

# **These Is My Words Study Guide**

**These Is My Words by Nancy E. Turner**

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## Plot Summary

These Is My Words is the story of Sarah Prine and her family who agree to follow their father's dreams to head west. The trip is eventful and Sarah's young brother, Clover, is bitten by a snake and dies on the way. Her older brother Ernest is shot in the knee by an arrow and loses his leg. In that same battle, Sarah's father is shot, but the wound is all the way through his arm and seems to be of little danger. However, shortly after the family arrives at their destination, her father drops dead from complications from the wound. Without the guidance of their father, the family - Sarah, her brothers Albert and Harland, and her Mama - decide to buy trees and return to the Arizona Territory to make their home. Albert marries a young girl he met on the way west and Savannah becomes more of a sister to Sarah than any blood relative could possibly have been.

As the group moves eastward under the guard of soldiers who are charged with protecting the settlers from Indians, Sarah becomes acquainted with a commanding officer, Captain Jack Elliot. Jack is strong and domineering and Sarah declares that he is ornery and coarse from the start. When Sarah finds the mutilated body of a young woman and asks Jack to take care of it without upsetting her Mama and Savannah, Jack falls in love with Sarah.

When the family chooses a place to settle, Sarah sends a letter to Jimmy Reed, a young man who had lived with them after his own family died of cholera, and Jimmy joins them to start a horse ranch. Jimmy proposes to Sarah and she believes marriage to be the right decision, and so accepts. They have a daughter, April, but Jimmy grows cold. When Jimmy is dying after having been thrown from a horse, Sarah learns that he's always held to his love for a woman who had spurned him.

Dealing with the ranch and a new child is difficult and Sarah is soon visited by Jack. After some time passes, he asks her to marry him, and when Sarah comes to believe that he loves her, she agrees. The years pass quickly with Sarah giving birth to four more children. One dies at birth and a daughter dies as a child. Jack finally gives up the military career and dies in a burning building, doing his job as fire chief. After his death, Sarah packs up to move back from the city to the ranch she'd built, accompanied by two of her children and Jack's father, Chess.



# July 22, 1881, through September 30, 1881

## July 22, 1881, through September 30, 1881 Summary

The story opens on July 22, 1881, with Sarah Agnes Prine describing her family. When her brother Harlan is nine and her brother Clover is six, Sarah's father and her two older brothers, Ernest and Albert, return from Phoenix with "their pockets running over in cash." Her father decides the family will move to "greener pastures" in San Angelo and will travel through Texas. As they begin their travels, Sarah breaks-in a horse she calls Rose, though the horse is not yet willing to endure the weight of a saddle. By August 6, 1881, they are joined by some additional families, including Mr. and Mrs. Hoover, and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence and their daughters. Savannah is the oldest of the girls and Sarah's brother, Albert, is soon enamored with her. By August 11, 1881, Sarah is spending a great deal of time with Savannah and her sisters, Louisiana and Ulyssa. On August 12, Sarah and her family have gone to bed when her younger brother, Clover, yells out that he's hurt. Mama hushes him back to sleep and when they wake the next morning, Clover is running a fever. It's soon discovered that he has been bitten on the arm by a snake. One of the men traveling with them is something of a doctor, having served in the military, and he says that amputating Clover's arm would do no good because it is too late. Clover dies later that day.

On August 16, the families haven't yet moved and Sarah's parents are walking around as if they're in a daze. On the morning of August 17, the travelers are awakened by the whooping of Indians. One of the men and one of the women traveling with them are killed and Sarah's father is shot in the arm. Ernest is struck in the knee by an arrow and the man who serves as a doctor for the group removes the leg. Ernest is nineteen and Sarah says that he suddenly seems young and helpless. The attack spurs on the group and they reach Fort Stockton on August 23.

On August 28, Sarah, Savannah and Savannah's sisters, Louisiana and Ulyssa, are sent by Sarah's mother for water. While they are at the stream, they go for a swim and some men arrive. Sarah can only watch horrified as one of the men holds Savannah at knifepoint while others rape Ulyssa. Sarah manages to slip away and rushes back on horseback with her gun, killing the two men. She then encounters an Indian who scalps the two men and leaves the scalps for her. On September 7, Sarah is sent to kill a chicken and when the bird calmly waits to be killed, Sarah begins screaming at the bird to fight back. Savannah comes to her and takes over the chore, telling her father that he is wrong to condemn Sarah for her actions. Later, Indians come into the group again and take almost all the horses except the one Sarah had ridden when she killed the men by the river, taking time to hand the reins of that horse over to Sarah. They now have lost all the horses they planned to use to start a ranch.



On September 19, Sarah and her family reach San Angelo. Before they can make any progress toward settling down, her father grabs his chest and dies of a heart attack. Sarah's mother becomes "a ghost of a person," responding to no one. On September 30, Albert announces that he's asked Savannah to marry him. He has purchased a wagon and seedling trees and the family plans to travel east to settle.

## **July 22, 1881, through September 30, 1881 Analysis**

Sarah puts her story down on paper by using a sharpened rooster feather as a quill and a can of hoof black given to her by her father. Sarah notes that her father says he's never known anyone so determined to write down her observations. Sarah, now seventeen, hopes there will be school available for a girl of her age in San Angelo but suspects there won't. When Sarah gets in trouble with her mother, she's told to read aloud from the Bible. It seems that this is partly to punish Sarah but also because her mother can't read and seems hungry for the Word of God.

Savannah's family are Quakers and they have some strong convictions on several subjects. For example, they do not believe in fighting, even in retaliation or for protection. When Sarah shoots the men attacking the other girls, Savannah's family shuns her. They do not speak to her and Sarah says this is worse than anything else she's endured. Sarah asks her mother if her killing the men was wrong and her mother assures her that it wasn't. Sarah herself says that she would do it again.

Sarah's mother has what turns out to be a temporary break with reality when her husband dies. She sits staring into space very often and barely responds to anyone or anything. She will much later say that she'd felt everything was in Sarah's capable hands and that she felt she could take this step away, but she comes back to reality when she feels it's necessary.

Sarah's ideas seem somewhat immature though it could be her upbringing. Later she will say she wishes she knew how it felt to ride in a carriage rather than constantly creating calluses from driving a team with her brothers. At seventeen, she is not overly interested in boys as potential husbands though she will later take note of the things she believes she must do in order to marry. She also believes herself to be plain.



# November 24, 1881, through January 11, 1882

## November 24, 1881, through January 11, 1882 Summary

On November 24, 1881, Sarah writes that Savannah and Albert married the previous day, and that a Calvary Captain performed the ceremony because there wasn't anyone else to do it. On November 27, the wagon train accompanied by a group of soldiers is headed East and Sarah says that there is a wide array of people, including freed "Colored folks" and Chinese. On November 30, the train is stalled as the rain falls. On December 1, Sarah admits she's always longed for a yellow sunbonnet but that her mother believes blues go better with her hair and complexion. On December 2, Savannah asks Sarah to help her learn to shoot. Sarah says that any additional help in the event of an Indian attack should be appreciated. Savannah has trouble shooting but promises to try again.

On December 3, Ernest and some of the other men have begun talking about their shooting ability and Sarah notes that the bragging is so severe that some claim they can shoot the eye out of a tick on a dog, and that she plans to put her dogs out of harm's way for the shooting contest that is bound to happen. On December 4, Sarah is summoned by Ernest to shoot against a man who has wagered his rifle that no one can outshoot him. Sarah reluctantly does and wins but refuses the rifle.

On December 11, Sarah finds a piece of paper with a small bit of a story written on it, page 87 from a book. She is hungry for the rest of the story which talks of a woman wearing a scarlet velvet dress. On December 14 there is another Indian attack and Sarah watches as Captain Jack Elliot slashes his way through Indians trying to save a woman, though the woman and her entire family are already dead. On December 15, a woman gives birth to a dead child and the wagon train cannot stop because of the Indian attacks. The baby is buried beside the road and the woman dies later. Ernest, now getting around pretty good with a wooden leg, announces he wants to join the military to fight Indians.

