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# Across Five Aprils

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# *Across Five Aprils*

by Irene Hunt

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# *Across Five Aprils*

## Objectives for the Student

*By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:*

1. write an essay that explains and supports the idea that the Coming-of-Age theme in *Across Five Aprils* is well developed.
2. identify and discuss the following themes in this novel and cite comments and incidents in the novel for support:
  - A. Related to “coming of age” is the Loss-of-Innocence theme. In this type of story, a young, innocent person, whose life has not been touched by sorrow or evil, suddenly comes face-to-face with it. As a consequence, the young person is said to have lost innocence through this recognition of the evil in the world. Point out how this theme is developed in *Across Five Aprils*.
  - B. The unjust and corrosive effects of stereotyping people and/or groups.
  - C. The importance of family and friends in one’s life.
  - D. The conflict that may have to be faced when loyalty to a friend or relative conflicts with a sense of duty.
  - E. The consequences of what may happen when unchecked emotions overwhelm rational thoughts.
  - F. The difficulty of following one’s personal conscience.
3. write a one-half page character description of selected characters.
4. infer meanings about plot and characters when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
5. list the major incidents in this plot and identify those incidents that are:
  - A. exposition
  - B. rising action
  - C. climax
  - D. falling action
  - E. resolution
6. define the term “dialect,” explain why an author may choose to use it, and point out how it is used in this story.

7. define the term “stereotype” and discuss the extent to which the following characters are or are not stereotypes:

Name	Possible Type
Jethro	the young boy in the act becoming a man
Bill	the sensitive, thoughtful young man
Ross Milton	the wise, older mentor
Shadrach	the idealistic young man
Jenny	the sweet, young heroine
Guy Wortman	the villain

8. define the term “foreshadowing” and point out where it occurs in this novel and for what purpose it is used.
9. describe the difference between first and third person narration and explain the advantages and disadvantages of both types. Identify the kind of narration used in this novel.



# Across Five Aprils

## Terms

*Inference* - the act of drawing a conclusion that is not actually stated. For example, in *The Pigman* from the fact that John and Lorraine are writing a memorial epic about the incident with the Pigman, we may infer that the Pigman is now dead and the incident is important to them.

*Stereotype* the act of putting people into groups based on race, religion, nationality, physical appearance, social class, or some other easily identifiable characteristic. Example: In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Magua and Uncas have become the stereotypical ideals of evil and good Indians.

*Foreshadowing* – the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense.

*Metaphor* - a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar but are brought together in order to create a sharp image. Example: The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds.

*Allusion* - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, or movie outside of the story that the author expects the reader will recognize.

*Narrator* – the one who tells the story. If the narrator is a character in the book, the term is first-person narration. (Example: *Moby Dick* is narrated by Ishmael, a crew member). If the narrator is not a character, the term is third-person narration. (Example: *Sense and Sensibility*).

*Protagonist* - the central or main character in a story around which the plot centers. Example: Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*

*Antagonist* The person or force that is in conflict with, or opposes, the protagonist.

*Plot* - the pattern of events in a novel. Is it believable or credible given its setting? Is it well-paced as opposed to slow moving?

*Exposition* - the background information which the readers has to know and/or understand.

*Rising Action* - the part of the story's plot that adds complications to the problems and increases the reader's interest.

*Climax* - the point of greatest dramatic tension or excitement in a story.

*Falling Action* - additional action following the climax.

*Resolution* - the part of the story in which all the problems are solved and/or the secrets revealed; also called “denouement.”

*Foreshadowing* - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense.

*Foil* - a character whose qualities or actions usually serve to emphasize the actions or qualities of the main character, the protagonist, by providing a strong contrast. On occasion, the foil is used as a contrast to a character other than the main one.

*Allusion* - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, or movie outside of the story that the author expects the reader will recognize.

*Setting* – when and where the short story, play, or novel takes place. Example: *Macbeth* takes place in the eleventh century in Scotland, which greatly influences the story and adds the elements of truthfulness to its violence.

*Hyperbole* - exaggeration for emphasis; overstatement. Example: I’ve told you a million times to...

*Metaphor* - a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar but are brought together in order to create a sharp image. Example: The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds.

*Dialect* - a distinctive variety of language spoken by members of an identifiable regional group, nation, or social class. Example: Jim, in *Huck Finn*, says, “Shet de do.” (“Shut the door”)

# *Across Five Aprils*

## Questions For Essay and Discussion

1. Explain why this novel is a good example of the Coming of Age genre. Support your answer by referring to comments and incidents from *Across Five Aprils*.
2. Write a short essay in which you explain how foreshadowing is used in this novel to build interest and suspense.
3. Write a one-half page description of each of the major characters in the novel.
4. List the major incidents in the plot of this novel and identify those incidents that are part of the *Exposition*, those that constitute *Rising Action*, the incident that is the *Climax*, those that are part of the *Falling Action*, and those that are part of the *Resolution*.
5. When a novel ends, sometimes we are sorry because we wish to spend more time with the characters we have come to know well. This is probably why sequels are popular. In a two-page sequel to this novel, write what you think happens to Jethro in the next ten years of his life.
6. Prove that the following are themes in this novel:
  - A. Related to coming of age is the loss of innocence theme. In this type of story a young, innocent person, whose life has not been touched by sorrow or evil, suddenly comes face-to-face with it. As a consequence, the young person is said to have lost his or her innocence through this recognition of the evil in the world.
  - B. The unjust and corrosive effects of stereotyping people and/or groups.
  - C. The importance of family and friends in one's life.
  - D. The conflict one may have to face when loyalty to a friend or relative conflicts with a sense of duty.
  - E. The consequences of what may happen when unchecked emotions overwhelm rational thoughts.
  - F. The difficulty of following one's individual conscience.
7. After defining the term "dialect," point to examples of it in this novel and discuss reasons why an author chooses to use dialect.



