

A Walk Across America Study Guide

A Walk Across America by Peter Jenkins (travel author)

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Contents

A Walk Across America Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1-4.....	4
Chapter 5-8.....	6
Chapter 9-12.....	8
Chapter 13-18.....	10
Chapter 19-22.....	12
Chapter 23-26.....	13
Chapter 27-30.....	15
Characters.....	17
Objects/Places.....	20
Themes.....	22
Style.....	24
Quotes.....	26
Topics for Discussion.....	28

Plot Summary

A Walk Across America is the true story of Peter Jenkins' attempt to find out the truth of what America is about. Peter starts his story out wondering if America is worth staying in or if it is too corrupt. He will go on a walk from Washington to Louisiana in order to answer his questions and find out about America and himself in the process.

The year is 1973 and Peter Jenkins is done with college. Peter believes that America is most likely the worst place to live in and decides he will abandon the country along with his dog, Cooper. When Peter voices his thoughts to an elderly janitor that Peter is friends with the old man becomes angry. He tells Peter that if Peter is willing to give up on the country Peter ought to take some time and really get to know America so that he knows what he is leaving.

Peter thinks it over and decides that he will begin a walk across America to fully learn what the country is all about, stopping to work as he needs money. Peter and his dog Cooper begin to walk and get in shape so that they are ready for the long walk. Peter says good-bye to his family and takes a camera from National Geographic before leaving Washington DC heading to the Gulf of Mexico.

Once on the road Peter begins to meet people that show their kindness and give him a glimpse of what Americans are really like. There is an old man named Homer Davenport that lived on a mountain. While Homer was protective of his home and way of life he eventually offers Peter to come and live with him. Peter will continue on his journey although this is the first hint of what Peter will find.

Peter eventually makes his way to a town where he will live for some time with a family of black people named Oliver. Peter works in a sawmill while living with the family. Although Peter is no relation to the family they will willingly take up arms in order to keep Peter and his dog Cooper safe. The people he meets continually move Peter.

Further on the journey Peter loses his companion Cooper when a truck runs him over. Peter will be forced to lean more on people and his faith is continually rewarded. Peter will meet governor Wallace, be taken in as family by many people he has never before met, live on in a commune, accept Jesus, and will even meet a woman whom he will marry.



Chapter 1-4

Chapter 1-4 Summary and Analysis

A Walk Across America is the true story of Peter Jenkins' attempt to find out the truth of what America is about. Peter starts his story out wondering if America is worth staying in or if it is too corrupt. He will go on a walk from New York to Washington, D.C. and then to Louisiana in order to answer his questions and find out about America and himself in the process.

Chapter 1 in the story introduces Peter Jenkins and his dog Cooper already on their journey. They have stopped into a little country store and are answering questions about what they are doing and why Peter is doing it. Peter had grown up in a suburban area in a family that had money. Peter had been looking for something and couldn't find it although he tried drugs and beer, Woodstock, and then went to college only to find himself feeling emptier.

Chapter 2 gives a background of Peter and his life while at college. Peter eventually gets married to a high school sweetheart who has transferred to his college. When Peter's marriage dissolves he decides he needs to find himself but doesn't have much money. After looking at everything his friends are talking about Peter decides that he will leave America since it is so rotten and awful. When Peter explains this to a friend of his Peter is told to go and look America over before he decides to call it worthless. Peter then understands he will have to walk across America for his answers.

Peter and his half Alaskan Malamute, Cooper, begin hard training for the walking they will be doing and set the date that they will try the first short leg of their journey for October 15, 1973.

Chapter 3 has Peter and Cooper on their journey from New York to Washington D.C. While they are traveling Cooper finds a porcupine and gets stuck with several quills. Peter is in a panic when a stranger in a truck stops and takes his lunch break to help Peter and Cooper and then drives away. Peter never even gets the man's name. Peter and Cooper close in on Washington, D.C. on October 30, 1973, just sixteen days after they started their walk.

In Chapter 4 Peter goes to the National Geographic offices to explain what he is doing and ask for a camera. They give him what he can carry easily and Peter's family comes to give him one last goodbye before he starts the long journey. As Peter and Cooper begin their walk Peter is excited feeling like nothing can go wrong.

The year that the story is taking place is very important to understanding the author's motives and state of mind. The Vietnam conflict was being highly debated and people tended to have strong views about it. Racial tension also was a strong factor in people's behaviors. As the story continues Peter will encounter people that have prejudices



about Peter and his looks. At the time that this happens Peter is angry and scared of the way he is being treated. Despite this it will become clear as the story continues that Peter also has his own thoughts of people and places that prove to be as untrue as the views that some take about Peter because of his long hair.

Peter and Cooper start the trip out with just a short piece from New York to Washington, D.C. The success of this short piece will be a large building block for Peter feeling they are capable of making the trip. The fact that Peter has Cooper with him will also prove to be pivotal. Later in the story Peter will realize how much he leans on Cooper once Cooper is no longer with him. Peter obviously starts this journey with the thought that he is going to find great evil from people in America and be justified in his reason for leaving. It won't take long for Peter to begin to find that he is wrong about his thoughts on America. Peter will also find that he will change and learn things about himself as well.



