



Living in the Modern Rural West Discussion Questions



"Living in the Modern Rural West" theme materials were created by Susan Swetnam, Idaho State University, 2007.

Discussion Questions for Series

1. What attitudes about the rural West and Western landscape do you see appearing across multiple books in this series? Is there a contemporary "myth of the West" that writers seem to share? (Remember that "myth" can mean "controlling story"—it doesn't have to mean "false" story.)
2. What social and personal problems are discussed in these books? Are those somehow caused or exacerbated by the characters' residence in the rural West? Or might they happen anywhere?
3. Some of the writers represented in this series are native Westerners; others are immigrants. Do native Westerners seem, as a group, to think of the rural West differently than the imports? If you've read both John Rember's book and Diane Josephy Peavy's book (both set in the same general part of Idaho, though separated by a major pass), comparing their perspectives might be especially revealing.
4. Many of these books are about Western families. As writers consider their relationships to their parents and grandparents, what kinds of questions do they ask? What sort of answers, if any, do they find? How does living in the rural west seem to have influenced their family life?
5. Many of these books are about relationships with Western neighbors. How does the nature of Western landscape influence people's interactions? Do you think that these patterns are like those elsewhere, or different? People often claim that neighbors are "friendlier" in the West. Do these books bear that out?
6. Which of these books do you think are especially well-written? Why? What features of style/plot/character make them so?
7. As a Westerner yourself, do you identify with particular writers in this series? Which ones, and why?
8. How do these books, taken as a whole, comment on stereotypical images of the West as a place of freedom, individual growth, and opportunity? Do they support those stereotypes, undermine them, or both? Do you agree with their conclusions?