8. Consider the term “stereotype” and discuss characters on television shows or in movies that you feel are good examples of stereotypical characters. In that light, consider each of the major characters in this novel and discuss to what extent these characters are or are not stereotypes.
9. Discuss first person and third person narration and explain the advantages and disadvantages of both types of narration.
10. Define and cite examples in the text of the following literary terms:
  - Allusion
  - Hyperbole
  - Metaphor
  - Setting

# *Across Five Aprils*

## Test

1. The narrative in this story is
  - A. in the first person by a character within the story.
  - B. in the third person by an all-knowing narrator.
  - C. from the point of view of Jethro.
  - D. an example of the author who interferes in the story.
  - E. Both B and C
  
2. In this story, Guy Wortman may appropriately be labeled
  - A. the antagonist.
  - B. the protagonist.
  - C. the author's alter ego.
  - D. the first person narrator.
  - E. Both C and D
  
3. "You ain't watchin' to keep the 'tater eyes facin' up, Jeth"  
The above comment an example of
  - A. stereotyping.
  - B. dialect.
  - C. rising action.
  - D. metaphor.
  - E. allusion.
  
4. In addition to an air of enthusiasm that can be attributed to Jethro's youthful optimism, what other mood is presented in Chapter One (as well as in many other places in the novel)?
  - A. anxiety
  - B. cheerfulness
  - C. sorrow
  - D. resignation
  - E. Both C and D
  
5. Whose viewpoint on war changes over the course of this novel?
  - A. Matt Creighton's
  - B. Ellen Creighton's
  - C. Jethro's
  - D. Bill's
  - E. Both A and D

6. Which is not a theme in this novel?
- A. the loss of innocence
  - B. the perfectibility of man
  - C. the importance of family and friends
  - D. the consequences of unchecked emotions
  - E. the need to follow one's conscience even in times of difficulties
7. In this story, a "Copperhead" is
- A. a Northerner with Southern sympathies.
  - B. a person who mines copper.
  - C. an officer in the Confederate army.
  - D. a first-year student at the military academy.
  - E. a Southern irregular who raids isolated farms.
8. The person who saved Jethro from grave injury was
- A. Shadrach Yale.
  - B. Dave Burdow.
  - C. his brother Bill.
  - D. Ross Milton.
  - E. his cousin Eb.
9. Matt Creighton's barn is set on fire because
- A. he wants to collect the insurance money.
  - B. he wants to build a new barn.
  - C. people believe that Bill has joined the Rebel forces.
  - D. the barn is infested with disease-carrying rodents.
  - E. his sons have joined the Union Army.
10. Jethro becomes upset with Jenny when she refuses
- A. to read her letter out loud.
  - B. to let him take the horse team to town.
  - C. to make him a drink.
  - D. to take him to town with her when she goes for the mail.
  - E. to take him to Washington.
11. In addition to Shadrach, the other person who greatly influences Jethro's formal education is
- A. his brother Bill.
  - B. the newspaper editor.
  - C. the new schoolmaster.
  - D. the general store owner.
  - E. his mother.

12. Jethro is forced to assume a man's role when his father
- A. is shot.
  - B. has a heart attack.
  - C. is beaten by the nightriders.
  - D. is drafted into the army.
  - E. disappears.
13. "He had heard cries often that autumn, all through the country side....All these familiar sounds had taken on overtones of waiting...He shivered and looked away from his brother's face"
- The above quotation is an example of
- A. allusion.
  - B. metaphor.
  - C. foreshadowing.
  - D. dialect.
  - E. climax.
14. The one character flaw that this character has is that he/she is suspicious of foreigners and anyone who speaks in a foreign language.
- A. Matt
  - B. Ellen
  - C. Ross
  - D. Jethro
  - E. Shad
15. This character is thought of as "strange" because at times he/she prefers to be alone rather than with other people.
- A. Matt
  - B. Bill
  - C. Eb
  - D. Tom
  - E. Ross Milton
16. This character has been stereotyped by the community because of his ancestors.
- A. Ed Turner
  - B. Travis Burdow
  - C. Ross Milton
  - D. Guy Wortman
  - E. Bill Creighton

17. Jethro thinks the fifth April is the cruelest April because
- A. the war, which seems won, drags on.
  - B. President Lincoln is murdered.
  - C. Shadrach is surely ignored.
  - D. his father dies just before the war ends
  - E. he hears the news that Bill has been killed.

### Short Answer

18. If Jenny is a stereotype, what type is she supposed to represent?
19. Give one example that is used to present the theme of “loyalty versus duty.”
20. What is the significance of the Battle of Gettysburg?

### Essays (Choose any two)

1. How did *Across Five Aprils* bring the horror, fear, death, and characters of the Civil War alive for you.
2. Define the term “stereotype” and by referring to the novel, show that a character is or is not a stereotype. Choose only one of these three characters: Shadrach, Ellen, or Bill.
3. How has Jethro lost his innocence? What one incident hurts the deepest? Do not confuse his coming of age with losing his childhood naivete.
4. Which character did you like most; which did you dislike most? Provide support for your choice.

# *Across Five Aprils*

## **Answer Key**

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. E | 7. A  | 13. C |
| 2. A | 8. B  | 14. B |
| 3. B | 9. C  | 15. B |
| 4. A | 10. A | 16. B |
| 5. C | 11. B | 17. B |
| 6. B | 12. B |       |

## **Short Answer**

18. She should be considered the sweet, pretty, bright, and feisty heroine.
19. To turn Eb in as a deserter or to help him is the most obvious choice, but other answers are acceptable.
20. It is the first time the South brings the war to the North.