Chapter 5-8

Chapter 5-8 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5, Peter and Cooper turn and head toward the Appalachian Trail. While traveling through Virginia Peter decides he can't discover America by walking high in the mountains and that he must go down into the towns and meet the people. Peter and Cooper have only been walking for a few days when they begin to see signs for Thanksgiving. Peter finds a country store and buys things for him and Cooper to eat on Thanksgiving and they enjoy their feast alone. Peter reaches West Virginia and is shocked not to find hillbillies and run down shacks.

Peter and Cooper keep pushing through the cold winter in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Peter and Cooper come to a mountain that almost makes them give up. Cooper and Peter are both weakened by lack of nourishing food and the harsh elements. A truck happens by with a kindly man in it that gives Peter five red apples and tells him how far it is to the nearest town. This is enough to keep Peter and Cooper going to the country store in Chattam Hill, Virginia.

Chapter 6 has Peter and Cooper in Chattam Hill at the small country store with people asking Peter where he came from and what he is doing. Someone tells Peter he has got to go meet Homer Davenport. Homer is described as a real mountain man. Peter starts up the mountain to Homer's place and finds that Homer is an elderly man that nearly sprints up the hillside that Peter, a man in his early twenties, has trouble walking up. Homer allows Peter to stay with him for a few nights. Peter is amazed at the way that Homer lives on his mountain, growing everything he needs and only going to town every few months.

Chapter 7 begins with Homer threatening to kill Peter if Homer learns that Peter was lying about what he is doing on his property. Homer offers Peter to come live with him and take over Homer's place since Homer is old but Peter and Cooper decide they must see the rest of the country. Peter and Cooper head off to the next town.

Chapter 8 has Cooper and Peter several towns away from Homer and they find a place to eat. The weather is cold and Peter and Cooper find a firehouse that will give them shelter. Peter is woken the next day by the firehouse alarms.

~Peter and Cooper are already running into very interesting characters that are changing Peter's mind about how awful the entire country must be. Peter doesn't stay with Homer and accept his offer but he does seem earnest in his belief that he and Cooper will be back to see Homer again some day. The book is published just a few years after Peter meets Homer but it never tells if Peter returned to see the old man or not. Homer is a quiet character and the reason that he was so willing to let Peter into his home will remain unknown. The first view of Homer that the reader gets is that Homer



was a very angry person that wanted to be left alone. Considering the reaction given by the people that knew Homer it seems odd that he was so willing to take Peter in.

Peter has developed a code for his writing that he keeps with him. This code gives the reader some insight as to how Peter managed to keep so much of his information straight after such a long period. Peter was unable to carry much with him and so it is understandable that Peter only has a few papers rather than a whole journal to write down every detail. The trip obviously makes a large impression on him since he is able to call back such excruciating detail to things like Homer's cabin.

There are pictures in the book to give the reader an idea of what Peter was looking at. Some of the pictures are of scenery that Peter saw along the way, and many contain his friend Cooper. Homer is one of the first characters that is described in the book with a picture to go along with him. From what is seen of Homer it appears that Peter's description of him was accurate. Peter never discloses how many pictures he took and how many could be put into the book. At several intervals in the story the reader will also have a map giving Peter's route and it will be marked with notes that show where he encountered certain people and places such as Homer and his cabin.



Chapter 9-12

Chapter 9-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 begins with Peter and Cooper making their way to Mountain City, Tennessee. There is much snow on the ground and it makes the journey seem longer than Peter believes it should be. When Peter gets to Mountain City the lady at the dinner tells Peter that her brother travels the country and is always telling her how nice people are. The lady decides to give Peter his meal for free to show him the same hospitality that her brother often receives. Peter is still surprised by this generosity. Peter is beginning to feel depression set in due in part to the holiday season and being so far away from any family or friends. Peter's brother Scott uses his vacation to come and hike with Peter for Christmas. The two start out determined but get lost for a time and become irritated with each other quickly. Scott and Peter finally find their way to a town and off the mountain.

Chapter 10 has Scott and Peter still hiking while Peter thinks of how he got Cooper from a friend. Cooper's mother had been an Alaskan Malamute but the father was a mysterious black shadow that was strong enough to tear the door of the dog pen that held Cooper's mother. Scott and Peter are attacked by a group of dogs. At first they are frightened but Cooper is able to defeat the dogs with out receiving hardly a scratch. Peter realizes Cooper is much like his mysterious frightening father.

Chapter 11 has Scott and Peter saying their goodbyes as Peter heads on with Cooper. After a short while Peter becomes ill. Soon he finds an old lean to and takes refuge while he is sick for days. Peter hallucinates and feels a fever break over and over again. Weak and exhausted Peter manages to walk to the nearby town of Fontana Village, North Carolina. There Peter learns that people have been reporting cases of influenza and one person had died of it.