On December 19, Sarah says that there is something missing every morning as evidence that the Indians continue coming into the camp despite guards being posted. On December 21 she discovers that the three women traveling with the Mormon all claim to be married to the same man. Sarah says they are "addled." On December 22, Sarah, Savannah and Mama are washing up and Savannah reveals that she's pregnant. On December 24, Sarah says that she is so harassed and worried about Indians that she can do nothing but keep her rifle close and her eyes on the horizon. On December 25, Sarah gives her family hugs, saying it's the only Christmas presents she has for them. Later that day, she finds a wagon, obviously abandoned, and filled with books. Captain Elliot has two horses that had belonged to the family that was killed and



Sarah asks to use the horses to pull the wagon. Captain Elliot says that he will not lend the horses but will trade them for two books. Sarah reluctantly agrees to part with two books. One of them is the "The Duchess of Warwick" - the book that is missing the page 87 that Sarah found days earlier.

On December 27 Sarah's brother rides her horse Rose in pursuit of some Indians and gets the horse shot. Sarah refuses to allow a soldier to put her down and the slow pace they are now taking allows the horse to recover over the next few days. On December 29, Sarah finds a disemboweled and scalped woman and, fearful that either her mother or Savannah might see the corpse as well, calls on Captain Elliot to bury the woman quietly without alerting the others. Captain Elliot comes around later, asking if everyone is alright. On December 30, Sarah wakes to find smoke in her wagon and believes she is on fire. It is only Captain Elliot who is smoking; when he apologizes, she begins to cry. He holds her while she cries herself to sleep. She wakes the next morning on top of him but he reassures her that no one has seen them and slips away. Sarah remains guilty for the coming days. On January 11, 1882, Sarah notes that someone is caring for her horses, easing her load of responsibilities, and that they've arrived at El Paso.

## **November 24, 1881, through January 11, 1882 Analysis**

When Savannah has trouble firing the gun, Sarah notes that it may not be ladylike for a woman to be able to shoot, though she's a very good shot and often brings home game for the family. When another family along on the wagon train says, loudly enough for Sarah and Savannah to hear, that "it ain't no good for a woman to learn to shoot," Sarah's admiration for Savannah seems to grow when Savannah says to her family, but also apparently making sure the neighbors could hear, that in the case of an Indian attack some women may have to throw their knitting at the Indians. Sarah seems to be envious of Savannah because Savannah has developed a more womanly figure while Sarah remains boyish, and Savannah is petite while Sarah says that she can look most men in the eye. However, what Sarah doesn't realize is that Savannah also envies some of Sarah's ways.

Sarah notes the words used in any writing she comes across and immediately sets herself to learning the meanings of any unfamiliar words. She is a voracious reader and wants desperately to learn. Savannah has taken and passed her teachers test and holds something of a class daily with the children from the wagon train. Sarah sits on the edges of this group and is grateful Savannah is willing to allow her to learn without embarrassing her about being part of a group of young children.

By December, Sarah is beginning to notice Captain Elliot more. The moment she saw him slashing his way through the Indians in an effort to try to save the woman has made a lasting impression on Sarah who will continue to believe she is safe with him, though it will be some time before she realizes this feeling herself. Sarah says Captain Eliot is "coarse" and wants nothing to do with him but will be drawn to him just the same. In time, they will certainly connect. Soon, Savannah tells Sarah that she should no longer



wear her hair down like a little girl, but should put it up, and Sarah notices that she "needs more room" in her clothing, including her camisole.

Sarah wants the wagon load of books very badly. She says that it's a gift and the most wonderful present she could hope to have. She approaches Captain Elliot for the use of the horses and he gives her the news that he won't give them to her, but will trade them for a book. Sarah doesn't seem like a greedy person, but on this count she is incredibly so. She says that she can barely stand the thought of the books in his hands. She also believes that he is laughing at her but says that she can't be sure because he has a mustache. When he walks away with the two books in exchange for the two horses, she calls him a "hateful scoundrel."





# January 13, 1882, through July 4, 1882

## January 13, 1882, through July 4, 1882 Summary

On January 13, 1882, the group is preparing to leave El Paso. On January 14, Sarah's younger brother Harlan asks questions about their mother and the possibility that she might marry again someday. He then arrives with Captain Elliot for dinner, announcing that the Captain has come courting. Mama says that she is too recently widowed to entertain callers and thinks that the Captain is with the Confederate Army. Captain Elliot talks gently with her and it's two days before they see him again.

On January 20, the wagon train passes a group of Indians, mostly women and children. On January 21, Captain Elliot discovers that some of his soldiers has slaughtered the entire Indian village, including newborns. Sarah says that one of the soldiers arrested for the crime had been hanging around "making eyes" at Sarah, and that she'd known he was no good. On February 1, Sarah becomes ill and goes so far as to write her will. She leaves, among other things, her horse Rose to her brother Ernest with instructions that he is to take her with him to the military. Over the next days she begins to recover and says it was "newmoniea." Sarah says that she looked in the dictionary to find out how to spell the word but couldn't find it.

On February 14, the family arrives at a place near Cienega Creek where it seems their seedling trees would thrive and decide this is where they will settle. On February 15, Captain Elliot tells Sarah that she's saved the Army the cost of caring for the two horses and returns one of the books. It is not "Duchess of Warwick" as she had hoped but she is grateful to have one of the books back. Ernest leaves with the Captain.

On February 20, Albert and Mama go to Tucson to file claims for the land. Sarah and Savannah take a walk together and talk about the relationship between a man and a woman. Savannah is somewhat surprised that Sarah doesn't talk to her mother and tells Sarah that the sexual encounter can be a very special time if there's love involved. On February 23, Harlan is "peevisish" and finally admits that he fears something has happened to Albert and Mama. Savannah cries as well and Sarah takes them to the place their house will be built, drawing the rooms and furniture on the ground and teasing the others into smiles.

On March 14, the entire family goes to Tucson for supplies. Sarah buys blue material for a dress. On March 26, Mama says to let her think about the dress some before cutting it out, and tells Sarah stories of being young and courting with Sarah's father. On March 28 Captain Elliot comes for a visit. On April 30, one of the men from the wagon train, Mr. Raale, arrives with his young daughter, Melissa. On May 10, a young man named Jimmy Reed who had lived with Sarah's family prior to their trip West arrives. He'd chosen not to go with the family citing an engagement but now reveals that the engagement fell through. On May 14, Jimmy stakes a claim for himself nearby, starting with horses that he plans to breed for a ranch. On June 2, Jimmy, Sarah and Harlan



were to have gone to town together for supplies, but Harlan comes down with the measles so Sarah and Jimmy go alone. Sarah wears her new dress and sells some vegetables while Jimmy takes care of his own business.

On July 4, Sarah receives a letter from Ernest, delivered by Captain Elliot. Jimmy comes by and the two men immediately clash. As Sarah is wrapping up a piece of pie for Captain Elliot's trip back to his post, he kisses her.

## January 13, 1882, through July 4, 1882 Analysis

As the Captain and Ernest are pulling out, it suddenly occurs to Sarah that she didn't properly thank the Captain for all he'd done for her. She doesn't seem to know exactly what she's going to say when she leaves to go after him, but when she arrives she tells him that she is grateful that he kept them safe from the Indians and thanks him for protecting her family "from hateful rumors," indicating his protection of her own reputation. It is becoming evident that Captain Elliot is interested in Sarah, though she does not yet seem interested in him.

When Sarah goes into the store to buy material for her new dress, she asks the clerk if he has any scarlet velvet, like she's read about in the book. The clerk asks if she doesn't know that's red and she doesn't admit that she didn't. Though red in this day would have seemed something of a "shameful color," Sarah meets the man's stare without flinching. When Sarah then hesitates over the price of the material, she asks to see a catalog and points out a dress that she believes is pretty. It costs twenty-nine dollars and Sarah cannot imagine having that much to spend but thinks the dress is pretty. Savannah says that there's no need for a fancy dress because it hides the inner beauty of a woman. This cuts Sarah but Mama understands both young women - Sarah with her desire to be pretty and Savannah with her strict Quaker upbringing. When Sarah asks for seven yards of a blue material that costs twelve cents per yard, Mama asks for an extra yard so the dress can have some ruffles. She tells Sarah that there's nothing wrong with a little ruffles. The entire episode does, however, seem to upset Sarah some who admits that she's not feeling wonderful when they leave the store with their purchase.

Jimmy Reed had lived with Sarah's family for several years after his own family died of cholera. When Jimmy arrives, he spends a night with Sarah's family, and she hears him snoring almost as soon as he lies down. Sarah notes that it's a familiar sound, one that she's known for many years, and one that's been missing during their travels though she hadn't realized it.



