



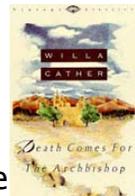
Let's Talk About ...

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: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) is a novel by Willa Cather in which two Roman Catholic priests from lush "civilized" southern France move to the arid regions of New Mexico to "convert the lost souls" of the Indians and Mexicans who populate the area. The novel quietly depicts the various cultures that exist in the American Southwest and sympathetically shows the values and history of each.



Discussion Questions: [compiled from Let's Talk About It program scholars]

- If you were to settle in a new country, who would you choose to accompany you --Father Vaillant or Bishop Latour? Why?
- Those who have lived in the West have their own ideas about the “real” West and the “imaginary or mythic” West. Still, most of us cling to some idea of what “the West” means in terms of its history and qualities. To what degree is *Death Comes for the Archbishop* about “the West”?
- Both Vaillant and Latour were given missions to perform in the new country. Were they successful?
- One of the moral dilemmas of the novel is the destruction of Native American cultures. Are Vaillant and Latour any less guilty of subverting native beliefs than were their predecessors?
- Is this novel a splendidly composed bit of nostalgia concerning the American frontier, or do its themes have some importance for life today in Idaho, specifically regarding Native Americans and Hispanics?