In Chapter 12, Peter knows that he needs to find work since he has ran out of money. In the town of Robbinsville, North Carolina Peter decides he will find a place to live and a job. The local sheriff and his family take in Peter when the town's people begin to complain. The sheriff is threatened with the loss of his job if he doesn't run Peter off and so Peter takes up camping on the outskirts of town. Peter can't find work and after two weeks decides to call his parents and ask for money to leave. While Peter is waiting for the money to arrive a Special Bureau of Investigation officer finds Peter and tells him the town doesn't want drug dealers. Peter has till tomorrow to clear out or Peter may find himself hanging from a tree. He tells Peter that Peter is equal to a "lazy nigger". The next day Peter gets his money and leaves the town.

Peter and Cooper have found a lot of good people at this point in the story but the ordeal at Robbinsville will leave a lasting bad taste in his mouth. In the next few chapters it will be seen that the events at Robbinsville may be having an effect on the way that Peter is perceiving people. Peter has admitted himself that he has preconceived notions as to what he will find while on his travels. It shows a great deal of



human nature that Peter is thought to be a hippie drug dealer since he has long hair and is traveling around more like a hobo than someone with a home and a steady job. Peter is made the subject of ridicule and prejudice. Despite this Peter will be unable to let go of his own notions of how he believes people will be. This experience may be the reason that Peter tries to give people a chance later on in the story. There isn't much explained about his reactions before this point.

Peter stayed in the town for some time trying to find work. Although this probably could have taken up a great deal of time in the book it appears that Peter had varied experiences while on this walk and felt that he needed to focus more deeply on the good that happened. The majority of the book will focus on the good that Peter finds. It is very likely he found many people on his walk that were willing to judge him for his looks but Peter will choose not to write about more than a few of those.



Chapter 13-18

Chapter 13-18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 begins with Cooper and Peter making to the town of Andrews after leaving Robbinsville. Peter and Cooper don't stay in this town long still upset from their welcome in Robbinsville. Peter and Cooper finally make it to the town of Murphy, North Carolina and decide they will give this town a try. The sheriff in the town introduces himself to Peter and welcomes them to Murphy. Peter and Cooper find a basketball court filled with young black men and they ask Peter to join. Peter is put on the team with the Oliver brothers and after the game is over the boys all run home to get their camping equipment and camp with Peter. Peter is invited home with the Oliver brothers to eat dinner. Their mother, Mary Elizabeth, tells Peter that she believes he was sent by God as a test of their faith and invites Peter to live with them. They are very poor and live in a tiny trailer but Peter is given one of the boys' rooms.

The next day, Peter gets a job working at a veneer mill but he is warned that no one ever lasts up there because of the backbreaking work. When Sunday comes Peter is instructed that he must go to church in order to live with the Olivers. Peter is the only white person in the church but is welcomed and is amazed at how much he really enjoys the service having never been to a church that alive before.

Chapter 14 starts Peter's work at the mill. The men there don't believe Peter will last long being a city Yankee boy. Peter begins to ride to work with a man named Oscar Winkler who is called Preacher. Preacher invites Peter to come eat with him and his wife Annie. Later that week Peter learns to run the mill. For working a full weeks work and an additional seven hours of overtime Peter's first check comes to \$85.50.

In Chapter 15, Peter is beginning to see different sides of Murphy. There are bootleggers and drug dealers in the town and Saturday night is called "Butcher Night". Peter takes Cooper and walks to Preacher's house and meets Preacher's wife Annie and Preacher's brother. The three of them live on the farm and run it. Later that week Mary Elizabeth's husband, Frank, Jr., tells Peter that some of the bootleggers have been raided and are blaming Peter saying he is an undercover informant. Frank, Jr. also has been told that if Peter doesn't leave they will come and kill him and Cooper. Mary Elizabeth orders the boys to go get every gun in the house and sends the oldest boy down to the bootleggers to tell them that if they lay a finger on Peter or Cooper then the Olivers will be ready for them.

Chapter 16 has Peter back at work at the veneer mill on Monday with all the men there looking at him like he might be an informant really playing the part. After nearly two weeks the bootleggers calm back down and forget about Peter. Peter decides to do something for his new family that had taken him in and was willing to fight for him. Although Peter buys food every week for the family he wants to do something that will



last. Peter buys lumber from the mill where he works and takes it home to the Olivers to build hog pens to raise some food for themselves.

Chapter 17 begins with Peter in the woods with Cooper being called home. A tornado comes and shakes the trailer. Mary Elizabeth prays the entire time until the storm passes. After the storm is gone the family goes out to help the rest of the town. Many are left dead and the town has vast parts destroyed. That Sunday the white people in the town were forced to go to church at the black church. The black church members give enough of their hard earned money to help begin rebuilding their white brothers church.

In Chapter 18, Peter is planning his leaving of Murphy and the Oliver family. Peter's family comes down to Murphy to visit him and meet the Olivers. They have a large feast and Peter is surprised at how well his family gets along with the Olivers. Peter says his goodbyes to both his families and he and Cooper head out.

Peter and his family both seem to be amazed by the fact that he has gone from wanting to leave America because of how rotten it is to a deep love of it. Not all of Peter's time in Murphy was good. There are many people in the town that don't care for Peter at all but it is obvious that the people that were good to Peter are the ones that he was able to concentrate on. Peter also speaks about a dream that he had shortly before he got to Murphy. Peter feels certain that this dream was forewarning him that he would come to live with a black family. Later in the story Peter will have other moments where he feels he is being given glimpses of what will be coming although it will not always be in dream form.

