot of land will somehow affect them in the future, more than likely negatively.

# Almondine

## Almondine Summary

Almondine is the dog that Trudy and Gar keep as their own. Almondine believes something is going to happen in the house, but no matter how hard she looks, Almondine can never figure out what is going on.

Almondine, through her investigations, discovers that baby Edgar cannot speak. He doesn't make any sounds at all. Almondine realizes that this is what has been bothering her.

## Almondine Analysis

Almondine is introduced in the third chapter. Almondine likewise knows acutely that something is not quite right, with the house or with Edgar who cannot speak like his parents. Almondine's appearance is especially important because she becomes a guardian for Edgar.





# Signs

## Signs Summary

Almondine assumes the air of guardian for Edgar, just as Gar and Trudy worry that Edgar will never speak.

One day, a woman named Louisa Wilkes, an aunt of the neighbors, comes to see Trudy at the behest of Ida Paine, who runs a local store. Louisa is enamored with her nephew's dog, Ben, because she feels there is something different about the breed. Louisa also tells Trudy that Edgar may not be able to speak, but he'll have all of his other faculties. She explains to Trudy that children are never too young to learn language.

Louisa then goes on to demonstrate to both Trudy and Gar the ways of making simple signs in order to begin building a language with Edgar.

## Signs Analysis

The fourth chapter proves important in the rearing of Edgar, because Trudy discovers that she can wordlessly communicate with Edgar through hand signs. This wordless communication seals a bond between Edgar and his other, as well as between Edgar and the dogs, that will prove important in coming chapters.

# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar's earliest memory is of Almondine sniffing him. Most of his major memories from infancy and early childhood revolve around dogs in one way or another. Edgar watches over the litters of puppies, and creates names for them in his mind.

Another memory is that of a bad storm that peels away a third of the roof of the barn. Before the storm hits, Edgar collects a letter, postmarked Portsmouth, Virginia, from the mailman.

## Edgar Analysis

Edgar is given the task of naming newborn puppies. He chooses names that have important and symbolic meaning to them. A storm likewise serves a symbolic omen of coming events. The barn roof is damaged, thereby damaging the overall integrity of the barn. A letter is received from Portsmouth, which serves to threaten the cohesive integrity of the Sawtelle family.



# Every Nook and Cranny

## Every Nook and Cranny Summary

Gar goes to pick up his brother, Claude, who is leaving the Navy and will be staying with them until he finds a place of his own. Claude is not happy to be back on the family farm, for he didn't get along well with Edgar's grandfather. But rather than staying in the house the first night, Claude gets drunk and passes out in the barn. Claude explains to Edgar that he is tired of cramped and confined spaces, and wants to be outside. Claude consents to helping repair the barn roof and helping around the farm.

## Every Nook and Cranny Analysis

The letter reveals that Gar's brother Claude is coming home after having served in the Navy. Animosity between the brothers is clear from the start. Claude is not happy to be home, and is not happy having to submit to his brother's wishes.



# The Stray

## The Stray Summary

On a walk around the property, Edgar comes across a stray dog. Gar calls around, but no one has reported a missing dog. Gar and Edgar see the dog again a few days later, and realize it is a purebred German Shepherd. They give the dog some meat to eat. Claude has meanwhile commenced work on the barn roof. Claude believes Gar should administer a dose of strychnine to the stray dog in order to kill it, or it might disrupt or fight with the other dogs. Trudy agrees, but Gar and Edgar disagree. They decide to lure the dog in to see if they can catch it, and then they believe they will bring it to an animal rescue shelter.

Over time, Gar and Claude begin arguing. Claude also tells Edgar that Gar in his younger years was wild and a fighter. Gar also had a dog named Forte, who was just as wild and combative as Gar. Gar ultimately ended up shooting Forte, but Edgar does not believe it.

Edgar and Almondine decide to hold a vigil to see if they can spot the stray. Eventually, he does, and coaxes the stray to eat from his hand. The stray begins leaving gifts, such as old trash, in front of the house. He decides to call the stray dog Forte. Edgar also thwarts an attempt by Uncle Claude to kill Forte. For the rest of the summer and into the fall, Edgar continues feeding Forte.

## The Stray Analysis

The differences between Gar and Claude are clear to Edgar. Claude wants to kill a stray dog, while Gar wants to bring it in. Edgar and Gar continue feeding the stray throughout the summer, winning out over Claude. Claude's willingness to simply shoot a dog is disconcerting to Edgar, whose suspicions and repulsion to Claude continue to grow.



# The Litter

## The Litter Summary

One of the mother dogs, Iris, is about to give birth to a litter. Gar asks Edgar if Edgar would like the litter to be his. Edgar happily agrees to take on the responsibility. He keeps watch over Iris the next few days as Iris nears birth. Gar instructs his son on how to help Iris with the birth. Four girls and three boy puppies are born. Edgar spends the night with Almondine and the dictionary in the search for names for the pups.

## The Litter Analysis

Gar gives Edgar his own litter of puppies. This act will prove compelling and important in future chapters. Edgar is happy to take on the job of caring for and training an entire litter. Almondine, faithful and loyal as always, continues watching out for Edgar.



# Essence

## Essence Summary

Edgar, Gar, Trudy, and Claude seem to be getting along relatively well in late October. Edgar's puppies are now four months old and he is training them. As part of Claude's responsibilities, he begins looking after the next litter of puppies. Claude's careless style of training the dogs is the source of much contention between him and Gar. Arguments between the two become more frequent and more severe, despite Trudy's best attempts to calm them down. Gar teaches Edgar how to drive Alice, the tractor. He also disapproves of Claude cutting wood in the rain, trying to teach him how to do things properly. But Trudy is upset, believing that Gar needs to let Claude live his own life.

Edgar, watching the news, learns about Starchild Colony on the Canadian side of Lake Superior, run by Alexandra Honeywell, a beautiful woman.

Edgar also oversees Claude and Gar physically grapple one night, with Gar getting the better of Claude. Gar then throws the truck keys in the snow, and Claude takes off.

## Essence Analysis

The animosity between Gar and Claude eventually spills over into a fistfight, in which Gar gets the better of Claude. Claude storms off the farm. In this chapter, Edgar also learns about Starchild Colony, which will prove intrinsic to the plot further along in the novel.