# Across Five Aprils

## Teacher's Study Guide

### Chapter One

1. The setting for this novel is established quickly. In what time period and in what place does it occur?

*The story is set in southern Illinois in April, 1861, just prior to the beginning of the American Civil War.*

2. What two moods are contrasted in this first chapter?

*Jethro's mood is one of youthful and immature optimism; he is happy and untroubled. Ellen's mood (Jethro's mother) is marked by great anxiety for what may develop in the country.*

3. What makes Jethro special to his mother? What literary term is implied in the sentence about destiny marking Jethro?

*He is the youngest and the only one of her younger children to survive a plague that killed many children his age, including three of his siblings. He also seems to be especially bright and talented. The literary term would be foreshadowing. Since "destiny had marked" Jethro, it must mean that later on in the story, the author will reveal Jethro's fate as special.*

4. Explain the allusion and find a simile, both in the same sentence, on page eight.

*The simile is the comparison between the disease and merciless soldiers. The allusion is to Herod, King of Judea in the first century B.C., whose soldiers killed every Jewish child under the age of two. "...a disease which struck the country that year, people said, like the soldiers of Herod."*

5. What had happened to Jethro's sister Mary? Why do you suppose this is mentioned?

*She was killed in an unnecessary accident caused by one of the Burdows. It gives the author a chance to include the way everyone feels about the Burdow family and an opportunity to reveal some very positive aspects of Jethro's father, Matt Creighton.*

6. Do you find it difficult to understand the dialect that Jethro and his mother speak?

*At times, written presentations of dialect are difficult to decipher; the meaning could become clearer if the passage were read aloud.*

7. How does Ellen's view of the troubles contrast with her boys' views?

*Jethro and the boys, at least the younger of his brothers and his cousin, all have a romantic view of the glory and pomp of war; Ellen, however, dreads the thought of it because she is realistic about war's horror.*

8. On which side, the Northern or Southern, do the sympathies of the people of southern Illinois lie?

*The Creightons seem to favor the North, but a good deal of controversy exists in the community, and some people side with the South.*

9. What do we learn of Ellen, which seems to be one weakness in an otherwise compassionate personality?

*She does not like foreigners, and she is suspicious of anyone who does not speak English.*

10. For what reason is Jethro's beloved brother Bill looked upon as strange by people in the community?

*Because he likes to read, be by himself, and think, he is very different from most of the other young farming men in the community. Many members of the group find this type of behavior odd.*

11. What is suggested about Jenny and Shadrach?

*The two have liked each other and might have developed a relationship, but apparently, Jenny's father has told Shadrach to back away because Jenny is too young.*

12. Who is the narrator in the story?

*The story is told through an omniscient first-person narrator, although much of what we see is from Jethro's point of view.*

13. If this is Jethro's story and if it is a coming-of-age novel, what can we expect to happen in the story?

*Since a coming-of-age story is characterized by the passage of a young person from innocence and youth to awareness and maturity, we can expect to see marked changes in Jethro by the end of the novel, especially in his knowledge of the world at large and himself in particular.*

14. The narrator says that Travis Burdow fired a shot at "a society that had kicked a boy from childhood." (Pg. 17) This raises two interesting points. From what kind of discrimination do Travis Burdow and his family suffer? What kind of attitude does the author suggest that this type of discrimination breeds?

*The Burdows have been treated as outcasts for at least thirty years, and this attitude seems to persist for little reason, except that the family has always been treated this way. Travis has become a resentful, angry person; most people in a similar situation would probably react the same.*

15. *Across Five Aprils* seems to be a strange title for a novel. What do you notice in the first chapter that has to do with April? Based on what you think this novel will be about, is this a good title?

*Answer will vary.*

16. We are told that Jethro is nine years old. In what ways does he seem to you to be or not to be a typical nine year-old?

*Some readers feel that he seems too mature to be nine years old; however, in farming families in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children had to grow up earlier than children now do.*

17. In describing the people's mistaken belief that the sun and moon revolve around the Earth, Jethro says, "Seems like people on earth believed we had the best diggin's jest because we want to believe that—because it made us feel important—" (Pg. 13) Later the narrator says:

*"Jethro, forgetting the lecture to his mother on the inclination of people to select beliefs that bring them most satisfaction, never doubted that if Tom and Eb got their chance to go to war, they'd be back home when it was over, and that it would be shadowy men from distant parts who would die for the pages of future history books." (Pg. 15)*

What aspect of human nature do Jethro's feelings reveal?

*Clearly, the idea that people believe whatever provides the most satisfaction, regardless of the facts, will play a big role in this story.*

18. With the talk of war heavy in the air, Jethro's mother, Ellen, says: "Seems sometimes there's a deep silence all about us out here waiting to be filled." (Pg. 11) What element does that sentence add to the novel? What do you think will develop?

*It clearly introduces a note of foreboding and concern, which creates some suspense as to what bad things will follow: in this case, war and its effect on this family.*

## Chapter Two

1. What does the visitor tell the Creightons early in the dinner?

*He is a cousin from Kentucky, and he brings news of friends and family from there.*

2. Later in the dinner, when they are arguing about the hostility between the North and South, what does the cousin blame the problem on?

*He blames the greedy Northern industrialists, who are trying to keep the South poor. For him, this seems to be the major issue.*

3. What is the major controversy for Matt, Ellen, Tom, John, and Eb?

*They believe that splitting the union and the evil of slavery, especially slavery, are the issues of main importance in 1861.*

4. What appears to be Bill's position?

*While he detests slavery, he does believe that it is Northern greed that is driving much of the anti-South fever. Even though he is against slavery, he does not like the abolitionist leaders.*

5. For what reason does the cousin, Wilse Graham, say that the people of southern Illinois have more in common with the Southern states than they have in common with Chicago and the North?

*Unlike the rich industrial North, southern Illinois is an agriculturally based economy, farmed by arrivals from Kentucky and Missouri.*

6. Jethro listens to the argument between Wilse and his brothers and remembers the "secret delight" that the thought of war has given him only a few hours before. The narrator says:

"Suddenly he [Jethro] was deeply troubled. He groped toward an understanding of something that was far beyond the excitement of guns and shouting men; but he could not find words to define what he felt, and that lack left him in a turmoil of frustration." (Pg. 32)

Why is Jethro now troubled?