Peter's time at the church at Murphy will be important later on in the story. Peter continually says that he feels that he is missing something. He had felt hollow and empty after college and seemed to blame much of it on the imperfections that could be found in America. In the next chapters Peter will come to a commune and then on to a revival. Peter will eventually learn what it is that he is missing and why he has this empty feeling.



Chapter 19-22

Chapter 19-22 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 19, Peter is getting farther and farther away from Murphy. Peter is sad and somewhat depressed after having a home and people that cared for him for so long and now being alone again. Peter soon hears of a place called The Farm, a two-thousand-acre commune in Tennessee. Peter makes his way toward The Farm even though it had not originally been on his plans to travel in that direction.

Chapter 20 finds Peter and Cooper in Tennessee. They easily find The Farm and the people there are very willing to take Peter in. The man that started the commune is named Stephen Gaskin although Peter doesn't see him much because Stephen is in jail for growing marijuana. Peter soon figures out that Stephen is offering people vague expressions of what he believes God to be and all these people are following this man with no idea of what the person is talking about. The people at The Farm are asking Peter to stay when Peter realizes the last thing he wants is to be one of Stephen's captives and so Peter plans the day that he and Cooper will leave. Peter also has the realization that what he has been looking for this whole time may in fact be God.

Chapter 21 begins with Cooper and Peter playing in the woods. Cooper didn't like being near The Farm and now Peter feels he should have listened to him.

Chapter 22 has Peter working with the others on the farm when a water truck off to the side runs over Cooper. Peter rushes him to the doctor hoping that Cooper is only stunned but the doctor tells Peter that Cooper is dead. Peter goes into the woods and digs a whole in the ground and covers up Cooper's body. Nine days after Cooper's death Peter walks away from the farm. This time Peter feels more alone than ever.

There have been times in the book that Peter doesn't talk about Cooper and Cooper isn't an immediate part of the story. After Cooper's death Peter will realize how much he has leaned on Cooper. Peter will continually wish that Cooper was there to support and protect him later in the book. The loss of Cooper will also force Peter to seek out human contact much more than he had before. Peter had known that Cooper was his best friend and that he would never get rid of Cooper but it isn't until Cooper is gone that Peter realizes how much he loved the dog.

Peter states in this part of the book that what he is looking for may in fact be God. Peter will find God later on in the story. Peter will also have times in the story where he is certain that God is talking directly to him. His time at the commune seemed to push him closer to finding God. Peter, who had been to churches, seemed to realize that Stephen was rambling things and had followers but wasn't really leading them.



Chapter 23-26

Chapter 23-26 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 23, Peter explains that leaving Tennessee without Cooper was another moment during the walk in which he wanted to give up and quit. Peter comes to a point where he must make decisions between going to Mississippi or Alabama. Peter had heard about the ignorance and hate in both states and didn't like the choices but decided to go on into Alabama. It isn't long before Peter sees a sign with Governor Wallace on it. Peter had also heard about how awful Wallace was. Peter is soon invited to come have dinner with a family that sees him walking. Again and again Peter was invited to eat and stay with people who take him in as if they knew him. Peter writes "TAA" on his map as a code to remind himself that he was totally amazed by Alabama. Peter decides to go and talk to Wallace before he leaves the state.

Chapter 24 has Peter in Shelby County. In Shelby County Peter stops to call his father on the phone. While talking a pick up truck stops and begins to pick a fight with Peter. The man is drunk and claims that Peter is a drug dealing Yankee and he will kill Peter. After remaining calm and talking peaceably to the man for some time the man becomes overly friendly and explains that his son was hooked on drugs during Vietnam. The drunks finally leave but Peter is too spooked to pitch his tent and sleeps out in the rain. The next day the man who was drunk finds Peter and wants badly to make up for his actions but Peter explains that it is all right.

In Chapter 25, Peter is deciding what he will say when he meets Governor Wallace. Peter wants to get an honest reaction from the man. Soon Peter is in Governor Wallace's office and is ushered in to talk to the wheel chair bound governor. Wallace shocks Peter with his friendliness, and offer to help Peter out financially in his walk. Peter refuses the offer to have his expenses covered but is honestly grateful for the offer. Wallace tells Peter that he will put the word out to the state troopers to keep an eye out for Peter to make sure that nothing bad happens to him. Peter leaves Wallace's office and is equally surprised to enter a dinner where blacks and whites are sitting eating together. One black gentleman in the dinner sent all his children to private schools and then off to college.

In Chapter 26, Peter finds himself in Orrville, Alabama in a small country store. Peter is trying to write a post card to his family and friends when he hears someone talking to him. He turns around and finds an elderly man who is holding a pistol in a holster. Peter is taken aback by the old man. The old man is named M.C. Jenkins and says that he and Peter must be some distant relation. M.C. insists that Peter come home with him since they are kin. M.C. and his wife, Miss Margaret, have Peter stay in their son's room, who is grown with children of his own. M.C. hires Peter to work on his farm for a time. Peter leaves M.C.'s place feeling just as fondly about them as he did about the Olivers and Homer Davenport.