# A Thin Sigh

## A Thin Sigh Summary

Trudy explains to Edgar that she and Gar tried to help Claude out, but it isn't working. She explains that there has been some sort of rivalry between both Gar and Claude since they were young. Claude begins doing odd jobs and working for Doctor Papineau as well, and stays in town. Life on the farm returns to normal.

Among the names that Edgar has given to his puppies include Essay, Baboo, Finch, and Tinder. Essay is a smart female dog; Finch is a quiet, watchful male. Edgar trains his dogs, and then on break, heads toward the workshop entrance. His father is lying face down, motionless on the floor. There is no blood, no sign of injury, and his father is uncommunicative. Edgar tries to call 911, but he cannot do so because he cannot speak.

## A Thin Sigh Analysis

Trudy confirms that Claude will not be living on the farm anymore, and that he will be working for local veterinarian, Doctor Papineau, in a town like he lived in when he was younger. With Claude's departure, life returns to normal and Edgar focuses on training his dogs. Yet Edgar discovers his father dead and the reader immediately reflects on the purchase of poison in South Korea in 1952.



# Storm

## Storm Summary

Doctor Papineau is driving by and sees the door to the workshop swinging open, so he stops to shut it and finds Edgar and Gar. Papineau brings Edgar into the house, and contacts all the appropriate authorities. Trudy is shaken when she returns home, but retains her poise in order to sign with Edgar. She nevertheless ends up breaking down.

She also is determined to carry on the chores and activities as normal with Edgar, in order to prove that they can maintain the place without Gar. Their lives depend on it.

## Storm Analysis

Claude's appearance has ruptured the Sawtelle family, and Gar's death has damaged its structural integrity. Yet Trudy and Edgar are determined to carry on and work on the farm despite Gar's absence. It was difficult work for the three of them, but Edgar and Trudy believe they can get on alone. This proves important to the plot in the coming several chapters.



# Funeral

## Funeral Summary

Papineau makes dinner for Gar and Trudy, and spends the night. Trudy makes more calls, among them, Claude. Trudy and Gar spend the night in the living room. The next morning, they head out to handle chores and Papineau leaves. Trudy and Gar then head into town to the police station to talk to Glen Papineau, the doctor's son and sheriff.

Glen, Trudy, and Gar recount the events of the day before. They return home, and Edgar begins assuming more responsibilities on the farm. It is revealed that Tinder appears to be the most obedient of the pups that Edgar is raising.

Claude does not attend Gar's funeral services, Edgar notices. But Claude shows up later at the burial.

## Funeral Analysis

Gar is buried, and Doctor Papineau is revealed as a loyal Sawtelle family friend. Edgar and Trudy begin work on the farm, and Edgar voluntarily begins doing more work in order to make up for his father's absence, and to help his mother. Edgar will come to shoulder much of the responsibility.



# The Letters from Fortunate Fields

## The Letters from Fortunate Fields Summary

Through the spring, life continues on. Edgar notices his mother has days where she is normal and happy, and days where she is sad and depressed. The amount of work to be done on the farm in the spring is incredible. They decide to split up chores rather than do everything together. With Edgar four years away from graduating high school, Trudy wants him to consider their selling the dogs and the farm and living in town. Edgar will have none of it.

He finds a cache of old newspaper articles and letters with success and life-saving stories about the dogs that Edgar's family has raised. There is also a letter which describes Edgar's grandfather's quest to create a new breed of dog as near-impossible. Nevertheless, the author of the letter, Mr. Brooks, had agreed to inspect the breeding stock that Edgar's grandfather had owned. He also learns that a dog's training and breeding were what make the dogs so valuable.

## The Letters from Fortunate Fields Analysis

As work on the farm continues, Edgar begins looking into his family's past, and learns about his grandfather's journey to create the breed of dog his family has become famous for raising. Edgar's grandfather's refusal to give up helps to steel Edgar's own determination not to give up.

# Lessons and Dreams

## Lessons and Dreams Summary

Edgar dreams of his father, and his mother helps teach Edgar how to train the dogs. Dr. Papineau comes by for dinner before heading to Florida for his yearly vacation. He is impressed with how Edgar and Trudy are handling the farm. Dr. Papineau suggests hiring on Claude in order to make sure the farm continues to function well, in order to protect his investment. Trudy is horrified at the suggestion, and will hear none of it.

## Lessons and Dreams Analysis

Early attempts to increase the breeding of the dogs are rejected by Trudy, who wants to keep the raising of the dogs a family operation. This also steels Edgar's resolve to help make his mother's determination successful, in that they can handle the farm on their own.

# Almondine

## Almondine Summary

Almondine is aware that Gar is gone. She spends time looking for him, spends time detecting his scent, but she can never find Gar. By the spring, his scent fades, and Almondine must accept that Gar is simply gone.

## Almondine Analysis

Almondine handles Gar's loss by looking for him, cannot find him, and must accept that he is gone. The simple love and loyalty of Almondine is heartbreaking because she spends so much of her life looking for answers, and finds few.

# The Fight

## The Fight Summary

Trudy and Edgar go see Doctor Frost. Trudy has developed pneumonia. Trudy will have to stay away from Edgar until she is better. The full weight of running the farm now falls on Edgar, who does everything from chores and cooking to caring for and training the dogs. Trudy is frustrated that she cannot help her son, and that she is bedridden.

When a dog fight breaks out, Edgar intervenes to break it up. One dog, Epi, acting on instinct, turns on Edgar and bites him twice, putting a gash in his forearm. Finch is also injured. Almondine intervenes on Edgar's behalf, chasing Epi away. Out of desperation, Edgar tells Trudy to call Claude.

## The Fight Analysis

Between an injury to Edgar's hand and Trudy's pneumonia, Trudy realizes that she must call Claude to come in to help on the farm. Even though Edgar has assumed all of the responsibilities on the farm, he is one person, and one person is not enough.



# Epi's Stand

## Epi's Stand Summary

Claude arrives to help with the dogs. He and Edgar catch Epi, sedate her, and then Claude commences patching up Epi. He then patches up Finch.

