

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier

- The song “Wayfaring Stranger” reminds us that a journey is one of the most common metaphors for a person’s life. Is Inman’s journey home to *Cold Mountain* a metaphoric one as well as a literal one? If so, in what way?
- Name one of your favorite characters in the book and be prepared to discuss his (or her) influence on Inman or Ada.
- In what way is *Cold Mountain* realistic as well as fanciful?
- When a contestant on one of his shows mentioned to Groucho Marx that she had been married to the same man for 31 years, Groucho was quick to comment that “no man married 31 years was the same.” In the same vein, rarely is one finishing a journey the same at the end as they were at the beginning. Did Inman change and if so, in what ways?
- What about Ada? Ada’s internal journey?
- What is the significance of the two epigraphs at the beginning of the book?
- Was Monroe a good father? In what ways did he fail her and in what ways did he contribute to her strength of character?
- Is Inman as a deserter a sympathetic character? If he was a Northerner would we feel the same? How does Frazier portray the Home Guard?
- How would you characterize the relationship between Ada and Ruby?
- Both were essentially motherless...how did that color their personalities and relationships with their respective fathers?
- Is Ruby a realistic character? (an 8 year old on her own?)
- Charles Frazier has been faulted for not having revealed more than glimpses of Inman’s past. We learn more about Ada and Ruby’s past, for instance. Is this a fault or does the novel gain something from Frazier’s reticence?
- *Cold Mountain* is told in alternating chapters set in very different worlds (Ada’s farm vs the road traveled by Inman) What are the characteristics of each world and what is the effect of setting them side by side? Would Inman have been able to blend into Ada’s world in the end?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Friendship
 - Loneliness
 - cyclic view of time
 - linear sense of time
- What is the role of birds in this novel?
- On page 278 as Inman describes Ada to the goat woman a theory of convergence seems to be developed.
- The characters of Stodbrod and Pangle were inspired by actual people killed by the Home Guard during the Civil War. What is their function in the novel? How do they contribute to Frazier’s themes?
- At one point Stodbrod and Pangle sing a spiritual (p. 338-9) which seems to be lacking a crucial final verse promising hope at life’s end. Does Frazier offer any more hope in the novel than at the song’s end?



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- Frazier takes great pains to give his novel a 19th century flavor, especially through his use of language. In what ways does Frazier's 20th century perspective show through?
- Is Stodbrod redeemed by his music?
- Does nature play too big a part in this novel? How do each of the following characters view the natural world? Monroe, Ada, Inman, Ruby?
- What is the significance of the story of the Shining Rocks in the novel? Why does Ada seem skeptical? What does it mean to Inman?
- How is religion portrayed in *Cold Mountain*? What is the view of war by the characters in this novel. What is Frazier saying concerning war?