M.C. says to Peter that what Peter needs to do is find a good southern woman like Miss Margaret. Peter will think back on these words later in the story. Peter will in fact find what he describes as a southern belle in the last chapter of the story although at this point in time Peter still seems to be uninterested in pursuing a relationship with a woman. It is most likely that Peter met a girl along the journey but he doesn't focus on that in the story. The reason for this isn't explained. It is possible that Peter is still reluctant to get involved with anyone since he has already had a failed marriage. It is also possible that Peter doesn't want to take the time to get to know anyone while on the walk he is undertaking. Later in the story Peter will get involved. If Cooper had lived and Peter had felt less alone it is unclear if that would have impacted his choices greatly.

Peter refused to take the offer of compensation for his financial during the trip when Wallace offered. In the next chapter, a waitress will give Peter his meal for free but explains that she can't tell him who it is from. It is unclear if it was the work of Wallace, who obviously will have sent word to all the state troopers, or if it was M.C. or some other friendly person that Peter meet.



Chapter 27-30

Chapter 27-30 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 27, Peter finds a dinner where he is given his meal has already been paid for although the waitress explains that she was instructed not to tell who is responsible. Peter hits Mobile and has to stop to get another job. It is in this town that Peter becomes a tree surgeon working with a group of men to take care of sick trees in the town.

In Chapter 28, Peter is invited to a wild party. He decides to go and tries to have a good time and take along his camera. On the way Peter sees billboards advertising a revival. Peter thinks it odd that they could afford a billboard since his idea is that all revivals happen in tents with little money backing them. After passing two more billboards Peter decides to forgo the big part and walks into the revival that is in a small Superdome. Once inside there is nowhere to sit amount the ten thousand people. Peter makes his way to the front so he can take pictures. The man begins preaching and before long Peter realizes that God is speaking to him. Peter comes forward with the others to accept God. For months afterwards Peter still feels the results of his experience.

Chapter 29 shows Peter leaving Mobile and heading off to the Gulf of Mexico. The last thing that Peter encounters before he leaves Alabama is a black state trooper that sat and talked with Peter for a time. Alabama turned out to be one of the best states Peter visited. Peter is soon into Mississippi. Peter knows that now that he has God that he has found much of what he was looking for. He began his trip feeling dull and desperate and now feels a thrill from what lies before him.

Chapter 30 has Peter in New Orleans. Peter finds a place to live on a missionary campus. While there Peter meets Barbara Pennell. Peter is immediately struck by her beauty and grace. They make a date and over the next few months while Peter begins to write about the first part of his journey they fall in love. Barbara begins to have doubts realizing that she would have to walk across the country with Peter and unsure about this life. Peter and Barbara agonize over the decision facing them when Barbara announces that she has been praying and if God doesn't give her a sign by the time they are in church on Sunday morning. That Sunday at church Peter feels defeated knowing that God doesn't give people a sign. When the sermon starts the preacher is preaching from Genesis and states that Rebekah's family came to her and asked her "Will you go with this man?" in reference to Abraham. Both Peter and Barbara feel that this message is meant for them. Barbara turns to Peter and says that yes she will go with him.

The author stops the story there. There is an afterword in the book that explains the date that they were married and when they began their walking together in 1978 toward the Pacific. Peter had met many people during the course of his travel. It is untold if he remained in contact with many of them or if he ever went back to see some of them. He does explain to the reader that Mary Elizabeth's father died shortly after he left and that

Mary Elizabeth's oldest son was the first to go to college. Past this there is little explanation given.

There are a lot of pictures in the book of the beautiful scenery that Peter saw. The reader will be given views of the communal farm where Cooper died and pictures of his burial along with M.C. and other people Peter met. Peter's wife Barbara isn't shown in the pictures. The reason for this is not given but it appears that it was rather personal. Peter devoted a very short piece of the book to his meeting of Barbara and the fact that they fell in love. It is possible that Peter wanted the book to be focused on America and the people he met rather than the love that he found although this conclusion will be left to the reader.



Characters

Peter Jenkins

Peter Jenkins is the author of the book. Peter begins his story when he is in college. Peter comes to the realization that life isn't worth living in America and that this may be the worst of all countries. It is then that Peter is challenged to take a closer look at this country before he decides to abandon it. Peter Jenkins will come across people living in ways that he couldn't have imagined. Peter, raised in a family with money, will see hard working Americans that live off the land. The realization that there is so much more to this country than Peter had realized will be life changing for him.

Peter appears to be self-centered at the beginning of the story. He worries about a lot of things but appears to care very little that isn't in his immediate family or friends. When Peter begins his journey he will be focused largely on what walking across America means for him and what freedoms it will give him. As the story continues Peter will find people willing to open their homes and their lives to him for no reason. Peter will even have a family, that he has known for a few short weeks, that is willing to take up arms to protect him and his dog Cooper. The reader will see every preconceived concept of what Peter thought America and its people were like challenged. As Peter is forced to challenge his thoughts about the people he meets he will begin to change his thinking as well as himself.