## Epi's Stand Analysis

Claude uses his skills from working with Doctor Papineau to help treat the dogs. He also assists Edgar in helping to handle chores, but Edgar is very suspicious and untrusting of his uncle.



# Courtship

## Courtship Summary

Claude begins regularly helping out at the farm as Trudy recovers. Trudy also tells Edgar that he is very much like his father, in his movements and in his actions. Claude has proposed marriage to Trudy, but Trudy has not yet accepted.

One night, the dogs in the kennel begin barking wildly, and then fall silent. Edgar decides to go see what has riled them up.

## Courtship Analysis

Claude continues helping out at the farm regularly. Claude even goes so far as to propose to Trudy, but Trudy has not accepted the proposal. Edgar, meanwhile, is continually deterred by Claude's presence. Edgar's investigative curiosity is piqued by a series of mysterious events, including one night where the dogs begin barking, and then cease barking suddenly.



# In the Rain

## In the Rain Summary

Edgar heads over to the kennels and the barn. There, he sees a man standing in the rain, but doesn't believe it at first. The figure tells Edgar to release a dog, which he does. The dog -Essay -heads over to where the figure stood. The figure is Edgar's father, who signs Edgar to search the house before the rain stops. The search is to find something that someone thinks is lost forever. Edgar's father also tells him that Trudy will accept Claude's proposal because she is alone.

Edgar searches through the workshop and finds a small plastic syringe, three-quarters empty. Edgar's father tells him to remember him, and to find something else which Edgar is not able to completely understand.

## In the Rain Analysis

Edgar sees his father's ghost on the farm in Wisconsin, just as Hamlet sees his father's ghost up on the castle walls in Denmark. Gar's ghost compels Edgar to seek something out, and Edgar finds a syringe nearly empty. Ideas begin to form in Edgar's mind about how his father may have died.





# Awakening

## Awakening Summary

Edgar awakes from a deep and peaceful sleep. He is haunted by the night before. Edgar and Claude come face to face, and Edgar fakes a smile in order to hide the fact that Edgar knows something.

## Awakening Analysis

Edgar is aware that Claude had something to do with his father's death, and like Hamlet, must put on airs around his uncle in order not to betray his knowledge. Here, the reader connects the sailor in Pusan, the syringe, and Claude together.



# Smoke

## Smoke Summary

Trudy knows something is upsetting Edgar, and she tries to get him to talk about it. Edgar isn't happy having Claude around. She explains to Edgar that Claude is coming to stay for a while.

Edgar is also coming to realize that knows Claude has killed Gar.

## Smoke Analysis

Edgar begins to understand that Claude has contributed in some way -directly or indirectly- to Gar's death. Further vexing Edgar is the understanding that Claude will actually be coming to stay at the farm for a while.

# Hangman

## Hangman Summary

That night, Edgar attempts to figure out what his father was trying to communicate to him with the letters H, A, C, and I. Looking through the old letters again, Edgar comes across the word "Hachiko", the name for a dog who lived in Japan and waited for a train. People believed the dog could sense a higher truth, or a presence, that others could not.

## Hangman Analysis

Edgar gets to the root of his grandfather's determination to create a brilliant dog through the story of Hachiko. The idea of a higher truth that others could not sense helps drive Edgar on in his search of answers.



# **A Way to Know for Sure**

## **A Way to Know for Sure Summary**

Edgar knows he needs proof of Claude's crime. In the process, he overhears a conversation between Dr. Papineua and Claude about expanding the dog breed. Claude has also taken over the paperwork aspect of the business.

Edgar believes that some reminder of the night his father was killed with also bring the memory back to Claude, allowing Edgar to gauge Claude's guilt through his reaction.

## **A Way to Know for Sure Analysis**

Edgar is fairly certain that his uncle killed Gar, but now needs proof. He believes he will be able to gauge Claude's reaction to something that will refresh Claude's memory of the night that Gar died. Like Hamlet, Edgar endeavors to bring justice to his father's murder.



# Driving Lesson

## Driving Lesson Summary

When Edgar's mother goes into town, Claude decides to teach Edgar how to drive. The lesson doesn't go well, and Claude becomes unhappy with Edgar, telling him to remember that they have people in common, such as Edgar's mother. Edgar says they also have his father in common.

## Driving Lesson Analysis

A personal experience with Claude leaves Edgar feeling as though Claude is attempting to usurp his father's place. But unlike Gar, Claude is combative and abrasive, and this further leads Edgar against Claude.



# Trudy

## Trudy Summary

Trudy enjoys the drive into the town of Mellen. She wonders about what things Edgar keeps locked up in inside. Trudy finds Edgar very mysterious.

Trudy again considers Claude's proposal, thinking that if a second chance came around, she wouldn't waste it.

Trudy also reflects on Edgar once more, believing that if something was truly wrong with him, she would know about it.

## Trudy Analysis

Some time is spent with Trudy in this chapter in order to reveal the workings of her mind. She is torn by her duties as a mother, a widow, and a farm/business owner and operator, and it appears as if her character has not made a place to ground itself just yet.



# Popcorn Corners

## Popcorn Corners Summary

Edgar wants to be away from home and from Claude as much as possible, so he takes to riding his bike down to Popcorn Corners, a very small, local hamlet. Edgar and Ida, who owns the store, are acquainted. He buys bottles of saccharine, syrup, and corn oil. Ida reminds Edgar that his father was a very good man.

This brings about an intense desire by Edgar to recall memories of his father. He is preoccupied by these thoughts, and accidentally spills a bag of dog food all over the ground.

## Popcorn Corners Analysis

An experience with Ida Paine compels Edgar to recall memories of his father. Edgar doesn't want to forget his father, whom Ida referred to as a good man.

# The Texan

## The Texan Summary

Edgar cannot sleep that night because he is plagued with memories of the past.

Doctor Papineau arrives the next day, which is when two older dogs named Indigo and Singer are to be placed with a man named Mr. Benson. Mr. Benson also wants to take a look at the entire farm and the operations. Edgar finds out to his surprise that Mr. Benson wants to open a branch contract. Mr. Benson also wants to see Edgar's litter of dogs, and Edgar obliges by instructing the dogs to carry out a syringe. This horrifies Claude, and Edgar has his proof.

