

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Angle of Repose by Wallace Stegner

- What do you think of Stegner's use of a contemporary narrator (Lyman) to tell Susan Ward's story? Why do you think the author structured the novel in this way?
- Lyman often uses the phrases "I suppose", "I wonder" and "I imagine" when he's filling in the blanks on Susan's story. Is he a reliable narrator? What do you think of all the assumptions he makes about his grandmother's life?
- Oliver's "heroism couldn't compete with his lack of civility" in Susan's eyes. Was she being unreasonable? Was he uncivil?
- "Every object has an angle of repose, the maximum slope at which material remains stable. Stegner has applied this engineering term to the uneasy equilibrium of four generations of an American family. Would you consider Susan and Oliver's marital angle of repose as stable?
- Lyman says "In a way, we deserve the people we marry." Compare the marriages we see in the book: Susan/Oliver, Lyman/Ellen. What does this book say about the nature of marriage?
- Who destroyed the marriage? Susan or Oliver? Why did they stay together?
- In what ways did the author use the rigidity of Lyman's bone degeneration to exemplify his personality?

Do you think Lyman identifies more with his grandmother or his grandfather? Which character, if either, did you find most sympathetic?

- What is the role of Shelly in this novel?
- Why do you think Oliver replanted the rose garden in Grass Valley?
- In what ways is Lyman similar to his grandmother? His grandfather?
- Should Lyman have spent more time looking into his own life rather than pontificating on that of his grandmother?
- What did you make of the book's final chapter, "The Zodiac Cottage," and Lyman's dream? Was it a fitting end for the story? How do you imagine his future?



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