Barbara Pennell

Barbara is the young woman that Peter meets in the last chapter of the book. While she has a very short piece in the story it quickly becomes apparent that she is a major part of what happens to Peter. If Peter had met Barbara earlier in the story he likely would not have been ready for the commitment with her. Much of what leads Peter to begin his journey across the country is the failed marriage that he had just a few short years before.

Peter describes Barbara as a Southern Belle. Just the kind of woman that M.C. Jenkins told Peter he needed. Barbara is young and still in college. She and Peter will quickly fall in love. Although they care for each other both Barbara and Peter will become torn about what they should do in their relationship. Peter knows that he must continue to travel the countryside but Barbara is unsure about going. Barbara will ultimately decide to wait for a sign from God. The sign will come while the two are at church. After hearing the words that the preacher says both Barbara and Peter will be certain that they are being spoken to. Barbara will make a choice to leave her life behind and walk across the rest of the country with Peter.



Homer Davenport

Homer Davenport is the old man that lives on top of a mountain located in Chattam Hill. Homer is described by a man in Chattam as "the greatest mountain man alive!". Homer and Peter become quick friends and Homer will invite Peter to come back and live on his mountain.

Mary Elizabeth Oliver

Mary Elizabeth Oliver is the black mother that takes Peter in to live with their family while Peter works in the town of Murphy. Mary Elizabeth is a large woman who says that she knows it is God testing their faith by sending Peter to them. Mary Elizabeth will pray incessantly while a tornado goes past their house.

Lemm Smith

Lemm Smith, an old white man, is Peter's work partner while at the veneer mill. Lemm will teach Peter how to run the saw after Lemm comes to work drunk.

Oscar Winkler, aka Preacher

Oscar Winkler is known as Preacher and is a nine fingered sixty-eight year old man that gives Peter rides to the veneer mill. Preacher has a pipe in his mouth most of the time. Preacher lives on a farm with his wife and his elderly brother.

Frank, Jr.

Frank, Jr. is Mary Elizabeth Oliver's husband. Frank doesn't like Peter and relates a message that some of the bootleggers are planning to kill Peter. Frank loses his job quickly after Peter moves in with the family and never holds down a steady job again while Peter is there.

Zack Oliver

Zack is the oldest of the Oliver children. Zack will be the first in the family to finish high school and the first in the family to go to college.

Governor George Wallace

Governor George Wallace is the governor of Alabama. Peter will have the opportunity to talk to the governor. George will be confined to a wheel chair but be very encouraging of Peter and his quest.



M.C. Jenkins

M.C. Jenkins is an old man that Peter meets while in a country store in Orrville, Alabama. M.C. will take Peter in to work for a while. It is M.C. that tells Peter he needs to find himself a Southern Belle to marry.

SBI man

The SBI man, State Bureau of Investigation, in Robbinsville, North Carolina is the one that offers to hang Peter from a tree if he isn't out of town the next day. The State Bureau of Investigation man will tell Peter that Peter is no better than a lazy nigger.

Stephen Gaskin

Stephen Gaskin is the leader of The Farm in Tennessee where Peter stays for a short while. Stephen is in jail on drug charges but Peter will see him perform marriages between people, and groups of people when Stephen is out of jail.



Objects/Places

Alfred, New York

Alfred is the city where Peter will begin his travels. This part of the journey will be a test run before Peter walks the entire country. From Alfred Peter will head to Washington D.C.

Washington, D.C.

Peter travels to Washington, D.C. to talk to the paper at the National Geographic. It is also here that Peter begins his journey to the Gulf of Mexico.

National Geographic

Peter will visit the National Geographic office in Washington and borrow a camera from them. Peter is unable to carry much but they will supply him with what he can carry for the trip.

Cooper

Cooper is Peter's half Alaskan Malamute dog. Cooper will be Peter's best friend and Peter will refuse to sell the dog when a man offers him a thousand dollars for it. Cooper will be run over by a truck and die halfway through the trip.

Veneer Mill

Peter takes a job at a veneer mill to make money while on his journey. It is at the saw mill that Peter meets Oscar Winkler and Lemm Smith.

The Farm

Peter goes to a commune called "The Farm" in Summertown, Tennessee. The Farm is run by a man named Stephen Gaskin. It is on The Farm that Cooper dies.

The Revival

Peter is on his way to a party when he sees a sign for the revival in Mobile, Alabama. It is at the revival that Peter accepts Jesus into his heart.



New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

It is at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary that Peter meets Barbara. It will be this town that Peter has stopped to write believing there will be no distractions for him to start his book.

Genesis, Chapter 24

It is in Genesis, chapter 24 that Mom Beall preaches from. In this chapter Barbara and Peter will feel like God is instructing them to get married and for Barbara to go with Peter.

Orrville, Alabama

It is while in Orrville, Alabama that Peter meets M.C. Jenkins and his wife Miss Margaret.