# July 8, 1882, through July 27, 1884

## July 8, 1882, through July 27, 1884 Summary

On July 8, 1882, Sarah recounts that all the children of the Mexican family who live nearby, the Maldonados, survive their encounter with measles except a little girl who is called Yoyo who continues to have spots on her mouth and doesn't keep anything down for sixteen days. On July 10, Yoyo's birthday, the little girl is buried. On July 12, Savannah goes into labor and gives birth to a healthy son that they name Clover Jeremiah Prine. On July 13, Sarah had ridden to Jimmy's house to tell him about the baby. It's dark when Sarah arrives, and she has a supper of pancakes with Jimmy. A storm breaks and Sarah is debating whether she should go home in the rain or risk her reputation by staying at Jimmy's house for the night when there's a knock on the door and a man who introduces himself as Moses Smith enters. He is carrying guns such as a gunslinger would do and Jimmy fears the man might follow her if she leaves so Sarah and Jimmy spend the night awake, Jimmy holding onto a pistol and Sarah with a knife. They wake the man very early and go outside where they wait for him to come out as well. There's no trouble, though the man says it seems he might have surprised them with his arrival as Sarah has no clothes in the house.

On July 19, Sarah receives a letter from Ernest who thanks Sarah for her recent letter to Captain Elliot. Sarah rages at the situation, saying again that he's ornery and that the horses weren't the property of the Army anyway but had belonged to a family that died. On July 28, Sarah goes to help Jimmy with the planning for his house and he asks her to marry him. She agrees to give him an answer in a week. On August 4, Sarah agrees. On August 9, Sarah receives another letter from Ernest saying that he's soon to leave for the Indian battles in the Dakotas. There's a letter from Captain Elliot which Sarah expects to be a note of congratulations but is actually a note saying that the book in his possession is "no longer for sale."

On August 16, Jimmy and Mama go to town and won't allow Sarah to go, which makes her angry. On August 23, Sarah notes that Albert seems to be "touchy" but says that she has a great many things to do and that Albert and Sarah will have to "mend their own fences." On September 12, Jimmy is building furniture while Sarah is making other things, including clothing and a mattress tick. On October 2, Sarah receives word that Captain Elliot has not received her most recent letter asking that she be allowed to buy back the book because he's left the military to be a Texas Ranger. On October 9, Sarah has questions about her new life as a wife but can't seem to get answers from either Mama or Savannah and gives up. On October 20, Sarah and Jimmy are married and she discovers that he's built an incredible kitchen with a fancy stove, new pots and pans, a stove in the parlor for warmth, and a washing machine wringer. Their Mexican neighbors, the Maldonados, arrive with a cat for a mouser, pottery plates and food. Mama and Albert bring calf skins, kerosene lamps and a small machine to make tortillas.



On December 25, everyone gathers at Mama's for Christmas dinner. On January 9, Sarah believes she's pregnant. On January 9, 1883, Jimmy plans to go for more lumber to build on another room for a nursery and Sarah continues her work on a little adobe building and tries to coyote-proof her chicken pen. On January 26, Sarah writes that Jimmy has asked her to keep records of all the foals born. On February 19, Savannah announces she is pregnant. On March 21, Harland returns from a trip to town with some school work. Savannah says that Sarah should be more careful and not work so hard. On April 2, Sarah's horse, Rose, gives birth. On August 25, Sarah feels "poorly" and April Alice Reed is born on August 29. On September 3, Sarah recounts the birth, saying that she'd been in labor for two days and that she'd felt she would die. She says she believes this will be her only child. On November 11, Savannah gives birth to Joshua David and Sarah notes the difference between the few hours of childbirth for Savannah and the days for Sarah. On November 14, Sarah goes to visit Savannah and the new baby.

On December 18, Ernest arrives. On December 25, 1883, the family gathers for dinner. Sarah says that April is fussy, refuses to be put down and that her crying puts everyone on edge. On February 13, 1884, Sarah notes that April is finally sleeping more and that Sarah seems to be feeling more recovered. On May 1, Sarah says that she feels "like a draft horse" and complains of feeling "lonesome and achy." On July 22, Sarah says that Jimmy spends a great deal of time complaining, often about Sarah's perceived shortcomings. On July 27, Sarah is recounting the past several days as she stands beside Jimmy's grave. She says that Jimmy was thrown from a horse and Sarah backtracked the horse to find Jimmy, badly injured. He lived for three days; as he was about to die, he told Albert to send a letter to Ruthanne, the woman who had spurned Jimmy before he married Sarah. Jimmy's message to Ruthanne is that he has always loved her.

## **July 8, 1882, through July 27, 1884 Analysis**

Sarah fully expects her night with Jimmy to ruin her reputation but she says nothing about the reaction of her mother or brother when she returns home the next day.

Ernest says that Captain Elliot was happy and nice after receiving the letter from Sarah and thanks her for having written to him. Ernest seems to understand that a word from Sarah was a good thing for the Captain because of the Captain's emerging feelings for Sarah, though these feelings haven't been openly mentioned at this point. Sarah herself seems oblivious to this and to the reaction returned by Captain Elliot when he receives word that Sarah plans to marry Jimmy Reed. Sarah writes of the night she and Jimmy spent together with the man they both felt to be dangerous. Sarah says that when the man acts threatening to them, Jimmy had immediately pulled her behind him and that she'd felt safe with him. She also says that they get along well and that they work well together. However, when Sarah allows Jimmy to kiss her, she's struck by the difference of her emotions, in this case to her emotions when Captain Elliot had kissed her. She says that she must have been responding to the fact that Captain Elliot had no right to kiss her, prompting the heightened emotion of that kiss. Sarah does later say that



Jimmy builds a series of small steps to their porch and that he says it's so that children can climb them easier. She says that saying that made Jimmy want to kiss her, "and I was glad to be handy." This indicates that Sarah's feelings for Jimmy may not be a deep abiding love, but that she does care for him.

Sarah's first night with Jimmy as husband and wife is not presented in detail. She says only that he's very embarrassed and doesn't look her in the eye. Sarah says that it wasn't what she'd expected but doesn't elaborate. Later, Sarah writes that Jimmy "says it is dangerous to the baby," but she doesn't say what "it" is. It seems reasonable to believe that she's referring to sex though she doesn't dwell on the topic.

When Sarah is angry all over again because Captain Elliot has the book, *THE DUCHESS OF WARWICK*, she tells herself that she must find a way to be forgiving and pious. At one point, Sarah picks up a book called *THE EXPOSITIONAL SERMON TEXTS*. She says that every time she starts a new paragraph, she wishes that Captain Elliot had this book and she had *THE DUCHESS OF WARWICK* back.

Sarah has a great deal of trouble recovering from April's birth. Her Mama says that it's at least partly because April cries constantly. While Savannah and Albert have no trouble soothing their own children, even Savannah cannot help soothe April. The lack of rest may be wearing on Jimmy's nerves as well and when Sarah returns one day from Savannah's house, soon after the birth of the second child, Jimmy comes into the house and is obviously angry. He says that if Sarah is able to go visiting, she should have been able to clean house and get him a clean shirt. It's not entirely clear what's going on with Jimmy at this early point, and Sarah has quickly come to learn that he is not a particularly open person. She says that he doesn't say "I love you" to her. It's only after Jimmy's death that Sarah learns that he has often visited women in town for sex and that he'd apparently never gotten over his love for Ruthanne. When Sarah and her family decided to move west, Jimmy had remained behind, citing his love for Ruthanne, who apparently spurned him in favor of a ranch foreman. Jimmy had apparently never gotten over that heartbreak; this realization will haunt Sarah's future relationship with Jack Elliot. Sarah also learns that many of the horses Jimmy had brought to begin his ranch were stolen from his former employer, though the man had decided not to press charges when he heard that Jimmy was getting married, citing that this was the best thing Sarah would get from the union.



# December 1, 1884, through July 31, 1885

## December 1, 1884, through July 31, 1885 Summary

On December 1, 1884, Sarah says that she's dyed her outer clothes black but sees no need to dye the petticoats for a man who didn't love her. On February 9, 1885, Sarah's dog, Bear, is hit by a bull and on February 10, she asks her mother and Savannah for suggestions of how to heal the dog. On February 22, Sarah says that Bear seems fine. On March 1, Sarah's other dog, Toobuddy, is acting foolish, and she finally follows him and finds Jack Elliot trapped under a horse though she doesn't initially recognize him. She goes home for the wagon, drags the dead horse off Elliot and takes him home. On March 3, it appears he will live and she borrows some clothes from Albert for him. He says that he's been reassigned to the Sixth Calvary at Lowell and is now a "special advisor in Indian affairs." He borrows a horse to return to his regiment. On March 16, he returns the horse, accompanied by a group of soldiers.

