



Let's Talk About ...

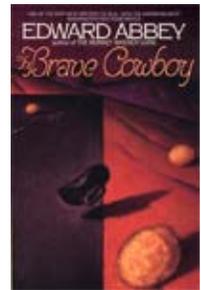
The Western Experience

“For many the West is more than a direction found on a compass, even more than a geographical location found on a map. The word carries connotations, snippets, and images from a host of sources that all go into making up an imaginative collage of the West. The works chosen for this series add to and enrich the picture by giving us different, and perhaps even new, experiences. Within this diversity, a common thread runs through the books: the ways in which individuals confront and deal with an alien culture and a sometimes inhospitable land. Whether depicting the pursuit of the American dream, attempts to start a new life, or struggles to hold onto traditional ways, the books in this series help create a fuller, more complete picture of the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions that ultimately make up the West.”

– James Hadden, for the Idaho Let's Talk About It, Mapping the West, 1986

Featured book: *The Brave Cowboy* by Edward Abbey (1956)

Jack Burns is a cowboy, not of cows, but of nature. Abbey has drawn Burns' character out of the western land, that geography, specialized topography where supposedly all good cowboys come from--pine forest, surrounding desert flats and mountains, all bordered by a winding river. Abbey's narrative yokes its power from pervasive irresolution. Every important aspect of the plot needs resolving but can't get it. Like most of his other books, in this book Abbey sends desperate signals about how mankind's technological and metropolitan impulses have infected or severed, rather than enhanced or reinforced, the vein of life.. Abbey moves his narrative from a good story to art by using the unities. Unity of action, place, and time have been meticulously installed. The action occurs within a concise setting, encompassing the river, the mountain, and the town.



Discussion Questions: [Written by Dr. D. G. Campbell, Associate Professor, Department of English, Northern Arizona University]

1. Is Sheriff Johnson a good guy or a bad guy?
2. Is Abbey's use of fate with Hinton's truck effective or artificial?
3. How does the mountain heal?
4. When did you make the plot connection between Burns and Al Hinton?
5. How does the judge's sympathy affect Paul Bondi's resolve?
6. How effectively does Jack's rustic demeanor contract to Paul's cultured education?
7. Discuss some important symbols.
8. What is the theme of the story?
9. Describe some ways Abbey achieves the feeling of helplessness.



Let's Talk About It is a partnership between the Idaho Commission for Libraries and the Idaho Humanities Council with generous support from U.S. Bank.