Themes

Self Discovery

The story has an obvious theme of a young man that is looking over the country that he is living in but it has an unexpected effect on the young college graduate, Peter Jenkins. He actually finds out a lot about himself along the way. The author had grown up in a world that was very structured and had specific ideas for how a person lived. He had been so sheltered that he didn't truly understand how people outside his lifestyle lived. Peter will continually be faced with realizations that change his ideas of how America and Americans are and at the same time change who he is.

The reader will see Peter change as he travels from state to state. At times the changes will seem small but there are other moments that realizations will hit this young man and be evident to the reader. He had begun his journey feeling there would be freedom being in nature and away from people. He even seems anxious to leave his family behind. Once Peter is spending Christmas and New Years out in the hills Peter begins realizing how much he wants to be around people. He will even have bouts of depression hit him during his journey. Peter had felt at the beginning of the story that America was no place to live in, but he will come to discover vast treasures in the people. Peter will go from a young man that was expected to live in a suburb and live the same life as his parents, to someone who can't imagine going back to that life. He will begin to see it as a prison.

The Importance of Family

The author will be in a rush to get away from his family. He heads out into the world with no one by his side except his dog, Cooper. While Peter Jenks appears to get great relief from being out on his own it will become apparent that he is human and will begin to long for familiar faces and those he loves. Cooper will become closer to the author as they depend on each other. When Cooper dies Peter will be as sad as if he had laid a brother down.

The author will reunite with his family at various points in the story and it appears that this will be a reprieve from the depression that grabs him at various intervals. Peter will also come to stay with people along the way that will call him family. The title will be more than just a word that is used. Peter will see people he has known for months or even as little as days that will offer him their homes. Homer knew Peter for only days and offers Peter to live in his home and take over his mountain. The Oliver family that Peter stays with will take up arms to protect both Peter and Cooper. These people are not blood relation to Peter but it will be clear that they have made deep connections to each other.

Race

Peter is traveling across the country in the early seventies. At this point in time in history America is obviously still in the grips of racial tension. Peter will find those willing to accept him as he looks and calls it a test from God to accept him in their lives. Peter will also be told he is equal to that of a "lazy nigger" and told that he will be strung up from a tree. Although Peter is not black it becomes apparent that the racial lines are thick and he will be thrown into the midst of several situations that are largely based on race.

Peter will go to a black church, live with a black family, and will at one point admit that he forgets he is a different color until he hears a woman commenting on the white boy walking with the nigger women. These comments will be something that Peter can't ignore but doesn't respond to. The issue of race will also be one of the many reasons that Peter decides to walk across America to find out what it is all really about.



Style

Perspective

The story is written in the first person point of view from that of the author, Peter Jenkins. The story is written with a limited point of view. Although the point of view is limited the author will give the reader a lot of information that he gathers which will give a better understanding of the mind set of the people that he meets and the places that he goes. Much of the beginning of the story will deal with Peter Jenkins frame of mind when he decided that America was no place to live and the training that he went through when he decided to travel across America. He will be forced to change his mind about people and the country many times as he faces different issues and responses in the towns he finds.

The author's perspective will focus on the things that he finds as he makes his journey. Peter will be amazed at how people live across America. He will find different family structures in every town and a different story to catch his attention almost everywhere he goes. Peter will also focus largely on the scenery that he finds. While this does take up most of his detail the book will have large portions devoted to the effect that the people and the land have on him. Peter will fall in love with different families, the lands, lose his beloved dog Cooper, and meet a woman he will fall in love with and marry. Peter Jenkins will learn as much about the nation as he does about himself.

Tone

The tone is written in a very informative style. The author makes this trek in the early seventies. There will be references to particular phrases and words that were commonly used in the seventies. In addition to this the author will make comparisons between the things he is experiencing and things he has recently done, such as weird drugs and Woodstock. While the tone is informal it is clear that the author is well educated and it is very easily understood. The author will intentionally misspell some words to emphasize the difference in language between himself and the people he meets on his journey. Some of these language differences will be cultural while others are based more on the educational levels of the people. None of this is meant to be insulting to the people but a way for the reader to have a better description of the people. The author travels a great distance and encounters enough people that the tone will be forced to change many times. Even though the tone will change several times it will add to the readers awareness of the authors surrounding and make the book easier to read.

Structure

The story consists of 291 pages. There are thirty chapters with an afterward given for the reader at the end of the story. The chapters will vary in length greatly. The author will choose to end and begin the chapters based on events rather than length. The story is

based on the journey of Peter Jenkins but will focus on his life so much that there will be many sub plots in the story. Some of the plots will be very short but will become extremely important to Peter Jenkins, such as when he finds his wife. Even though this a life changing experience he doesn't introduce her into the book until the meet in the last chapter. There will be many other plots in the story that will come to life. Since much of the story is about Peter discovering America there will be questions that are not answered. There will be people and towns that Peter passes that will create more questions than answer.

In addition to the story Peter Jenkins was able to get a good quality camera from National Geographic before he started his journey. The camera provided the author with pictures of the natives to the country and helps to give the viewer a picture that explains just as much as the words that Jenkins writes. Some of the pictures are in color while others will be in black and white. These will add to the story and understanding what Jenkins encountered along the way.