On March 20, Sarah is making soap and comes up with the idea to use some of the rouge and perfume that she'd found in the wagon load of books. The result is pretty and smells nice and she takes some to her mother and Savannah on March 23. On March 25, Sarah makes more soap, wraps it and writes "Mrs. Reed's Fine Ladies' Soap" on the wrappers and on April 8, sells it in Tucson where she encounters Jack Elliot and spends the day with him, starting with a picnic at Carillo Gardens. On April 17, the young Mexican boy named Ruben asks Sarah to marry him and she refuses. She says that he is kind, hardworking and would likely make a good husband but wants the kind of love that she sees between Savannah and Albert. It's this realization that lessens her anger toward Jimmy because she says he probably didn't have the ability to recover from Ruthanne, just as Sarah might have broken Ruben's heart.

On May 4, Sarah is visiting Mama when she and Albert see dust on the horizon. Sarah leaves April with Savannah and she and Albert rush to discover Indians at the home of Ruben's family. Ruben is killed and his mother shoots herself to avoid being captured by the Indians. Sarah and Albert move on to the home of Mr. Raalle and find him dead. The little girl, Melissa, is in the house which the Indians set on fire. Sarah and Albert are in the thick of battle when soldiers, led by Jack, arrive, just in time to save Sarah when she runs out of shells. On May 5, Sarah writes that Jack - who is now a lieutenant - kissed her. On May 15, the community is recovering from the Indian attack, Melissa is living with Sarah's mother, and Sarah continues to remember Jack's kiss.

On May 16, Sarah receives a package with no return address that has several packets of flower seeds. On June 28, Jack arrives at Sarah's house and tells her that he's arranged to spend the night with Albert and Savannah. He spends some of the day helping with chores, has dinner with Sarah, and returns to work some more on June 29. Jack then says the reason was that he'd already asked her to meet him in town on July 4 and that she is now indebted to him and that his payment will be to have her meet him in town. On June 30, Sarah discovers that he's planted a rosebush for her.





On July 4, Sarah goes to Tucson and spends the day with Jack. They drive around the area but leave town when the fireworks start, Sarah saying that she hates the smell of gunpowder. Jack tells the story of his mother's death at the hands of Union soldiers who burned his house when he was six. Sarah spends the night in a motel. On July 5, they spend the day together. Albert gives her almost four hundred dollars from the sale of some horses, and Sarah asks for the return of the book, but Jack says it was destroyed during a battle, prompting Sarah to wonder why Jack had it with him. On July 19, Jack arrives at the farm with blocks as a gift for April. Jack says he's spending the night with Albert and will return the following day. Before time for his arrival, Sarah and April take a cool bath and are in the tub when a man rides up. It's the man Sarah knows as Moses Smith, though that turns out to be a fake name. He attacks Sarah and is just about to rape her when Jack arrives and beats the man almost to death. April is traumatized and holds tight to Sarah for days. On July 30, Sarah says that Bear - who was killed by her attacker - is buried on the hill next to Jimmy. She learns that Moses Smith is really William Gunther, and he hangs in Bisbee for murder. When Jack returns after turning Gunther over to the sheriff, he asks Sarah to marry him. She initially refuses until he makes it clear that he loves her. On July 31, 1885, Sarah admits to Savannah that Jack has asked Sarah to marry him, and they might set a December date so that Ernest can be present. Sarah also admits that they've kissed and when Sarah goes to spend the night with her mother, Savannah insists that both Jack and Albert walk her home.

## **December 1, 1884, through July 31, 1885 Analysis**

Sarah snaps at Savannah after Bear is injured by the bull and immediately feels ashamed of having done so. In fact, Sarah is in an impossible situation now because the ranch Jimmy started is now left to her alone. She works impossibly long hours and cannot keep up with the work at hand, and she is doing all this with a child in her arms. Savannah and Albert are helping, but there is enough work for Albert at his own farm. Sarah will soon come to depend on the young men from the Mexican family nearby. Sarah comes to realize that the young Mexican men have been working a great deal on her farm with no pay and insists that they take a horse each as payment. The one thing she won't allow is for anyone to take the stallion that Jimmy was riding when he was thrown. Though Albert says that Jimmy must have done something stupid to cause the accident, Sarah knows she would feel a sense of responsibility if someone else were injured while riding that horse.

Sarah and April encounter Jack in Tucson when Sarah is selling her soap and he insists that they spend the day together. Sarah is not yet analyzing her feelings for Jack but does admit that he makes her "feel like I have my bonnet on backwards." Sarah says that Jimmy had never had any inclination toward helping her buy any frivolous things that a woman might desire. She is initially proud of Jimmy's drive and his building such a fine house for them and is amazed that he goes to such great lengths to outfit a wonderful kitchen just for her. But then she discovers that this all seems to be an effort on Jimmy's part to make up for what he believes to be missing from his life. Jack, however, seems intuitively to know that Sarah needs flowers and color. He plants a rose

bush with a somewhat sentimental card attached, telling her how to care for it so that it will live for many years.

Jack's initial proposal seems to Sarah very similar to that of Jimmy. He says that he believes they will make good partners, but Sarah has by now seen what she believes true love should be in the relationship between Savannah and Albert. She is no longer willing to settle for something else. When Jack realizes what her concerns are, he takes her in his arms and kisses her. She says that it's something not quite decent and that she likes it a lot. Sarah is constantly comparing herself to Savannah and seems to hold Savannah up as a model of the perfect person. She also refers often to a book about being a young bride that makes her feel that she doesn't quite measure up to the standard. When she and Jack marry, he'll tell her that he doesn't want any of those things, but wants her as she is.





# August 5, 1885, through May 10, 1886

## August 5, 1885, through May 10, 1886 Summary

On August 5, 1885, Sarah reads her most recent letter from Jack and says that he writes "a dust cloud of words." On August 28, the family comes for April's second birthday. On October 1, Jack writes that he'd like to take Sarah to meet his father in Texas, and they plan a trip there immediately after their wedding. On October 6, Sarah's house is in a "flurry" as she is busy sewing clothes for the wedding and the trip. Jack is beginning to plan to lessen the number of horses and to raise cows instead. On October 8, Sarah says she has been in a bad mood though it is not because Jack left and that she cannot possibly love a low, coarse man such as he is. On November 1, Sarah receives a letter and says that she loves Jack very much. On December 4, Sarah says she doesn't know how she could have doubted herself.

On December 20, 1885, Savannah writes a letter to Sarah about her wedding, including how beautiful Sarah looks. Sarah also writes of her fears as she waits for Jack's return that night. On December 21, Sarah writes that Jack had been gone so long because he was having a broach repaired - a family heirloom that he presents to Sarah. Sarah writes that the lovemaking is wonderful and fulfilling. On December 23, Jack, Sarah and April are on their way to Texas to see Jack's father. On the train, Sarah is asked to join some ladies for tea and does so at Jack's urging. She soon realizes that they are talking down to her and fully believe both Sarah and Jack to be somewhat ignorant and unrefined. At the depot, one of the women meets her son - a military cadet - who, upon seeing Jack, snaps to attention, salutes and shows the utmost respect. The woman then "sidles up" to Sarah who sees her not for the haughty woman she'd been moments earlier, but as a woman who had just seen her son admire Jack.

Sarah and Charles Elliot - known as Chess - get off on an uneasy footing. He spoils April immediately. On December 26, Sarah writes that they are pampered to the point that she fears April's reaction when they return home, especially considering that Chess thinks it's funny for April to throw a tantrum. On December 27, Chess asks Jack and Sarah to remain with him, but Sarah says her family has spilled too much blood in the Arizona Territory to just walk away from it. On January 12, 1886, Sarah, Jack and April head for home. On January 16, the train is stopped and robbed. Jack takes control of part of the situation and Sarah shoots one of the men in the ear. Several passengers are killed and Jack is shot. On January 19, they arrive in Tucson and Sarah insists Jack be taken to the Saint Mary's Hospital where he recovers over the next few days. On January 22, Sarah and Jack return to the ranch and Sarah meets Mason Sherrill, the man Jack has hired as a ranch hand. On January 26, Jack has returned to the fort and Sarah knows she is pregnant. On February 5, Sarah tells Jack that she is expecting and notes that he cries.