Trudy confronts Edgar about what has happened. Edgar tries explaining the look on Claude's face. Behind them they see a figure in the shadow, and Edgar lunges forward, knocking the figure down the stairs. But it is Doctor Papineau. Trudy is horrified and tells Edgar to run away and hide for the night, because she'll have to call the police and tell them that Papineau fell down the stairs.

Edgar heads out into the woods and Baboo, Tinder, and Essay go with him.

## The Texan Analysis

In an act that rivals the play that Hamlet stages, Edgar has his dogs bring around a syringe. This horrifies Claude, and Edgar has his proof. Edgar, enraged with the knowledge, accidentally kills Doctor Papineau, believing him to be Claude. Trudy, loyal to her son and horrified at what has happened, prevails upon Edgar to leave, who flees into the woods with three dogs.





# Flight

## Flight Summary

Edgar sleeps in the woods with the dogs, realizing that he is a murderer. He and the dogs continue on through the woods the next day, and come across an old road. Glen Papineau drives up, and Edgar and the dogs hide until he passes by, and then they continue on.

Edgar begins wondering about food the second day, and they come across an old, abandoned cabin near a lake where they will stay for the night. Further up the lake, Edgar begins stealing food from different cabins in order to survive and feed the dogs. While in one cabin, he finds a newspaper and a flier that talk about his running away. He and the dogs head to a clearing in the woods and eat some food.

## Flight Analysis

Edgar, like Hamlet, is now wanted, and has been forced to leave. Edgar, Essay, Tinder, and Baboo begin traveling around, stealing food in order to survive.

# Pirates

## Pirates Summary

Ten days into the woods, Edgar teaches his dogs new routines and they continue on. The move west through the Chequamegon forest, going from lake to lake. At Lake Scotia, Edgar and the dogs are forced to go far into the woods and away from the cabins because it is the Fourth of July weekend. Nevertheless, two young girls come across Edgar and the dogs in the woods before they can get away without being seen.

Edgar, Baboo, Tinder, and Essay continue pushing on into the woods. Out of desperation, the dogs catch and eat a garter snake raw.

## Pirates Analysis

Edgar and his dogs continue traveling around aimlessly it seems. Like Hamlet, they are without a home through causes that are and are not their own doing. Edgar is a fugitive in many respects, both from his uncle, and from Doctor Papineau's son.



# Outside Lute

## Outside Lute Summary

Edgar and the dogs come to a sunflower field and a farmhouse. No one is home, and he and the dogs eat as much food as they can. They take what food they can carry, and Edgar grabs a pack of matches and some medicine and bandages. They move on, following railroad tracks.

Tinder steps on a piece of glass, and Edgar must tackle Tinder to remove the glass. Tinder bites Edgar's forearm, and Edgar cuts his thumb attempting to remove the glass. Edgar succeeds and then carries Tinder to the nearest house -the house they have robbed- where a man appears outside. Edgar scribbles down a note to explain the situation to him and the man helps treat Tinder and Edgar's wounds.

## Outside Lute Analysis

When one of the dogs is accidentally injured, Edgar must bring the dogs back to a farmhouse they have just robbed. There, the owner allows them to come onto the property in order to help them treat the wounds. It appears as if fate -and whatever is not quite right with the Sawtelle property -has let Edgar go as far as he could, before stopping his journey.



# Henry

## Henry Summary

The man introduces himself as Henry, and continues helping treat Tinder. Henry allows Edgar and the dogs to spend the night in the living room by the fireplace. Henry heads out to work the next morning, allowing Edgar and the dogs to stay. Edgar then takes a shower and makes food for himself and the dogs.

Later on, Henry cooks dinner for Edgar and the dogs. Henry turns in for the night, and Edgar sets to cleaning Tinder's foot.

## Henry Analysis

Henry proves to be a good friend. He not only allows Edgar and the dogs to stay, but cooks for them as well.



# Ordinary

## Ordinary Summary

In exchange for room and board, Edgar does work around Henry's place. Henry needs the shed cleared out, which is full of things his late wife had saved. Henry was engaged to be remarried, but his fiancée has left him, saying he is too ordinary.

Edgar continues working and eating, and is worried he may again become used to living indoors.

## Ordinary Analysis

Henry continues allowing Edgar and the dogs to stay, hoping to do something that is not ordinary. At Henry's, Edgar finds some semblance of peace. He is no longer running, though he desires to move on. The physical injuries -hunger and bloody gashes -are being taken care of. Yet, injustice still lingers in the back of Edgar's mind.



# Engine No. 6615

## Engine No. 6615 Summary

Edgar continues working, clearing out the shed. Sometimes Henry helps out as well. Henry questions where Edgar is headed, and Edgar replies that he is headed toward the Starchild Colony. They continue organizing the shed.

They go to town and Edgar notices that they are being followed by the state police.

## Engine No. 6615 Analysis

Edgar helps Henry around his farm in order to compensate Henry for room and board. Edgar decides he will head for Canada, to go to the Starchild Colony. There, it is possible Edgar can escape his past.



# Glen Papineau

## Glen Papineau Summary

Glen is still saddened by the death of his father, though it has been two months since the incident. Glen and Claude reminisce about Doctor Papineau, for whom Claude worked when he was younger. They discuss the death of Gar as well, and Claude comments on the fact that he finds it strange that Edgar cannot remember much of what happened when Gar died.

Glen suspects that Edgar has something to do with Doctor Papineau's death, perhaps amounting to manslaughter.

## Glen Papineau Analysis

Glen Papineau, fueled by alcohol, bitterness, and Claude's ruminations, becomes determined to find Edgar. Glen even believes that Edgar is somehow responsible for his father's death. Edgar's enemies have now doubled in number.



# Wind

## Wind Summary

Henry decides that he will take Edgar to Starchild Colony. When they arrive at Lake Superior, a bad storm hits, which forces Edgar and Henry to take cover before continuing on. Edgar decides instead to return home, and he gives Tinder to Henry to care for. Baboo decides to stay, but Essay continues on with Edgar.

## Wind Analysis

Nearing Canada -and as if to cement the idea that Edgar has gone as far as fate is allowing him to go- a waterspout and storm appear like a physical reminder that there is a storm behind him. Edgar decides then to return home to confront Claude because injustice is still heavy in the air.