Quotes

"I'm walking across America. I started in upper New York state in October and I'm heading down through the Deep South and then on over to the West Coast." Chapter 1: Page 2

"We informed Northerners also knew only too well that Southern rednecks were in a quiet war to wipe the blacks off the face of the earth. Plus the Indians, who were already pickled. And Communism? Whatever that was, it couldn't be any worse than the capitalist pig warmongers who ran this country." Chapter 2: Page 14

"It had happened again. I had met another American whose generosity, it began to seem to me, gushed out of the spirit of this land." Chapter 9: Page 86

"'Let me make myself a little clearer, you white trash,' the SBI man said, with one-hundred-proof hatred. 'If you ain't out of this town soon-real soon-we might accidentally find you hangin' from that pine over there.'" Chapter 12: Page 108

"Although I hated to admit it, I was scared of these boys and of going to their part of town. While I stalled for more time, the gaptoothed Terry walked over to me and jeered, 'Cum on, man! What's a matter? We too ugly 'n' black fo' you? You afraid we might hut you 'n nigga' town?'" Chapter 13 Page 116

"These poor folks, who barely scratched enough together to pay their pastor, had something I was looking for. Of all the cool things, this service surpassed every far-out and turned-on experience I'd always held close to my snobby heart. It made Woodstock and a Stevie Wonder concert at the Fillmore East in New York City seem as boring as waiting for school to end on a hot June day." Chapter 13: Page 132

"'The people 'round Murphy, white and black, been tellin' he's one o' them undercover agents... That white bo-boo-bootlegger up Joe Brown Ha'way says to me, 'What would a smart college kid be livin' with a bunch o' niggers for, anyway?' and he says he'll kill Peter if'n it's true.'" Frank, Jr.'s, own words made him think about it even more." Chapter 15: Page 146

"Mary Elizabeth spoke for everyone. 'I'll tell ya what we gonna do. Frank, Jr., you go to our room 'n' get every one o' yaw guns. Bruce, you go down ta the pool hall 'n' pass the word. Any one o' them lyin' white honkies come up here 'n' bother Peta or Cooper, we'll be ready for 'em.'" Chapter 15: Page 148

"It made me happy to see them share in the constantly growing family Cooper and I were finding, and it didn't seem possible to any of us that I had changed from hatred for America to a deep love for our country, so completely, so soon." Chapter 18: Page 171



"I felt as if Stephen was dangling sacred carrots in front of his people so he could keep his followers full of far-out explanations for God and the Universe. The more Stephen and his select assistants talked, the more psychedelic it got." Chapter 20: Page 196

"Nine days after Cooper was crushed to death, I walked down the dusty road that led the two of us here. Now I walked alone, really alone." Chapter 22: Page 207

"It was either here or Mississippi, and I don't know which was worse. All my growing -up days, I was told horror stories about these uneducated, barefoot, racist states. As far as I knew, most people in Alabama never made it past the sixth grade." Chapter 23: Page 212

"'That would be great, Governor Wallace,' I answered in an absolute daze. Moved by his reaction to me, which was the opposite of any I had imagined, I reached out my Yankee hand and we shook hands hard. As I walked out of his office, prouder to be an American than when I had come in, the governor rolled along beside me, confined forever to his wheelchair, and said, 'God bless ya, son.'" Chapter 25: Page 231

"Now I was at the southern tip, ready to cross the border with my last impression of Alabama being a helpful and gracious black trooper. This state turned out to be one of the friendliest experiences I'd ever had." Chapter 20: Page 264

"I had come face to face with God, and accepted Him as my own. Still, as much as I had experienced, there was more waiting to be found. I had started out with a feeling of burning dullness and desperation. Now I was filled with a thrill and expectation of new discovery." Chapter 29: Page 266

Topics for Discussion

Peter had a massive change in the way he viewed America, and himself, in a relatively short period of time. What occurrences seemed to play the largest roles in Peter's realization that he may have been wrong? In what ways did Peter change over the walk?

Peter wouldn't sell Cooper. Explain the reasons that Cooper wasn't for sale, even for a thousand dollars? Would Peter have stayed with Homer had he known that Cooper was going to die? Why?

Zack Oliver doesn't believe that he can go to college. Explain the reasons that Zack wouldn't even consider this as an option? Speculate on what changed Zack's mind. What possible repercussions resulted from Zack attending college?

What was the significance of Peter finding that most of the people at The Farm were from backgrounds with no previous religious knowledge? What does it reveal about Stephen Gaskin that he was so much older than the majority of his converts? Why do people like Stephen Gaskin have such loyal followers?

Look at Peter's walk before and after Cooper's death. In what ways did it change for Peter? What can you find in his writings that showed this change?

Peter feels like giving up several times on the trip in places like Robbinsville and Shelby County and after Cooper's death. Why would Peter refuse to go home? In what ways is this behavior in Peter an attribute? In what ways is it a negative characteristic?

What was the significance of Peter forgetting that he was black for a moment while living with the Oliver family? Explain why this would have happened to him even though he worked fifteen hour days at the veneer mill.