On February 8, Jack leaves again for the fort and it begins to rain. On February 9, the low places have become flowing streams. Sarah battles frogs that continue to hop onto



the porch, kills one snake and then a rattlesnake that climbs onto April's chair. Mason, who has been living in a small adobe room near the house, finds his living space underwater and Sarah helps him move onto the porch. She remains somewhat uncomfortable having a man in the house but comes to trust him more in the enforced closeness. Mason plays guitar and they sing for awhile the first night, then Sarah reads from *Treasure Island*. The rain continues for several days and on February 12, Mama comes to the other side of the stream and yells that Savannah is in labor, and that it's not going well. With Mason's help, Sarah fords the stream on Rose. After hours with no apparent progress, Savannah finally gives birth to a little girl in the breech position, followed by a second little girl. Both are tiny, but live. Savannah, however, has lost a great deal of blood and is very weak.

On February 14, it's evident that Savannah is not going to recover and she's taken to Saint Mary's Hospital. On February 16, a specialist arrives and asks Sarah to donate blood. After being assured there's no danger to her own unborn child, she agrees and Savannah, with several more donors, begins to recover. On February 28, Jack returns and Sarah tells him he has to be careful so that their children do not grow up without a father. On March 10, Jack leaves and warns that it's likely to be a long campaign. Savannah learns that her sister, Ulyssa, is in a tuberculosis sanitarium in Tucson but is not allowed visitors.

## **August 5, 1885, through May 10, 1886 Analysis**

As Sarah waits for Jack to return on their wedding night, she begins to imagine all sorts of things - that he might be gone to see the prostitutes as Jimmy had done. She lets her imagination go so far that she conjures up a newspaper headline, "Man swallowed up on Congress Street," and imagines herself as the grieving widow after Jack disappears into a hole. When he returns, Jack tells Sarah that he was married once before and that the woman was an Indian. Being able to live in neither world, the two had not been married by either Indian rituals or by a preacher, but Jack apparently felt the commitment to be real. He says that she was taken away by some of her own tribe members and believes her to be dead, having never been able to find her. When Sarah hears this, she immediately fears Jack still loves his lost Indian partner and that this love will mean that he never really loves her, just as had been the case with Jimmy. Jack seems frustrated as he tries to explain to her and says that he had loved the Indian woman, but that he'd been young and foolish, refusing to see the danger he'd put her in, and that he does love Sarah fully. She seems reassured. Jack then tells Sarah that he wants her as she is, "spitfire and all."

There is a point of foreshadowing when Sarah leaves the station on the train. Sarah and Ernest were always close, probably closer than Sarah and Albert despite the recent separation. When Sarah and Ernest say good-bye to each other, Sarah notes that she sees a "cold, faraway look in his eyes," and that she realizes this will be the last time they see each other. However, it isn't. Ernest will show up later with a wife though this wife eliminates any chance Ernest might settle with his family. It's left to the reader to decide the significance of Sarah's premonition, if there is any.



Sarah and Jack have apparently never really talked about whether Jack would remain active in his military career and Sarah is hurt when she discovers that he does. She says that he can't understand that she's waiting for him to return or perhaps news of his death the entire time he's out doing this job that he seems to truly love. It's going to weigh on Sarah for some time, and she is very angry with Jack for the situation, especially after she's pregnant, until Savannah points out that this could be a blessing. As Savannah puts it, Sarah's willful independence would be greatly stifled with Jack around all the time. In the current situation, the two are glad to be together when they are and their nearness never becomes overwhelming for either. Sarah comes to realize that Savannah could be right on this point.



# May 21, 1886, through January 18, 1888

## May 21, 1886, through January 18, 1888 Summary

On May 21, 1886, Sarah and Jack have an argument over nothing, and he says that he is leaving on another campaign and this time won't return until Geronimo is captured or dead. He may not return until after the baby is born. On May 25, Chess arrives just as Jack is preparing to leave. On May 26, Jack leaves. Chess and a group of hired hands are staying at the ranch for a while. On July 1, Sarah receives a letter from Jack who says there is no end of the campaign yet in sight. On July 4, Mama says that Mason Sherrill had come to call on her and Sarah says she is glad to have Chess at the ranch with her in Jack's absence. On August 26, Jack returns and has a fever that keeps him in bed for two days. On August 28, Sarah tells Jack that she learned he had attended college, West Point, and fears that he is ashamed of her because she has had no education. Jack says that she isn't ignorant and reassures her.

On September 25, Sarah feels the signs of early labor and sends Mason with April to get Mama with the message that they should come late that evening. There's a sudden onset of pains and Jack winds up delivering the baby, a son, they named John Charles Elliott and who will be called Charlie. On September 29, Sarah writes that Mama and Savannah arrived well after the birth and were surprised at the difference in this labor and Sarah's previous delivery. Jack asks Sarah to consider moving to the fort so they will be together more. On December 1, Jack has the arrangements made, Sarah having given in after realizing that the move means April can attend school.

On January 10, 1887, Sarah's house is in turmoil as they prepare for the move. She finds a letter Jack had started in 1882 in which he states his love for her. In that letter, he'd cited her actions on the trail as the reasons he'd fallen in love with her. Sarah returns the letter to its hiding place, in the pages of the book he'd traded for a horse so long ago, and seems less frightened of the upcoming move.

On January 12, Sarah wakes for the first morning in the fort to a bugle call. She predicts this will become an important part of her life. On January 19, Sarah is miserable as the sod roof is falling in during rain and she predicts that there will be spiders and centipedes falling out of the roof during the summer. Just as she's trying to make the point to Jack, a clod of dirt falls on the stove. It takes nothing more for him to head out to order a new roof. Sarah has money she's saved, mostly from making soap, and says she will use that if she has to but that the children cannot live without a roof. On February 3, Sarah writes that some of the other wives are angry that they still have mud roofs and Sarah says that's the penalty for not speaking up. On May 5, Sarah writes that she has an Apache woman who helps with the chores, including the never-ending stream of diapers to wash. Jack is about to leave on a campaign and Sarah plans to spend that time at the ranch.



On May 31, Sarah says that she's very tired and beginning to understand how to oversee the operations on the ranch. When she is to return to the fort, she takes Melissa, Harland and Clover with her. Harland is due to take his "commencement test" and will go to college if he passes. As they travel, they encounter a man who says he will take Melissa for his own. Sarah shoots the man twice, who rides off a short distance and raises his arm, apparently about to shoot a pistol in their direction. Sarah then shoots the man again. When she reaches town, she goes to the Marshal and Jack learns later that the man had reached town but had died. On June 1, the Marshal arrives and says that the man's body had been displayed on the street with a note that read, "Murdered on the road to Tucson," and warns that there could be retaliation.

On July 14, Harland goes to take his test and Sarah, in talking to Mrs. Fish who orders the tests, agrees to take the test as well though she doesn't believe she can be ready. On August 1, Sarah writes that she and the children were outside when the brother of the man she shot arrives. He tells her that he initially pledged revenge but has learned that his brother was not honorable and decided not to retaliate. On August 4, Sarah takes the test. She says that she isn't familiar with all the questions. On September 3, Sarah realizes she is pregnant yet again. She says that she and Jack had agreed to wait awhile but that he is smiling after she tells him the news.

On October 1, Sarah meets an Indian scout named Blue Horse and a man named Sergeant Lockwood. On October 4, Sarah says that there is some fallout over her willingness to have Blue Horse at her home. On October 4, Sarah goes to a bank to make a deposit and the banker is condescending, saying she should leave the confusing money matters to her husband, prompting Sarah to say that she doesn't want her money in any bank where the bankers believe money to be confusing. Citing the five hundred dollars she was about to deposit, she leaves the man speechless. On October 10, Jack returns and Sarah learns that Sergeant Lockwood saved Jack's life and was injured in the deal. On October 22, Sarah takes a pillow and blanket to Sergeant Lockwood in addition to the soup she takes most days. On October 30, Sarah and the children attend church and are spurned because of her friendship with Blue Horse. Sergeant Lockwood arrives and sits with Sarah, prompting a slight lessening of the cold attitudes.

On November 22, Sarah and Jack go to the ranch for Sarah's birthday and Jack reads aloud her certificate which had arrived. Sarah passed with higher marks than Harland. On January 2, 1888, Jack leaves on another campaign. Sergeant Lockwood accompanies Sarah and the children to church again and stays for a meal and then plays with the children. On January 9, Sarah fears she sees love in Sergeant Lockwood's eyes and declines another invitation to church, pleading illness from her pregnancy. She then declines his offer to stay and make something for her to eat. On January 18, Jack returns home and Sarah tells him her fears about Sergeant Lockwood, hoping to head off any rumors.