*By seeing the family heatedly discussing this controversy, Jethro may have clearly become aware of what lies beyond the glory, fascination, and nobility of war; war encompasses hatred, destruction, and death. The reality of the Civil War is that opposing soldiers could be closely related.*

7. Keep in mind that the narrator has told us earlier that these brothers are very close; notice that at one point in the discussion Bill says something that challenges John:

“John did not answer. The two brothers looked at one another steadily for long seconds; it was as if they had forgotten all the others at the table and that each was searching the other’s face with some pressing need. Tom and Eb squirmed uncomfortably; Wilse Graham crumbled a piece of bread.” (Pg. 32)

*The brothers recognize that probably for the first time in their lives they are on opposite sides of a serious issue. They have a pressing need to close this gap and be close again.*

8. What news does Shadrach bring?

*He brings the news is that the Southern forces have fired on and forced the surrender of Fort Sumter.*

9. What does everyone assume that this news means?

*It is obvious that there will be a war between the North and South.*

10. Based on the first two chapters, what do you expect will happen in subsequent ones?

*Answers will vary. Example: Probably, characters we have already met and whose opinions are contrary to each other, will join the war on opposite sides.*

## Chapter Three

1. What is significant about the battles of Bull Run and Wilson Creek?

*Bull Run was the first real battle of the Civil War.  
Wilson Creek was the first battle in Missouri, which means the first one close to home. The North has lost this battle, as well as two others.*

2. What causes Jethro’s bad dreams at night?

*He has nightmares brought on by all the talk of war. He is frightened about what may happen.*

3. How does Bill respond to Jethro’s crying at night? What does this show about Bill?

*He describes Jethro’s crying as a “manly yell of pursuit and aggression.” (Pg. 40) The fact that he does not want his younger brother to feel embarrassed gives an indication of his kindly nature.*

4. Bill tells Jethro what is bothering him. What is Bill's problem?

*He believes that the Northern factory owners urge high tariffs to help them get richer, while cotton growers use slave labor to help them get richer. Both sides, therefore, are in the wrong. He hates slavery in the South, but he also hates the conditions of life imposed on factory workers in the North.*

5. What is the one thing that makes Bill a little unsure of his own view?

*His brother John and his father, both of whom he admires, have contrary opinions, which cause Bill to doubt his own beliefs.*

6. Jethro used to go to Walnut Hill, where his brothers, who had died at an early age, are buried. While there, he talks to them as imaginary playmates. Why does he stop going to Walnut Hill and pretending?

*The young children are never real people to him; when Mary dies, however, her death is real, so he can no longer go to Walnut Hill.*

7. Explain the following quote:  
"He no longer talked to the children though; a phase of innocence had passed, which would never be recaptured." (Pg. 43)

*Because of his youth, death has not been real for Jethro, but with Mary's death, Jethro's childish innocence has been lost, at least in part.*

8. What unusual incident happens between Bill and John? Why?

*Bill and John get in a fistfight because of the different opinions they hold.*

9. The narrator says the following of Jethro:

*"He had heard cries often that autumn, all through the countryside. They came at night, wakened him, and then lapsed into silence, leaving him in fear and perplexity. Sounds once familiar were no longer as they had seemed in other days—his father calling cattle in from the pasture, the sheep dog's bark coming through the fog, the distant creak of the pulley as Ellen drew water for her chickens—all these once familiar sounds had taken on overtones of wailing, and he seemed to hear an echo of that wailing now. He shivered and looked away from his brother's face." (Pg. 44)*

What is Jethro reacting to, and what mood is conveyed in this paragraph? What does the paragraph seem to foreshadow?



*Jethro, filled with feelings of anxiety and fear, responds fearfully to any noise. This anxiety he feels foreshadows the troubles that will be facing the family in the future. Note the contrast between the pleasant, natural, “familiar” noises, which have now become sounds of pain and crying.*

10. What has Bill decided he must do? What has forced this decision?

*Bill has decided he must leave home because his position and beliefs have made it impossible for him to stay. Given his strong feelings, Bill cannot fight for the big money interests in the North against the Southern farmer.*

11. Why is the reader not all surprised by Bill’s decision?

*From the outset, we know that he is an independent thinker, and, throughout, we have seen him struggle with this problem, so his decision does not surprise us.*

## Chapter Four

1. This is a chapter of contrasts. What contrast is made between General McClellan and General Grant?

*McClellan wanders around, Grant takes decisive action.*

2. What problem does President Lincoln have with his commanding generals early in the war?

*Lincoln keeps changing the top commanders because those in command fail to take decisive action in battle. Grant, to the surprise of most, turns out to be a tactical commander who makes bold, resolute decisions.*

3. In response to his father’s comment about General Buckner and General Grant, why does Ellen say, “Yes...and my Bill and Tom was even closer than that--”?

*The father says that the two generals had been classmates at West Point and now are on opposite sides in this war. Bill and Tom, however, were far more than classmates, but the war has come between them, also.*

4. What is Ellen’s reaction after reading Tom’s letter?

*Her face is twisted in sorrow after reading the letter. She feels great sorrow for the hardship and dangers that Tom has to live with.*

5. Why has Jenny been crying?

*Her father says that she is too young to marry Shad.*

6. Shad, who is twenty-one, and Jenny, who is fourteen, have a relationship. Today, it would be considered completely inappropriate; why does it appear acceptable in the story?

*Even though Matt says that Jenny is too young to get married now, he does not see the age difference as the major problem. In a few of years, Matt probably will agree to their courting and marriage. Girls, and especially farm girls, married younger in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than they do today. (Remember, Jenny's mother was married at sixteen)*

7. Do you have any response to the author's description of the weather on this cold, February day?

*While all of us may not feel exactly the same, the details in the author's description are so vivid that one can see and feel the chill of the day as the author describes it.*

8. How does Shad's comment about himself and Jenny create a sense of divided loyalties for Jethro?

*Shad appears to be criticizing Jethro's father because of his decision, and Jethro feels that he has to stand up for his father.*

9. Shadrach makes an allusion to a line from Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* when he says, "Thou too, Brutus?" Explain what he means by the allusion.

*After being stabbed by the conspirators, Caesar's friend Brutus stabs him, too. Caesar's question means that Brutus also has turned against him. Shad, obviously, was taken back by Jethro's comment.*

10. What is Shad and Jenny's plan for Jethro?

*They feel that he should live with Shad and prepare himself to go to a fine university.*

11. What does the decision show about Shad's opinion of Jethro's talent; what advice and materials does Shad give Jethro?

*Shad has a high opinion of Jethro's potential, and he is going to leave the boy his books to do a great deal of reading and learning.*

12. What is your reaction to Shadrach's statement: "We were foolish enough to reach manhood just when the long fizzling turned into an explosion." (Pg. 55) Can you think of other times in U.S. history when this same comment may have been made?