# Return

## Return Summary

Edgar and Essay continue on, spending the night outside. They even come across Forte, who trails them at a distance. Eventually, Edgar and Essay cross back onto their land.

## Return Analysis

Edgar and Essay have their homecoming, where they cross back onto their land. They have been born and raised on the land, and the land and the events that have taken place on the land have proved irresistible to Edgar.

# Almondine

## Almondine Summary

Almondine gets older, and misses Edgar. She knows he is gone. She wants to go and look for him, but is too old to do it. She wanders out into the road as a car comes up the hill.

## Almondine Analysis

Almondine has a tragic end. While looking for Edgar, she is hit by a car. The loyalty and devotion of Almondine to both Gar and Edgar has remained unchallenged to her death. Likewise, the loyalty between Edgar and Trudy, as well as Edgar and Essay, has remained unchallenged.



# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar and Essay head back into the farm. Edgar leaves a note for his mother and Claude, saying he will return the following day. Edgar sees Almondine's grave as well.

## Edgar Analysis

Edgar sees Almondine's grave, and he leaves a note saying he will be back the following day. Like his father's ghost, Edgar has returned to the farm seeking justice.

# Trudy

## Trudy Summary

Trudy regrets having sent away Edgar, and reflects on the time since he left. Trudy reflects on growing closer to Claude, and on being finally able to say goodbye to Gar. She wonders how she will ever tell Edgar about Almondine's death.

## Trudy Analysis

Trudy is heartbroken at having sent away Edgar, and also heartbroken at Almondine's death. Almondine was Trudy's one truly personal link to Edgar (and Gar) still alive on the farm.



# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar makes a place to hide out in the hay bale stacks and reflects on his time with Almondine. He tries sleeping, but is unable to fall asleep entirely.

## Edgar Analysis

Edgar waits up in the barn in the hay bales, remembering Almondine. His homecoming has so far been sad and challenging, especially with Almondine's death.



# Glen Papineau

## Glen Papineau Summary

Claude calls Glen to let Glen know that Edgar is back around. Glen wants the chance to speak to Edgar before anyone else does, and Claude says he will let Glen know when Edgar returns.

## Glen Papineau Analysis

Claude, aware that Edgar is back, alerts Glen. In so doing, Claude sets the stage for a disastrous future event. All of the pieces of the puzzle are slowly coming together to spell out the fate of each of the characters involved in the events that have taken place on the Sawtelle family land.



# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar listens to the goings-on on the farm, waiting patiently for time to pass. Claude comes in, looking for Edgar, and tearing away at the hay bales. He stops to set a small, glass bottle to the side, covers it up with hay, and continues searching. Eventually, he stops, and Edgar hears him drive away.

## Edgar Analysis

Claude attempts to find Edgar, but is unsuccessful. In the process, Edgar sees that Claude has a bottle of poison that was hidden in the barn. The presence of the poison bottle now erases any lingering doubts in Edgar's mind that Claude is indeed a murderer. The guilty reaction was a form of proof, but the poison is form of hard evidence.



# Trudy

## Trudy Summary

Trudy returns to the barn and is confronted by Edgar. He asks her to keep Claude in the house that night so he has the chance to search the barn for something. Trudy agrees and is overwhelmed with relief to see Edgar. Edgar then heads off across the field.

## Trudy Analysis

Trudy's loyalty to her son remains unchallenged as she falls into line with Edgar. Edgar needs to find the poison bottle, but he also needs to hide before he can go looking for it.





# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar cools off in the creek. Essay comes running up to him the next morning, with a photograph, a key to the car, and a few hundred dollars duct-taped to her.

## Edgar Analysis

The next morning, Essay arrives, brandished with money, keys, and a photograph. Edgar doesn't understand the meaning of the things Essay bears, but is not deterred by them.



# Glen Papineau

## Glen Papineau Summary

Claude calls Glen again, and Glen was the source of the idea for Claude to search the hay. Glen heads out to stake out the Sawtelle farm. He wants to knock Edgar out before Edgar gets home, and then bring Edgar to the car. Glen then sees Edgar heading across the field toward the barn.

## Glen Papineau Analysis

Glen's involvement in the Sawtelle family drama is dangerous. He is an outsider, drawn into things through the death of his father, and now seeks to even further ingratiate himself in the goings-on. Glen is obsessed with getting to speak to Edgar, so much so that he stakes out the Sawtelle family farm.



# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar heads to the barn and begins searching for the bottle. But he is trapped by Glen who proceeds to knock him out with ether. Glen then attempts to revive Edgar, but gets quicklime in his eyes. Ether fumes rise up to the hot lights. Edgar struggles to free the dogs and Glen scrambles out into the yard.

## Edgar Analysis

Glen's attempt to kidnap and revive Edgar has disastrous consequences, as Glen inadvertently sets the barn on fire, and blinds himself in the process. Now, not only are the lives of the dogs threatened, but the records of the family business and the business's existence are also threatened.

# Trudy

## Trudy Summary

Trudy and Claude head out back to find Glen screaming for water, blinded by the lime dust. Trudy also sees Edgar in the barn against flickering light. Trudy refuses Glen any water until she knows her son is safe. The barn catches on fire from the ether fumes meeting the hot light. She and Claude work to release the rest of the dogs and keep them away from the fire.

## Trudy Analysis

Trudy at once knows that Glen has caused the fire in the barn, and she and Claude work to get the dogs out of the barn. The barn continues to burn, and all is chaos, just as in the final act of Hamlet.

# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar continues instructing the dogs to leave the barn. Edgar and Trudy come face to face. Trudy and Edgar both realize that Claude has betrayed them. Edgar begins working to get the dogs' files and papers out of the barn.

## Edgar Analysis

Edgar and Trudy both recognize that Claude has tipped Glen off, and they both realize that Claude is a common enemy. Edgar sets about working to save the dog records.



# Claude

## Claude Summary

Claude is transfixed by the fire, unsure of what to do. He watches Glen and Trudy struggling, and watches Edgar carting out files. Claude had sent the money and the key to Edgar, hoping to frame him for robbery. He knows in order to save himself in Trudy's eyes, he must rescue Edgar. Claude goes to help Edgar get the files out, but he also knows that the bottle of poison is hidden in the file cabinets with the oldest records. It would only be a matter of time before Edgar finds it, he knows.