## May 21, 1886, through January 18, 1888 Analysis

Sarah is obviously feeling some of the pain of being pregnant when Jack is leaving for yet another campaign. She says there are so many men around that they all know how often she's headed to the outhouse, and that she goes often because of the pressure of the baby. After Jack leaves, Sarah cries on Chess's shoulder and says that life isn't fair because the men get to run around the country while the women remain at home to worry. After this ranting session, Sarah's obvious strength is seen and she says that she was then finished with the crying, calling it "a waste of water." She finishes the entry by saying, "And I still have to go to the outhouse again."

Sarah says that taking a test gives her a new reason to be afraid because her scores will be a matter of record for people to see. She says that if she fails at something, she knows that she failed. But her failure on this test will be something that other people see as well. Sarah is worried about her intelligence and it seems she is less confident because she has never had anyone to measure herself against. This is also a testament to the power of reading as an education tool because that is the only real source of information Sarah has ever had.

Sarah's passing the examination from the board of education seems to be a problem for her because she is suddenly faced with all the things she might have accomplished in her life had she had the right opportunities earlier. She says that life is like a road and that there's no way to backtrack to some point in order to walk that stretch over again. She says that the test may have been a way of testing what she had learned up to this point, but that it feels that it has pointed out the things that she'll never have.



# March 9, 1888, through June 30, 1901

## March 9, 1888, through June 30, 1901 Summary

On March 9, 1888, Sarah writes to thank God for the birth of a healthy son, Gilbert. She says that Blue Horse chanted on the porch during her labor. On March 12, a man arrives with a box of puppies that look just like Toobuddy and Sarah begins looking for good homes. On March 22, Sarah has given away three of the puppies and plans to keep one named Rusty at the ranch. Sarah donates a box of books to the newly-established college and there's a newspaper article about the donation from the "extensive library of Captain and Mrs. J.E. Elliot." Sarah calls it "a hoot." On April 6, Toobuddy is run over in town as the children are headed to school, and the boys responsible laugh at the children's tears. On April 7, the boys are not at school and on April 9 there's a newspaper article saying that the two boys had been beaten severely. Blue Horse is nowhere to be found. On May 18, 1890, Sarah writes that she gave birth to a daughter, Suzanne, on May 14.

On Christmas Day, December 25, 1891, Sarah says she has bought new bulls for the ranch, that she is lonely and spends most of her time cooking and cleaning. On January 7, Sarah and Jack make plans to build a new house in town and Jack leaves again. On January 21, Jack returns and says that he believes he saw Blue Horse, but the man slipped out without acknowledging Jack.

On March 1, 1892, Sarah meets Sergeant Lockwood's new wife. The woman is high-strung and on March 22 Sarah writes that the newlyweds fight constantly. On April 8, Sarah goes to visit Sergeant Lockwood's wife, Adelita, and on April 12, Adelita returns the visit. On June 2, Sarah visits Adelita and tells her that the nervousness she is feeling is due to her pregnancy. Sarah is pregnant for the fifth time. On June 19, Sarah says that Adelita is completely insane.

On November 24, 1892, Ernest arrives with his new bride, Felicity. The marriage is a surprise and Felicity is pampered, not at all fitting in with Sarah and her family. On November 25, Thanksgiving, Charlie breaks his arm and he and Sarah, who is suffering with a constant backache and fatigue during this pregnancy, take a nap in the evening. The entire family is together at Sarah's house. On November 28, the family is gone except for Felicity and Ernest. On November 29, Sarah, Jack, Felicity, Ernest and the children travel to the ranch. Felicity says that Sarah should "sell" her a share in the ranch on credit and let her work to pay it back. Jack outright refuses. On December 4, 1892, the same group are headed back to town because Felicity is angry and wants to go home after Sarah insists that she learn how to do ranch work, such as branding and castration.

On December 8, Adelita gives birth to a girl and then kills the baby, prompting Sergeant Lockwood to kill Adelita. On April 8, 1893, Sarah writes that she gave birth to a baby boy much too early, home alone, and that the child was stillborn. On June 9, Harland and





Melissa marry and Harland, having finished his college, is an architect in San Francisco. On September 1, 1894, Gilbert begins school. On September 6, 1894, Suzanne comes down with yet another cold and Jack announces that he's going to help search for a gang of train robbers. On September 5, he leaves and Sarah takes Suzanne to the doctor. On September 13, Jack arrives home and Sarah greets him with the news that Suzanne died and was buried four days earlier. Jack rushes to the cemetery and cries for a long time. On September 18, Jack says he plans to retire from the army and become fire chief. On November 14, Sarah says she now understands why her mother went out of her head at the loss of her son and husband. Sarah says that she wishes she knew how to cope.

On March 10, 1900, Sarah says she can hardly believe it's been four years since she had time to write in her journal. On March 14, 1900, Sarah is scrubbing the kitchen floor when she hears a fire bell and learns that city hall, which is under construction, is on fire. Then there's an insistent knock on the door and a man says that Jack has been hurt. Sarah rushes to the hospital where she finds that Jack had rushed back into the building when he thought he heard a child crying. April soon arrives and Jack tells her to never forget that he is, in all ways that matter, her father, then sends her to find the boys. Jack sends both on errands, one to send for Sarah's mother and one to telegraph Jack's father. He tells Sarah he's sorry for leaving her and dies.

On March 25, Sarah makes the decision to move to the ranch. The boys are excited but April is angry. On March 30, Sarah writes that April ran away and got married and that she hopes the young couple finds happiness. Chess remains with Sarah. On June 30, 1901, Sarah pays to have the coffins of Jack, Suzanne and the baby boy moved to the ranch.

## **March 9, 1888, through June 30, 1901 Analysis**

Adelita Lockwood confides in Sarah that she does not believe her husband is much of a man and bases this on the fact that she calls him a coward and he doesn't react. Adelita seems to believe that her husband should beat on her if he loves her. This seems a case of having seen this kind of relationship and basing her own ideal of marriage on that. However, Adelita soon proves that she is facing some break in reality. When Adelita begins to seem that she might be a danger to herself or her unborn child, Sergeant Lockwood removes all the knives, scissors and glass from the house. When Adelita gives birth to a healthy child, it seems that she might get a grip but one night later, Sergeant Lockwood arrives with a gun. He speaks somewhat cryptically and Jack follows him back to the fort where he finds that Sergeant Lockwood had found that Adelita had killed their child and then he had killed her. When Jack goes in search of Lockwood with instructions to bring him back in, he is gone only a short time and the indication is that he's found Lockwood and let him go.

The situation with Ernest and Felicity is interesting in that this woman seems to have changed Ernest. He tells Sarah that he could hardly believe it when she consented to marry him, indicating that he felt she was not really in his social class. Ernest has no





reservations in his efforts to make his new wife happy and he tells Sarah that she'll have to keep the children quiet and that Felicity is accustomed to being waited on. The entire situation makes Sarah mad but another important part of this is that Felicity consistently rubs against Jack or makes an excuse to touch him. This is so overt that Jack tries not to be in a room alone for fear that he'll encounter the woman. Felicity has so captured Ernest that Ernest lies, telling the woman that he's part owner in Sarah's farm and in Albert's pecan farm, neither of which is true. The match seems doomed but Sarah notes that they remain together for the coming years.

Sarah has, in the end, returned to her ranch. She and Chess seem to be at ease with each other and Sarah says that Chess is a good person to teach her sons about the ranch. Sarah also seems to have gotten past the feelings of loss regarding her own education and says that the boys will finish their own by mail, as Harland did. She says that she has come to realize that learning is not something that comes to a halt at any point and that there is no reason that she won't continue to learn. An interesting thing is that April is as headstrong as Sarah and that seems to be at the root of at least some of their clashes, though April also has a quality unlike Sarah in that she seems to have at least something of a mean streak as is evident when she argues with Jack, yelling that he is not her father. This prompts Jack's reminder to her on his deathbed that he is, in all ways that are important.