*Answers may vary. Example: The Vietnam War and World War II may come to mind.*

13. After Shadrach rebukes Jethro for calling President Lincoln "Old Abe," the narrator tells us that Jethro, although he means no disrespect to Mr. Lincoln, "would remember the rebuke to the end of his days. He would remember and he would feel ashamed at the memory." (Pg. 59) Why does Jethro feel that ashamed at the memory of Shad's comment? *While it was not a bad thing to say, nor did Jethro receive in any way a stern rebuke, Shad's good opinion of him means so much to Jethro that the younger boy takes the rebuke very much to heart, perhaps too much so.*

## Chapter Five

1. The author states that Ellen was "[s]chooled to believe that self-indulgence of any kind was morally unacceptable." (Pg. 65) Ellen, Matt, and Bill all appear to be people who have strong principles and live by them. Do you have any opinion of people like that? Would you care to be that kind of person? Would self-indulgence be useful or harmful to the characters in the book? Why?

*Answers will vary.*

2. Why do people harass Jethro in the store in town? Who befriends Jethro?

*Guy Wortman and a pal of his attack Jethro and his family because Bill is fighting for the South; Wortman calls the family "Copperheads." Ross "Red" Milton, the editor of the newspaper, however, befriends Jethro.*

3. How can Guy Wortman or any reasonable person think that a family that has three young men fighting for the North could be Southern sympathizers?

*Bill, everyone knows, is fighting on the Rebel side, which may put the Creightons' beliefs in a different light. However, Guy Wortman is a cowardly, drunken, troublemaker, so he may not be a reasonable or very rational person.*

4. After Milton and Jethro talk, the editor becomes interested in helping the boy with his education. Why is this not surprising?

*Jethro is interested in words and ideas, which are also the editor's interest. It is probable that the editor wants to encourage the boy in intellectual and self-improvement pursuits.*

5. What most impresses Jethro about the editor, Red Milton?

*Milton has actually written a book about correct speech.*

6. What literary term is used in this sentence on page 85? “He felt as if he were someone else...who had started from home with a team and wagon on a March morning that was at least a hundred years ago.”

*The feeling may be real, but the exaggeration for effect is an example of hyperbole.*

7. Why is the reader not surprised by the incident at the bridge on the way home?

*There has been ample foreshadowing that something of this type would occur. The only thing that might be surprising is that a grown man would seek to cause grave injury to a child because of what the man believes the sympathies of the boy's family are.*

8. Jethro is not going to tell his family about what has happened in town, but at the last minute, he does tell them. Why do you suppose that he makes that decision?

*What has happened can lead to future trouble, so he probably feels that he has to warn the family.*

9. This chapter is about challenge, intolerance, kindness, and violence. It is also about the learned intolerance for Dave Burdow that is proven to be ill-founded. What in this chapter do you find the most moving or interesting?

*Answers will vary. Example: It would have been quite understandable and expected if Burdow had been a villain in this chapter and not Jethro's rescuer.*

10. Ed Turner's assessment of Dave Burdow proves false. Of Burdow, Turner has said:

“Decency ain't in him....He's had nary a word of human feelin' fer what happened to that little girl, nary a word of thanks that Matt saved his worthless boy from his neighbors. He's more of a dumb brute than a man.” (Pg. 84)

How do you suppose people can have been so wrong about Burdow?

*While answers may vary, it should be clear that prejudice and stereotyping cloud people's rational thought. Ed, obviously, had blamed the father for the son's actions.*

11. What do you predict will happen in the next few chapters?

*Answers will vary.*

## Chapter Six

1. How and why has Jethro had to grow up fast in many ways? What significance does this have to the main theme of the book?

*Because of his father's heart attack, Jethro not only has to take on the work and responsibilities of grown man, but he also must take on the mind-set of a responsible adult. Part of a coming-of-age novel must show the growth and maturity of the main character.*

2. How has the relationship between Jenny and Jethro changed?

*Instead of acting as if he were a kid brother, she now treats him like an equal.*

3. What causes Jethro's one attack of "childish fury"? (Pg. 96)

*The fact that Jenny will not share Shad's letter with him upsets him greatly.*

4. Aside from his work and family responsibilities, in what area of personal self-improvement is Jethro changing?

*He is practicing and using some of the aspects of correct speech that he has read in Ross Milton's book.*

5. In what way has his sister-in-law changed, and what may account for this change?

*She is becoming more friendly and more talkative with the family. She is warming up to them as she gets to know them better; with John gone, she is probably forced to interact with the family more than when John had been around. In addition, she has no one else to talk with except the family.*

6. Jethro's comments on the word "April" suggest that he may be interested in what kind of career when he is older?

*His interest in words and their sounds suggest he may be interested in a writing career.*

7. Given the situation at home, do you think that a career in anything but farming is realistic for Jethro?

*Jethro is only ten or eleven, and the Civil War will end sometime, so he may be able to pursue something other than farming. Jethro's future may also be tied closely to what happens to all his brothers in the war.*

8. Find the metaphor a page 104.

*Matt says, "This war is a beast with long claws."*

9. What is thrown on the porch at night?

*Men, whose faces are hidden, threaten the family by throwing a "bundle of switches tied together with a cord" on the porch. They also leave a note saying, " 'Theres trubel fer fokes that stands up fer there reblovin sons.' " (Pg. 104)*

10. Though the fire is a horrible act, why does the coal oil seem worse?

*The author writes of the amount of labor it will take to correct the situation and the anguish it will cause the victims. This attack upon what is so necessary to support life (water) is accomplished in little time, using no intelligence or skill. Anyone, therefore, would become a victim of simple, dumb hatred.*

11. This chapter shows a boy becoming a man; it is also about vicious, mean people and warm-hearted, helpful people. Gratitude, violence, and anger are also present. What in this chapter do you respond to the most?

*Answers will vary.*

## Chapter Seven

1. In this chapter, men come from all over the county to help the Creighton family, but there is also bad news. What is the news, and who is the bearer of it?