## Claude Analysis

The money, photo, and keys had been sent to Edgar through Essay by Claude, hoping to frame Edgar for theft. Claude's character -as a truly sinister man- is fully on display. He is conniving, vindictive, and uncaring. Claude knows that he must now deal with Edgar in ways other than framing him for robbery.



# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar continues getting files out. Trudy begs him to stop, but Edgar will not stop. He continues going back in for more files. Yet he also knows that Claude is now in the workshop to help him.

## Edgar Analysis

As Edgar works to save the files, he is also aware that Claude is now working beside him. For the moment, the survival of the business and everything the Sawtelles have dedicated their lives to has superseded Edgar's quest for justice.

# Claude

## Claude Summary

When Edgar goes out, Claude scrambles to find the bottle of poison. He fills up a syringe and stabs Edgar when Edgar returns, but Edgar doesn't feel anything in the rush of the moment. Edgar instead grabs a pitchfork, and shoves it up over their heads.

## Claude Analysis

Claude does the only thing he can think of in order to bring things to a favorable outcome: he injects Edgar with poison. Edgar, meanwhile, does the only thing he can think of, and that is to save the records at all costs.





# Edgar

## Edgar Summary

Edgar feels a quick pain in his neck but believes it to be something that has fallen from overhead. He needed to clear the smoke from the room, so he forces a pitchfork up to the roof of the workshop to open up a hatch. Edgar then falls to the ground. Between the poison and the smoke, Edgar either hallucinates or has a Heavenly vision, and sees Almondine, who urges him to get out. But Edgar cannot get out.

## Edgar Analysis

As Edgar begins to succumb to the poison, Claude continues watching him, waiting for Edgar to die. In a bittersweet moment, Edgar sees Almondine's ghost coming to meet him.

# Claude

## Claude Summary

Claude watches Edgar writhing on the floor in front of him. He reflects on the night in Pusan, about the first time he saw the poison in action. Claude also realizes that he needs to get out of the barn. Claude struggles to get out, but gets lost in the smoke.

## Claude Analysis

Claude has waited around too long to be able to get out of the barn. In his own delight in watching Edgar die, he becomes lost in the smoke and cannot find his way out. His own demons have at last caught up with him.



# Trudy

## Trudy Summary

Trudy watches helplessly as the entire barn is engulfed in flames and collapses. Glen hears the sounds and begs to know what is going on.

## Trudy Analysis

Trudy, terrified by what has gone on, watches as the barn collapses with both Edgar and Claude inside. Everything she has loved -her husband, her son, her family, her business, the farm- has been destroyed. Everything that has come from the dust of the farm has returned to it.

# **The Sawtelle Dogs**

## **The Sawtelle Dogs Summary**

The dogs rush around in chaos, seeing the barn collapse, Trudy on the ground, and Glen screaming blindly. Essay then rounds up as many of the other dogs and puppies as are willing to follow her, and leads them away from everything they have ever known.

## **The Sawtelle Dogs Analysis**

The loyalty of the dogs, especially Essay, toward Edgar continues unabated in the final chapter of the book. The dogs have measured their lives by the presence of Edgar in them. But without Edgar, the dogs set out across the fields with the intention of leaving behind everything they have known.



# Characters

## Edgar Sawtelle

Edgar Sawtelle is the fourteen year-old protagonist in the novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle." He has an exceptionally rare gift of being able to communicate with and instruct dogs that are raised on his family's Wisconsin farm. Mute and being unable to speak, Edgar must instead rely on hand signs in order to speak with his family and command the dogs. He works alongside his father, Gar, and his mother, Trudy.

Edgar is very close to his father and his mother, but the arrival of Gars brother Claude changes everything. Edgar is suspicious of his uncle. Claude's drinking and his ideas creates a rough relationship between Edgar, Gar, and Claude.

Edgar also discovers his father dead at the dog workshop one day, and he is unable to help him. Claude moves back to the farm against Edgar's wishes. Edgar would much prefer that he and his mother handle the farm alone, but Trudy understands the need for a third person to help out on the farm.

In the rain one night, Edgar sees his father's ghost, who tells Edgar that he needs to search for something. Edgar believes that Claude has murdered his father, and he discovers a syringe lost the night of the murder. Edgar informs his mother of what has happened, but hears someone nearby. Believing it to be Claude, Edgar pushes the unknown individual down the steps, only to discover that he has accidentally killed Doctor Papineau. Trudy then tells Edgar to flee. Edgar travels the countryside with three of his dogs, deciding at last to return and confront his uncle.

Doctor Papineau's son, Glen, attempts to drug Edgar to question him, but a fire breaks out in the barn. During the fire, Claude stabs Edgar with a syringe full of poison, and both of them end up dying in the inferno.

## Gar Sawtelle

Gar Sawtelle is the owner of the Sawtelle family farm and the head of the Sawtelle family. He is patient, kind, and caring as a husband, father, and dog trainer. He helps to care for and train the dogs that his family raises, as well as placing them with owners. Gar is married to Trudy, and his son is Edgar.

Gar is also the brother of Claude, who has recently returned from serving in the Navy. The two brothers approach their work and their lives from different directions, and Claude's brash ideas often lead to arguments between both brothers. After one such argument breaks out into a fist fight, Claude murders Gar using a syringe full of poison.

Gar's ghost later appears to Edgar, instructing Edgar to search for the missing syringe.



## Trudy Sawtelle

Trudy Sawtelle is the mother of Edgar and husband of Gar. She is sweet, patient, kind, and attentive both as a mother and as a wife. She helps out on the farm, caring for and training the dogs. She loves her son very much, for her previous attempts to bear children ended in miscarriages.

When Gar dies, Trudy is torn between selling the farm to give Edgar a normal life, and attempting to continue on the family business. This ultimately leads to her reaching out to Claude to help out around the farm.

When Trudy discovers that Edgar has accidentally killed Doctor Papineau, she urges him to run off into the woods, and then later regrets the decision. She is overjoyed when Edgar returns home, but is devastated when Edgar and Claude both die in the ensuing barn fire.