# Characters

## Sarah Prine

Sarah's courage is an important aspect of her life and personality. One example of this courage is seen when Sarah finds a woman who has been greatly mutilated, her first concern is that the situation not become known to her mother and sister-in-law. Sarah could just as easily have fallen apart herself, screaming out her fear over the situation, but she doesn't. Instead, she goes to great lengths to find the person who can take care of the situation. Sarah's courage is later seen in her determination to keep her ranch going. Sarah isn't the only person who shows great courage. Jack is always a courageous individual. Sarah recalls one of her first impressions of Jack is when he has a sword and is rushing to the rescue of a woman who is already dead during an Indian attack. Jack's courage is a driving force behind his own nature and it seems to be this aspect of Jack's personality that draws him to Sarah and that draws Sarah to Jack. They are only two of the many courageous people depicted in this story. These characters are, by and large, willing to face danger and hard work head on in order to carve out a life for themselves and their families in this area known as the Arizona Territory.

## Jack Elliot

Captain Elliot is a member of the Calvary detachment assigned to guard Sarah and the others on their trip from San Angelo back eastward. He is a strong man and seems almost immediately taken with Sarah, though it takes her a great deal of time to realize his affection. She routinely refers to him as "ornery" and swears, during each of his visits, that she will be glad when he's gone. After Jimmy's death, Jack shows up again and lends a hand with the duties of the ranch each time. Sarah says that he isn't comfortable like Jimmy had been, but comes to love him fully. Jack is a forceful person in his own right but teasingly allows Sarah to rule in matters of their home. He refers to her as "General Elliot" and teaches the children to do so as well. Jack is a career army man and only leaves the military life after the death of Suzanne, their youngest daughter. Jack dies as the result of wounds sustained while fighting a fire. His final words are to Sarah and he apologizes for leaving her alone to raise their family.

## Savannah Prine

Savannah marries Sarah's brother, Albert, and leaves her own family behind to become part of Albert's. Savannah and Sarah are, from their first meeting, friends, and the bond of family makes them truly sisters. Sarah notes that Savannah is more of a sister to her than any blood relative could possibly have been. When Savannah is dying from loss of blood, Sarah has no doubt that she will be a match, and she is. Savannah was raised



as a Quaker and has pacifist tendencies though she understands the need for violence as a way of protecting one's family.

## **Ernest William Prine**

Sarah's older brother, Ernest is shot in the leg by an arrow during an Indian attack early in their journey to San Angelo. A man who had worked as a surgeon of sorts for the military helps remove Ernest's leg. Sarah notes that he suddenly seems much smaller than he had before the incident. Ernest joins the military and works with horses. He eventually marries a very spoiled woman named Felicity.

## **Clover Prine**

Sarah's younger brother, Clover is six when the family sets out on the trip to San Angelo. One night early in the trip, Clover screams out that there's a snake in his bed, but his yells are apparently discounted as a bad dream. The next morning, it's evident that he was bitten by a snake. He is feverish and dies later that day. It should be noted that Albert and Savannah name one of their sons Clover as well.

## **Albert Prine**

Sarah's older brother who marries Savannah. Albert is quiet but solid and dependable. He loves Savannah completely and, faced with the possibility of her death, is emotional and pleads with God to spare her. Albert and Sarah are not as close as Sarah and Ernest, though it's Albert who stands by and helps Sarah when he can while Ernest ignores Sarah's plea for help.

## **Harland Prine**

Harland is Sarah's younger brother and her inspiration for taking the board of education's exam. Harland attends college to become an architect and later marries Melissa, the young girl taken in by Sarah's mother after an Indian attack left the girl an orphan. Harland and Melissa move to San Francisco where he gets a job after finishing college.

## **Jimmy Reed**

James Eldon Reed is the young man who comes to live with Sarah's family when his own parents die of cholera. Jimmy seems more of a brother to Sarah than a potential suitor until after Sarah's family return from their trip and are joined by Jimmy near their new homestead. Jimmy is a hard-working young man who wants to settle down with a family and build a life for himself and his family. He doesn't seem at all certain that Sarah will agree to marry him and seems surprised when she returns with an affirmative



answer. In truth, Jimmy loves a young woman who has spurned his attention and his dying words are a request that Albert will tell the woman of his unrequited love.

## **Mama**

Sarah's mother is a strong woman though she has a temporary break with reality after the death of her son and husband. When Sarah becomes very ill, Mama returns to reality and later tells Sarah that she'd known that everything had been in Sarah's capable hands and that her break had been her way of coping.

## **Ruben**

A young Mexican boy who, along with his brother, helps Sarah on the ranch after Jimmy's death. Ruben asks Sarah to marry him and she declines, realizing that she wants the kind of all-consuming love she sees between Savannah and Albert. Ruben is killed during an Indian attack.

## **Mason Sherrill**

The man Jack hires to tend the Ranch while he and Sarah are gone to Texas to visit Jack's father. Mason earns Sarah's trust and takes over the operations in her absence. He begins courting Mama and visits her regularly.

## **April**

Sarah's oldest daughter and the only child born to her marriage to Jimmy. Sarah has a difficult labor and April is a temperamental baby. Faced with the plan to return to the ranch, April runs away and gets married.

## **Suzanne**

The youngest daughter of Jack and Sarah. Suzanne is the only child remaining at home when the older three are attending school. She comes down with what Sarah terms "another cold" that develops into scarlet fever. She dies while Jack is away and her death seems to prompt Jack's decision to give up the military life.



## **Objects/Places**

### **San Angelo**

Where Sarah's father had decided that the family should settle and where he died.

### **Arizona Territory**

Where Sarah and her family settle. She notes that there has been too much blood spilled for her to be willing to leave the land behind.

### **Cienega Creek**

The area where Sarah, her mother and two brothers plan to settle upon their return from San Angelo.

### **Tucson**

Where the land office is for filing of land claims.

### **The Duchess of Warwick and Her Sorrows by the Sea**

The book that Sarah finds a single page to and that Captain Elliot takes as payment for the horses.

### **Carillio Gardens**

The place in Tucson where Sarah and April picnic with Jack Elliot.

### **Saint Mary's Hospital**

Where Jack goes after being shot during a train robbery and where Savannah goes after losing blood during the birth of the twins.

### **West Point**

Where Jack attended college.

## **Texas**

Where Chess lives.

## **Congress Street**

The location of the hotel where Sarah and Jack stay after their wedding.

## **The Fort**

Where Sarah and Jack live while Jack is in the military.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

Sarah ages physically over the course of the story but also matures in terms of her self-confidence, self-awareness and her belief in herself. One example of this maturity is seen in Sarah's realization that she and her Mama had endured very similar heartaches and that she finally understood her mama's reaction by her own. When Clover and Papa die, Mama has a break with reality and doesn't regain control of herself until Sarah becomes ill. Sarah, having lost a brother and a father in that situation, believes that she's endured a horrible heartache of her own and doesn't fully understand her mother's reaction. However, when Sarah's daughter Suzanne dies, Sarah suddenly understands that losing a sibling is nothing like the heartache of losing a child. She goes so far as to say that she would gladly go to this place her mother had sought if she only knew how. Another aspect of this theme is seen in Sarah's realization that what she had felt about Jimmy was not true love. Sarah doesn't seem to fully analyze her feelings for Jimmy before agreeing to marry him. When Jack asks, Sarah takes much more time and questions both her feelings for Jack and his for her.

## The Quest for Knowledge

Sarah is interested in learning from the time she is a young girl, and this need to learn new things continues to grow as she does. When Sarah finds the wagonload of books, she is immediately set on finding a way to take them with her. The thought of losing any one book to anyone hurts. She calls Jack ornery and a skunk when she has to trade two books for two horses in order to get the wagons home. Sarah signs up for a "commencement test" from the board of education. The purpose of the test is to prove that she knows enough to have completed the twelfth grade. When she signs up for the test, she doesn't really believe she can pass but Sarah underestimated the knowledge she'd gained from all the books she'd read. When Sarah realizes she has passed, her immediate response is that something has come to an end, as if proving that she has the knowledge to pass this test means that she has no longer any need to learn. Sarah comes to realize that learning is a lifelong passion and that anything she learns is a positive thing. An interesting point is that Sarah did not pass this love of knowledge on to April, and April grows angry when Sarah tries to make her look up some piece of information.

## Courage

Sarah's courage is an important aspect of her life and her personality. One example of this courage is seen when Sarah finds a woman who has been greatly mutilated, her first concern is that the situation not become known to her mother and sister-in-law. Sarah could just as easily have fallen apart herself, screaming out her fear over the



situation, but she doesn't; instead, she goes to great lengths to find the person who can take care of the situation. Sarah's courage is later seen in her determination to keep her ranch going. Sarah isn't the only person who shows great courage. Jack is always a courageous individual. Sarah recalls one of her first impressions of Jack when he has a sword and is rushing to the rescue of a woman who is already dead during an Indian attack. Jack's courage is a driving force behind his own nature and it seems to be this aspect of Jack's personality that draws him to Sarah, and that draws Sarah to Jack. They are only two of the many courageous people depicted in this story. These characters are, by and large, willing to face danger and hard work head on in order to carve out a life for themselves and their families in the area known as the Arizona Territory.