*A neighbor, Dan Lawrence, who was standing next to Tom when he was shot, tells the Creightons the news is that Tom is dead.*

2. It is suggested by the author that Dan Lawrence himself has been changed. In what way may he be changed, and what would have changed him?

*He has been seriously wounded and is recuperating, but there is also a sense of wonder or confusion in his eyes as a result of what he has witnessed. He is "still under the cloud of a horror that only subsequent horror could make him forget." (Pg. 109)*

3. What is the tone and intent of Ross Milton's editorial?

*It is clearly satiric, and the intent is to ridicule and heap abuse upon the cowardly nightriders. The beginning, calling vigilantes "Gentlemen" and "Patriots" is pure sarcasm. (Pg. 111)*



4. The author uses the contrast between the stark somberness at the Creighton house and the gay parties in New York City to lead into the one incident that gives Jasper County a real laugh, as well as bring a sense of relief and security to the area. What is the incident?

*Sam Gardiner sets a trap for Guy Wortman and delivers a load of buckshot to the backside while Guy and some friends are trying to tear up Sam's store.*

5. That incident, plus the reciting of General Halleck's embarrassment, seems to serve as a bit of relief to the reader, who has read of one trouble after another hitting the Creighton family. At this point, the reader welcomes a little diversion. What makes the story of General Halleck and General Beauregard a welcome diversion?

*The reader smiles to read the manner in which General Beauregard saves his soldiers from the clutches of a boastful, but apparently not too talented, Union general.*

6. Jethro is spoken of as a country boy "who was hungry for a hero." (Pg. 117) Why do you suppose, especially in bad times, people feel a need for a hero"?

*Answers will vary.*

## Chapter Eight

1. Much of this chapter is filled with war news. At this point, what do Jethro's feelings about the war seem to be?

*Since Tom's death Jethro seems to be depressed about the war. Like everyone else, he would like to see the Federal troops win some decisive battles that will bring the war to an end, but those victories do not seem to be happening.*

2. What is happening on the Creighton farm?

*Neighbors have come to help build a new barn so the animals will have shelter in the winter.*

3. We learn that Dave Burdow has sent some logs "to the young one." In what little way has Dave Burdow changed since the incident at the bridge?

*Men have come up to him and shaken his hand for what he did at the bridge, and in a small way he has responded to their friendly overtures.*

4. On the occasion of the barn raising, why is it necessary for Jethro to bite his tongue?

*A man who means well treats Jethro as if he were a child ignorant of the war and its ramifications. Jethro feels it would not be polite for him to correct an adult, but keeping quiet takes an effort.*

5. What is the opinion that the men building the barn have of General McClellan. How does this view conflict with the view that Shad informs Jethro that McClellan's men have of the general?

*The farmers think of McClellan as an indecisive incompetent, with these men even questioning his loyalty to the Union side. On the other hand, we learn that his soldiers love him and view him as a hero.*

6. What is Shad's view of McClellan?

*Shad believes that McClellan's indecisive behavior might reflect a reluctance on his part to send his soldiers out to get killed; it might be that the general does not take risks because he does not want to lose the good image the men have of him. In either case, Shad thinks McClellan lacks the aggressive instinct necessary to win this war.*

7. What does Shad write about the Battle of Fredericksburg and the Union's General Burnside?

*He thinks the battle is a disaster in which Union soldiers are needlessly slaughtered because of Burnside's pigheadedness.*

8. What has happened to the morale in the Union forces, and what is now showing up as a result?

*The war, which the volunteers expected to be quick and easy, has been neither, so they have begun to question the point of continuing it. As a result, many of the early Illinois volunteers are now deserting from the army. Previous feelings about the glory of war and the just causes for the fighting have faded and have been replaced with frustration and horror.*

## Chapter Nine

1. Why would the soldiers who come to search the house not go to Prospect Point?

*The deserters there are numerous and are desperate men who would, undoubtedly, kill anyone coming to arrest them.*

2. What is Jenny's reaction to the visit of the soldiers? How does Jethro feel Jenny handles it?

*Jethro admires the spunk and manner in which Jenny speaks to the soldiers.*

3. In his continuing education about life and language, what does Jethro learn from these soldiers?

*He learns that the dialect that he speaks would be ridiculed and mocked by someone not from the area.*

4. Why does Eb say, “I’ve been a long gettin’ home, and now that I’m here, it ain’t no comfort”? (Pg. 135)

*After having deserted, Eb makes his way home very slowly and carefully; now that he is home though, there is not a thing he can do. He certainly will not risk getting his family in trouble by showing up, and he cannot be sure that if any of the neighbors see him they will not report him.*

5. The story of Hig Phillips and the reason he is shot presents an interesting sidelight on the Civil War that some people may not be aware of. What is that sidelight?

*When Hig Phillips is drafted, he is able to pay someone \$300 to serve in the army in his place. Hig is killed by deserters, who have been angered that he was spared the horror and shame that they must undergo.*

6. After two years of fighting, what is it that Eb says caused him to desert?

*Eb says that he was able to withstand the horror of it all as long as Tom was with him. After Tom was killed, however, Eb says he lost all his spirit.*

7. As in earlier situations, Jethro faces another instance of divided loyalties in regard to Eb. While one side argues he should help Eb, the other argues he should not. What is it that pulls Jethro in each direction.

*Eb is family and deserves his help and loyalty. On the other hand, Jethro asks himself what would happen to soldiers like Shad and John, who remain at the battle, if others desert them.*

8. Why does Jethro decide that going to his father is really no solution to the problem? What do you think this says about Jethro?

*The problem of divided loyalties will be a problem for his father as well. Jethro realizes that he will not be solving the problem, simply by shifting it to the shoulders of an ailing man. This shows a wisdom and a sense of responsibility far beyond his years.*

9. When Jethro mentions to his father that he (Jethro) has to go to Hidalgo, why does Matt not question the decision?

*The author says that the father believes Jethro is due the dignity accorded a man because Jethro is doing a man’s work.*

10. What action does Jethro take to try to solve his moral problem?

*Jethro writes a letter to President Lincoln. He learns by return mail that the President is announcing a period of amnesty in which deserters can turn themselves in and be returned to their units without punishment.*

## Chapter Ten

1. In this book, the reader learns a great deal about the Civil War. For example, we learn that the Battle of Chancellorsville is an important one in which, although the Union forces enjoy a great numerical superiority, they lose the battle. Why do they lose this battle and fail to follow up on other victories?