## Almondine

Almondine is the oldest dog on the Sawtelle family farm, and is Edgar's loving companion. She accompanies Edgar everywhere, sleeps near him, and watches out for him. When Edgar runs away, Almondine waits patiently for him, but is killed by a car.

## Claude Sawtelle

Claude Sawtelle is the brother of Gar and uncle to Edgar. Claude is brash, impetuous, and lazy, and often clashes with his brother Gar. Claude worked for Doctor Papineau when he was younger, then leaves town to join the U.S. Navy. In Korea, Claude obtains a lethal poison used through injections. Claude later uses this poison to kill Gar.

Claude discovers that Edgar has determined that Gar was murdered, so Claude works to kill Edgar by stabbing him with a syringe full of the same poison during the barn fire. Claude waits to make sure that Edgar is nearly dead until he attempts to get out, but becomes lost in the smoke of the fire and dies when the barn collapses on him.

## Glen Papineau

Glen Papineau is a local police officer and is the son of Doctor Papineau. He is acquainted with the Sawtelles and friends with Claude. After his father's suspicious death, Gen wants to catch Edgar in order to question him. But the attempt at sequestering Edgar with ether results in Glen getting quicklime in his eyes, thus blinding him. The ether fumes rise up and hit the hot barn lights, resulting in a fire that kills Edgar and Caude.



## **Doctor Papineau**

Doctor Papineau is the local veterinarian and a kind, gentle man who has long been friends with the Sawtelles. He is accidentally killed by Edgar, who pushes him down the stairs, believing him to be Claude.

## **Ida Paine**

Ida Paine runs a local goods store and is considered to be a scary although kind, old woman by the residents in the area. She pronounces that there is nothing wrong with Edgar. Ida also sends a friend to the Sawtelle farm, who explains to Trudy that Edgar can be communicated with through hand signals.

## **Essay**

Essay is the female leader of the litter of Sawtelle dogs that Edgar is raising. Essay accompanies Edgar when Edgar flees the farm and later is the only dog to return with him. When the barn burns down, Essay leads many of the Sawtelle dogs to safety and then out into the wild.

## **Mr. Benson**

Mr. Benson is a man contacted by the Sawtelles who plans to expand the breeding of the dogs to another branch farm. It is for Mr. Benson that Edgar shows off a trick where a dog carries a syringe, which startles and angers Claude.



# Objects/Places

## The Sawtelle Family Farm

Located in northern Wisconsin, the Sawtelle Family Farm is the piece of property purchased by Edgar's grandfather in 1919. It is a strange piece of land, so lonely that the previous owner was compelled to sell it. The Sawtelle Family Farm is where the Sawtelle breed of dogs was created and raised for almost three generations. It is where Gar Sawtelle and Doctor Papineau are murdered, where Edgar is born, raised, and killed, where Claude dies and where Glen Papineau is blinded by quicklime.

## Northern Wisconsin

Northern Wisconsin is where the Sawtelle Family Farm and the Chequamegon Forest are located, below the border of Canada. It is the landscape in which Edgar Sawtelle's story is told.

## Canada

Home of the Starchild Colony, Canada lies north of Wisconsin. Canada is originally Edgar's destination before Edgar decides to return to his family's farm.

## Chequamegon

Chequamegon is a huge, beautiful forest that is spread across the lake country in northern Wisconsin. It is where Edgar heads out with three dogs to live for several weeks before deciding to head to Canada, and then deciding to head home.

## Dog Workshop

The dog workshop is located on the Sawtelle Family Farm. It is where the records of dogs are kept, and serves as a hub for the farm's day to day operations. It is where Claude kills Gar and later Edgar, and is where Edgar discovers Claude's body.

## Poison

Obtained in Pusan, North Korea during the Korean War by Claude, poison is what Claude uses to kill Gar. It is discovered by Edgar that Claude indeed has poison and used it on his father. Claude later uses the poison to kill Edgar.





## **Ether**

Glen Papineau uses ether, soaked up by a rag, to subdue Edgar near the end of the novel. Spilled ether creates fumes that explode into flames, setting the barn on fire.

## **Quicklime**

Quicklime is the substance that blinds Glen Papineau after he gets it in his eyes.

## **Food**

When Edgar flees his family's farm, food is in short supply. He and his dogs rummage through cabins and farmhouses in order to obtain enough food to eat and live on.

## **Syringe**

The syringe is one of the focal points of the murder of Gar Sawtelle. Claude uses a syringe full of poison to kill Gar, loses the syringe, and later uses another syringe to inject Edgar with poison.



# Themes

## Fate

Since "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" is an American retelling of "Hamlet," the idea of fate can be clearly seen in the novel if sought. Hamlet, determined to flee Denmark, nevertheless returns to the kingdom to confront his murderous uncle, as if his path was ever uncertain: injustice must be righted. So too in the "Story of Edgar Sawtelle" does Edgar leave his home (the family farm) and return there later in order to confront his murderous Uncle Claude in order to right an injustice.

Two instances early in the novel provide evidence for a fatal journey. First is the presentation of Claude in Pusan, South Korea, during the Korean War, where he purchases a lethal poison. The second instance of fate occurs when the Sawtelle family land is mentioned as being somehow not quite right that there is something indefinably wrong with it. The land, the friction between Gar and Claude, and the poison ultimately spell out a certain fate. Both brothers are bound to the land, for they have come from it. Edgar, likewise, comes from the Sawtelle family land, so he is also bound to anything indefinably wrong with the land.

The Sawtelle land sees the murder of Gar, the murder of Edgar, Claude's death, Doctor Papineau's death, multiple miscarriages by Trudy, and the blinding of Glen Papineau, as well as the destruction of the barn and the livelihood of the Sawtelle family. When viewed in the lens of fate -in this novel, that justice must be righted -Gar's death must be avenged, Claude must be confronted, and Claude's death means Edgar will not have that on his hands. Yet Edgar has Doctor Papineau's blood on his hands, and Doctor Papineau's death must also be made right through Edgar's death. Glen, for his willful deceit and interference, is blinded when he becomes involved with the Sawtelles. Trudy, who tries to persevere and make everything better, loses her entire family and her livelihood in the process.