# Style

## Point of View

With only a couple of noted examples, the story is written in first person from a limited point of view. Those exceptions are presented in the form of letters written to Sarah from other people, including Jack and Savannah. The story is presented as a journal, which makes it appropriate that the story be written in first person and that it be limited to Sarah's perspective. It's also important to note that Sarah shares a great deal of her innermost thoughts, ideas and fears through this journal, which is also appropriate for a journal. For example, Sarah confides her fears regarding her decision to marry Jack Elliot, saying that she can't possibly love a man such as that, that she does love him, and that she can't imagine that she might have doubted her love. The insight into Sarah's thoughts and feelings provide a vital look at Sarah's personality. On several occasions she writes that she is not as pure and pious as Savannah, citing Savannah's constantly calm exterior. Sarah holds Savannah up as an example for herself and seems to want to try to live up to that role model, though she never does. At one point, Sarah is berating herself for her selfishness in that she's thankful that all her family is safe after an Indian attack that took the lives of several neighbors. In that case, she soon realizes that Savannah is praying the same prayer of thanksgiving which makes Sarah realize - at least to some extent - that she is not that different from other people.

## Setting

The majority of the story is set in the Arizona Territory during the years prior to and immediately following 1900. Sarah's first entry in her journal is in 1881 and her final entry is 1901. The dates are clearly spelled out, meaning the reader can check the events against a historical setting. For example, Arizona became a state in 1912, but it's reasonable to think that people would have been talking about the possibility for several years prior to the event. That makes it believable that Sarah's daughter April presents an essay on the subject during a school recital during the late 1800s. The setting is, overall, historically accurate. There is a train ride that is described in some detail and that seems reasonable for the time period. There is a train robbery, which also seems reasonable. Sarah herself is caught up in a tumultuous time in which many women were forced out of the parlors and into the forefront of defending their families and handling duties that had often fallen to men. This is where Sarah comes into her own and is a believable character overall for the time and place.

## Language and Meaning

The overall tone of the story is one of hope and determination, though Sarah seems to have more than her fair share of heartache and sorrow. A prime example of this is seen after Jack's death. Though Sarah's grief is genuine, she is soon looking forward for a



way to help move her life in a positive direction. She finds this in her decision to move back to the farm. The one exception to this tone is seen after Suzanne's death. Sarah and Jack never seem to get over the loss of their youngest daughter, and Sarah admits she really has no interest in anything after the child's death. It seems that the death of Jack almost jars her back to life with her realization that she must move forward. This same scenario was played out in the life of Sarah's mother after losing her husband and son. Mama takes a leave from reality for awhile and it takes Sarah falling ill to jar her back to reality. The majority of words used in the story are likely to be understood by the average reader. Those that are not immediately understood are easily determined from the context.

## Structure

The story is written as a journal, in first person from Sarah's point of view. This means that the writing matures over the course of the story, beginning when Sarah is just a teenager and continuing to the turn of the century. The writing is, as a rule, straight forward, though there are some cases in which the lack of correct punctuation makes the reading somewhat convoluted and difficult to understand. The reader should be able to figure out these passages, despite the lack of quote marks and other punctuation. The story is divided into journal entries that are dated. There are no chapter designations throughout the entire book. It should be noted that there seem to be some chapter divisions, however. For example, the entry of January 12, 1887, is set halfway down page 287. The previous entry, January 10, 1887, stops about three-fourths of the way down the previous page. This has the appearance of a "chapter," but there is no designation in the form of a title or any markings. For the purposes of this study guide, these divisions have been largely ignored. Each of the sections does begin at one of these points that could be a chapter, but there are others that are not detailed in the study guide. The story flows in chronological order with one exception. On January 10, 1887, Sarah reads a letter that Jack wrote and never given to her. The letter is dated February 16, 1882. The reader should be aware that all events that are presented as being written on a particular day may not have occurred on that date. For example, Sarah writes on September 13, 1894, about Jack's return and her telling him that Suzanne had died. The reader learns in this instance that Suzanne had not died on that date but had been buried four days prior. There are other instances of this occurrence that are not quite as clear. The reader should remain aware that Sarah is always writing about events that have already occurred.



## Quotes

"Then I felt real hollow and low and mean. If He is watching us, I wish He'd lend a hand now and then." August 17, 1881, Page 12

"I asked Mama was it a sin to do what I done, and she said no, it was the same as David slaying Goliath, it was only to save Ulyssa and the others, not because of meanness that I did it. I would do it again, too. I am not sorry, but this has hurt my heart and spirit more than all the other trials for being forsaken is worse than being killed." September 5, 1881, Page 17

"Accustomed is what the scarlet velvet woman was. She was accustomed to her sorrows it said, as she had been accustomed to great riches and fine foods. We are accustomed to Indian wars and sorrow and traveling fast and folks dying." December 11, 1881, Page 35

"That sorry soldier who was making eyes at me is one of the men arrested for killing all the Indians. I knew he was no good and when he hangs the devil will be waiting his arrival with a hot poker and a grin." January 22, 1882, Page 65

"Low down dirty ornery rotten skunk of a cussed mule-headed soldier! What's he want with my book anyway? And what kind of a way is that to write a congratulations? I am so mad I could walk clear to that fort and take him on single handed." August 9, 1882, Page 106

"I wish the Lord would just knock me over with kindness and goodness and simple purity, because I don't seem to be getting the knack of it on my own." August 16, 1882, Page 107

"So I priced a few other things, and decided I would put my soap money in a jar and save up for myself some ladies' niceties that were never before considered as useful as white paint and new saddles had been." March 25, 1885, Page 142

"I was so sure it was real I could feel his skin and hear him breathing, and I reached over with my hand and there was no one there. I felt sad. Then I was mad at myself and got myself up on my knees and asked the Lord to forgive my wanton heart." July 1, 1885, Page 176

"It was surely the devil's own brew, burning and hot and nasty tasting, and it made my eyes water and I shuddered real hard like when I was little and Mama dosed me with castor oil." December 22, 1885, Page 213

"Then he said real quiet, 'Ever notice how if you do something hare-brained and you fail, you're an idiot, but if you succeed, you're a hero?'" May 10, 1886, Page 272

"I remain forever lost to you, and sustain myself only with a memory of one night when we shared a tenderness that went far beyond mortal bounds. You shared with me your



fears, and most importantly, your trust as you slept quietly and safely in my arms. Unkind of you, to brutally expose a man to the sweetest thing a woman has to offer, her trust, and then to just slip away as if you cared nothing for him at all." From a letter dated February 16, 1882, read on January 10, 1887, Page 285

"My life feels like a book left out on the porch, and the wind blows the pages faster and faster, turning always toward a new chapter faster than I can stop and read it." April 8, 1893, Page 356

"I finished ironing my newly dyed black dress. For days I have been stirring everything we own into boiling pots of black dye and tears." September 13, 1894, Page 361



## Topics for Discussion

Describe the trips Sarah takes at the beginning of her journal. How does Sarah write; what does she use as pen and ink? What does her father say this indicates about her determination to write?

How does Sarah come to know Savannah? What is it that happens to Sarah, Savannah and Savannah's sisters during their trip? What is Sarah's reaction? What is the reaction of Savannah? Of her family? Of Sarah's mother? What do these reactions say about each of the characters?

List the names of Sarah's siblings. Describe their lives in detail. Provide a comparison of Sarah and any one of her surviving siblings.

Who is Jimmy Reed? How does Sarah know him? Who is Jack Elliot? How does Sarah know him? Compare the personalities of the two men.

Who is Harland? Melissa? Mr. Raalle? Ruben? Ulyssa? Clover? George Lockwood? Blue Horse? Felicity? What are the roles each play in Sarah's life?

Describe the years over which Sarah's journal is set. How does Sarah mature over the course of this time? Using historic information, how does Sarah's world change during that time? Does Sarah's journal fit into that historical information?

What kind of person is Sarah? What are her strengths? Her weaknesses?

Sarah and Harland each take the test from the board of education. What is the outcome of each test? What is the impact of this on Sarah? What does she eventually come to realize about education?