*They lost the battles and other opportunities for victory because the Union generals, with a few exceptions, were not as skillful as the Confederate generals, particularly Robert E. Lee.*

2. After Shad survives the Battle of Chancellorsville, in which seventeen thousand Union soldiers are killed or captured, what does he write in his letter to Jenny?

*He says that after witnessing such massive slaughter, a person has to be a supreme optimist to dream about the future. He tries to prepare Jenny for the fact that, like many other soldiers, he may not, probably will not, survive the Civil War.*

3. Why is Gettysburg an important battle of the war?

*This battle marks the first move into the North by the Confederacy. If Gettysburg falls, the supposition is that Lee may take Philadelphia and Washington.*

4. Why does Ross Milton say to Matt, “As I see it, you’d better gamble, Matt. It will be better for the girl to have tried to get to him even if it is too late?”

*Shad has been seriously wounded and is lying near death in a hospital in Washington, D.C. The editor is encouraging Matt to let Jenny go to Shad.*

5. In his statement, what does the editor imply might be a negative consequence for Matt if he does not let Jenny go at this point?

*We assume that if the father does not let her go and Shad were to die, Jenny will always have some bitter feelings toward her father.*

6. Matt lets Jethro stay home from school because of his own opinion of the new teacher. What is that opinion, and what may it tell us about Matt?

*Matt says of the new teacher that not only is he without book-learning “but he has a mean and pinched-in mind.” (Pg. 155) Matt, who can be a strict and rigid father when it comes to his children’s education, speaks to the teacher after listening to Jethro’s complaints. His comment indicates that he has the sharpness of mind to see the problem and the flexibility of mind to adjust to new situations.*

## Chapter Eleven

1. In the Battle of Chickamauga, which is a terrible defeat for the Union forces, how do General Thomas’ troops stand out?

*While the rest of the Union troops suffer defeat, Thomas’ troops repeatedly repulse the attacks.*

2. What prompts the narrator to say:  
“Other names prominent in that battle were, true to the temper of the times, disgraced and dragged through the mud. Those who fought battles comfortably within their homes or newspaper offices had more than enough mud to spare. Rosecrans, McCook, and Crittenden, who in the bewildering mountain terrain had completely lost control of the men they were supposed to command, were now accused of everything from downright stupidity to traitorous complicity with the enemy.” (Pg. 161)

*The people who were safe at home and without the responsibility are harshly critical of the Union generals who do not win every battle.*

3. In the quote above, how would you describe the narrator’s tone?

*The narrator is disdainful of the critics. The phrase “fought battles comfortably within their own homes” is clearly sarcastic.*

4. Why is Chickamauga viewed as a dreadful reversal?

*After the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the people are hoping that an end to the war is near; the defeat at Chickamauga shatters that hope.*

5. What is there about this book (and this chapter is a particularly good example) that makes reading about the Civil War here more interesting than reading about it in a history textbook?

*While there may be exceptions, most history books deal in broad generalities and, for this reason, tend to be boring. In this book, however, the many specific details about the people and the events make history come alive and infinitely more interesting.*

6. In the fourth year of the war, General Grant is made commander of all the armies of the United States. What distinguishes General Grant from the line of generals who have had this job before him?

*While he is probably a better military strategist than all the others, with the possible exception of General McClellan, Grant is more decisive and tenacious than all the rest.*

7. Why is President Lincoln hated by members within his own party?

*There are some Republicans who think he is going to be too easy on the South, once the war is won.*

8. What may you infer from this chapter is a major controversial issue of the 1864 presidential election?

*The nation is weary of war, and some feel that if a dissolution of the Union is the price for peace, it would be better than a continuation of the war.*

9. What seems to have ensured the re-election of President Lincoln?

*A series of victories for the Union forces seem to suggest that a victorious end to the war may be close.*

10. Shad says of General McClellan that he “lacked not the courage to face personal danger, but the courage to risk being wrong.” (Pg. 169) How much courage do you suppose it takes to risk being wrong?

*Answers will vary.*

11. When John meets Bill, what is the one thing Bill wants John to tell their mother?

*He wants John to explain that Bill did not fight at the battle of Pittsburgh Landing, where Tom, the younger brother, was killed.*

## Chapter Twelve

1. Why is Ed Turner concerned about his eighteen-year-old son's future?

*He worries that the horrors that his son has seen in the war may turn the boy into a cold, callous person.*

2. When Ed Turner compares his son to Jethro, what is he saying about Jethro?

*Ed says that his son follows the crowd, but Jethro is more mature and thinks for himself.*



3. Why does Ross Milton's comment to Jethro about peace depress Jethro?

*Jethro has been looking forward to peace, expecting all things to be good; the editor points out that following the peace, there will be many problems.*

4. Why does Jethro's mother view him with anxiety and concern?

*He has become quiet and withdrawn as a result of his talks with the editor. Jethro reminds the mother of Bill, also a sensitive, thought-filled son who, because of what he believed, had walked out of their lives with such finality.*

5. The coming of the fifth April brings peace, but what desolation follows on its heels? Why does Jethro take it so hard?

*The assassination of President Lincoln devastates both Ross Milton and Jethro. Not only do they see Lincoln as the one who will help the country heal from its wounds, but they also feel a great personal love for the President.*

6. How does the author portray Jethro's feelings of inner desolation?

*Jethro is described as going on with his work, but there is no longer any beauty or joy in the world for him.*

7. What does the following passage tell us about Jethro?

“It was the saddest and most cruel April of the five. It had held out an almost unbelievable joy and had then struck out in fury at those whose hands were outstretched. Jethro had learned to accept the whims of fate, schooled as he was in the philosophy of men who work the soil. The rains came or they were withheld, the heat ripened the grain or blasted it with a scorching flame, the ears of corn matured in golden beauty or they were infested by worms or blight. One accepted the good or the evil with humility, for life was mystery, and questions were not for the lowly. But on the last Sunday of the April, a Sunday of sunlight and bright sky, Jethro lay in the grass on Walnut Hill, and rage mingled with the grief in his heart.” (Pg. 184)

*Although only thirteen, Jethro has achieved a philosophical acceptance of life and the whims of fate, yet it is hard for him to accept Lincoln's death. The author's point is that Jethro has matured a great deal in the four years since he stood in the potato field with his mother.*

8. In the quotation above, the popular literary motif of “the question of evil” (i.e., why God permits evil to exist in the world) is introduced. How does the author answer this question?