## Family

The theme of family is especially dominant in the novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle." It is one of two single, overarching themes that bind together the story. The theme of family is presented in two ways: history of family, and the will of family.

The history of the Sawtelle family is important to the novel because it demonstrates the rootedness of the Sawtelle family to the land on which they live. The family business, the farm, and the family itself are identical with the land. Purchased by Edgar's grandfather in 1919, the land served as a breeding ground for the family and for a new species of dogs. The Sawtelle family history breaks down in the friction that exists between Gar and Claude, who are described as being as different as night and day,



traced back to their youth. This friction serves as both omen and catalyst for future events.

The will of the family is also important to the novel because it serves as the route of history as it is being written. The will of Gar, Edgar, and Trudy is to preserve the breed of dogs being grown, preserve the land, and preserve the family. This includes taking in Claude for a limited time before Gar's death. The will of family, following Gar's murder and Doctor's Papineau's death revolves around Trudy's desire to protect her son from legal recourse. This ultimately ends with the death of the Sawtelle family name when both Edgar and Claude die.

## Loyalty

The theme of loyalty is especially dominant in the novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle". It is one of two single, overarching themes that bind together the story. Loyalty in the novel exists in two forms in two ways: First, in human loyalty between family; and second, in loyalty between the dogs and Edgar.

Loyalty between family is very clear when it comes to Gar, Edgar, and Trudy, who watch out for one another and care for one another. Edgar's loyalty to his father and his mother lead Edgar to reject his Uncle Claude, and steels his resolve to confront Claude. Edgar's loyalty compels him to want to bring justice to his father's death, and to protect his mother from Claude. Loyalty is also especially strong when Trudy sends Edgar away to protect him following the murder of Doctor Papineau. Just as strong as the loyalty is between mother and son, so too is the lack of loyalty between brother and brother or uncle and nephew. Claude has no second thoughts about killing either Gar or Edgar.

Loyalty between dogs and people is also especially strong throughout the novel. The litter of dogs that Edgar raises -including Essay, Baboo, and Tinder -obey Edgar best, and remain with him as long as they can. Essay remains loyal to Edgar through the very end, and remains loyal to him to such an extent that she decides to leave the farm and bring other dogs with her rather than submit to whatever authority succeeds Edgar's.



# Style

## Point of View

"The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" is told from the third-person omniscient narrative in different perspectives. Although the protagonist of the novel is Edgar, chapters are dedicated to the points of view of other characters, including Trudy, Claude, and Almondine. This is done in order to provide better depth to the story, and to allow the reader glimpses into the ideas and understandings of other characters, enabling the reader to better understand Edgar.

Although the points of view shift, third-person narration reigns throughout the novel. This is done in order to avoid the sometimes obstructive and deterring effects of switching between multiple first person narrations that are often written in different characterized narration, making a more jarring transition between characters and plot points.

## Setting

The setting of the novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" is in northern Wisconsin near the Chequamegon Forest in the United States in the late 1950s and 1960s. The setting works well for the novel, focusing on a time without the internet, without advanced police detection and autopsy techniques and a rural place that enables Edgar to escape and live off of the land until he returns home.

## Language and Meaning

David Wroblewski writes "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" using thick, poetic prose that seems almost dreamlike in some places. In so doing, he recreates an older, more tranquil United States without the internet or smartphones. Considering the novel is a retelling of Shakespeare's "Hamlet," the use of poetic prose is very justified.

Yet, despite the thick, poetic prose, the writing does not detract from the plot of the novel. Rather, the writing enhances the story and works in coordination with the plot because the beauty of the writing reinforces the beauty of the setting.

## Structure

The novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" is divided into five parts. Each part is further divided into individual chapters. Each part deals with a specific part of the plot (for example, the part entitled "Chequamegon" deals with Edgar's flight through the Wisconsin wilderness). Furthermore, the division of the novel into five parts is reflective of the five act structure of Shakespeare's plays.



## Quotes

"A person communicates by giving as well as taking, by expressing what is inside" (Signs, p. 43).

"And that night, he dreamt of a jumbled world, color and sound without substance, and in the dreaming everything fitted together perfectly, mosaic pieces interlocked in a stately, exquisite dance" (A Thin Sigh, p. 117).

"I know you're doing what seems right. But I'm not helpless. I don't expect this to be easy..." (Storm, p. 130).

"The painter who creates one masterpiece, never to produce another, is well known" (Lessons and Dreams, p. 193).

"Later, he would blame himself for not seeing what would happen, as if he could have prevented it, but during the weeks that followed, his preoccupation was above all with his mother's health and the mending of the injured dogs" (Courtship, p. 222).

"He tried to sort out his feelings. There was the desire to run; there was the desire to stay and put himself in front of Claude the moment he returned..." (Smoke, p. 259).

"Did you see? he signed. Did you see his face?" (The Texan, p. 323).

"He remembered a time when he was small, when Almondine was young and rambunctious, more like a wild horse than a dog to him, when she could cross the yard faster than a swallow and catch him running across that same field" (Edgar, p. 471).

"She was surprised, given the chaos of the moment, how many of the dogs held their stays..." (Trudy, p. 526).

"The forest streamed round. The night passed. They tracked through marshes and forded creeks until the dark vault overhead gave way to a deep orange, the sky ignited by what they'd left behind" (The Sawtelle Dogs, p. 561).



## Topics for Discussion

David Wroblewski's "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle" has been called a reinvention of Shakespeare's "Hamlet." Identify, compare, and contrast characters, story plots, and components of Edgar's story with Hamlet's story.

Discuss the theme of loyalty in the novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle." In what ways is loyalty demonstrated between the dogs and Edgar? In what ways is loyalty demonstrated between Edgar, his mother, his father, and his uncle? Why is loyalty such a core theme of the novel?

Discuss the theme of family in the novel "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle". In what ways does family matter in the novel? Why? In what places does the idea of family break down? How does this occur and why?

When Edgar sets off into the wilderness, his original goal is Canada. He later changes his mind and decides to return to the family farm to confront his uncle. For what reasons does Edgar decide against Canada in favor of going home?

The idea that there is something wrong with the Sawtelle family land is brought up early in the novel. This perhaps sets the stage for a fateful story. Why? Are all of the characters in the novel fated to some end? Why or why not?