*The author suggests that a person cannot really understand or answer the question of good and evil, so it is simply a mystery that people must just accept.*

9. What is your opinion of the ending of this story? Would you consider it a romantic or realistic ending? A pessimistic or optimistic ending? An appropriate or inappropriate ending?

*As the story ends, some points are left in doubt, which tends to make the story realistic. For example, we are told that there is only a remote and shadowy chance that Bill will return from the war. Jethro also tells Shad, “Don’t build me up too much, somethin’s like to break inside of me,” a comment which indicates that Jethro may feel himself emotionally vulnerable. (Pg. 188) On the other hand, many things are neatly planned, like Jethro’s future. The story ends on an upbeat note and suggests a happy future for the characters, so it is definitely optimistic. Given all that has gone before, the ending seems appropriate.*

# *Across Five Aprils*

## Student Study Guide

### Chapter One

1. The setting for this novel is established quickly. In what time period and in what place does it occur?
2. What two moods are contrasted in this first chapter?
3. What makes Jethro special to his mother? What literary term is implied in the sentence about destiny marking Jethro?
4. Explain the allusion and find a simile, both in the same sentence, on page eight.
5. What had happened to Jethro's sister Mary? Why do you suppose this is mentioned?
6. Do you find it difficult to understand the dialect that Jethro and his mother speak?
7. How does Ellen's view of the troubles contrast with her boys' views?

8. On which side, the Northern or Southern, do the sympathies of the people of southern Illinois lie?
9. What do we learn of Ellen, which seems to be one weakness in an otherwise compassionate personality?
10. For what reason is Jethro's beloved brother Bill looked upon as strange by people in the community?
11. What is suggested about Jenny and Shadrach?
12. Who is the narrator in the story?
13. If this is Jethro's story and if it is a coming-of-age novel, what can we expect to happen in the story?
14. The narrator says that Travis Burdow fired a shot at "a society that had kicked a boy from childhood." (Pg. 17) This raises two interesting points. From what kind of discrimination do Travis Burdow and his family suffer? What kind of attitude does the author suggest that this type of discrimination breeds?

15. *Across Five Aprils* seems to be a strange title for a novel. What do you notice in the first chapter that has to do with April? Based on what you think this novel will be about, is this a good title?
16. We are told that Jethro is nine years old. In what ways does he seem to you to be or not to be a typical nine year-old?
17. In describing the people's mistaken belief that the sun and moon revolve around the Earth, Jethro says, "Seems like people on earth believed we had the best diggin's jest because we want to believe that—because it made us feel important—" (Pg. 13) Later the narrator says:

"Jethro, forgetting the lecture to his mother on the inclination of people to select beliefs that bring them most satisfaction, never doubted that if Tom and Eb got their chance to go to war, they'd be back home when it was over, and that it would be shadowy men from distant parts who would die for the pages of future history books." (Pg. 15)

What aspect of human nature do Jethro's feelings reveal?

18. With the talk of war heavy in the air, Jethro's mother, Ellen, says: "Seems sometimes there's a deep silence all about us out here waiting to be filled." (Pg. 11) What element does that sentence add to the novel? What do you think will develop?

## Chapter Two

1. What does the visitor tell the Creightons early in the dinner?
2. Later in the dinner, when they are arguing about the hostility between the North and South, what does the cousin blame the problem on?
3. What is the major controversy for Matt, Ellen, Tom, John, and Eb?
4. What appears to be Bill's position?
5. For what reason does the cousin, Wilse Graham, say that the people of southern Illinois have more in common with the Southern states than they have in common with Chicago and the North?
6. Jethro listens to the argument between Wilse and his brothers and remembers the "secret delight" that the thought of war has given him only a few hours before. The narrator says:

"Suddenly he [Jethro] was deeply troubled. He groped toward an understanding of something that was far beyond the excitement of guns and shouting men; but he could not find words to define what he felt, and that lack left him in a turmoil of frustration." (Pg. 32)

Why is Jethro now troubled?

7. Keep in mind that the narrator has told us earlier that these brothers are very close; notice that at one point in the discussion Bill says something that challenges John:

“John did not answer. The two brothers looked at one another steadily for long seconds; it was as if they had forgotten all the others at the table and that each was searching the other’s face with some pressing need. Tom and Eb squirmed uncomfortably; Wilse Graham crumbled a piece of bread.” (Pg. 32)

8. What news does Shadrach bring?
9. What does everyone assume that this news means?
10. Based on the first two chapters, what do you expect will happen in subsequent ones?

## Chapter Three

1. What is significant about the battles of Bull Run and Wilson Creek?
2. What causes Jethro's bad dreams at night?
3. How does Bill respond to Jethro's crying at night? What does this show about Bill?
4. Bill tells Jethro what is bothering him. What is Bill's problem?
5. What is the one thing that makes Bill a little unsure of his own view?
6. Jethro used to go to Walnut Hill, where his brothers, who had died at an early age, are buried. While there, he talks to them as imaginary playmates. Why does he stop going to Walnut Hill and pretending?
7. Explain the following quote:  
"He no longer talked to the children though; a phase of innocence had passed, which would never be recaptured." (Pg. 43)
8. What unusual incident happens between Bill and John? Why?



9. The narrator says the following of Jethro:

“He had heard cries often that autumn, all through the countryside. They came at night, wakened him, and then lapsed into silence, leaving him in fear and perplexity. Sounds once familiar were no longer as they had seemed in other days—his father calling cattle in from the pasture, the sheep dog’s bark coming through the fog, the distant creak of the pulley as Ellen drew water for her chickens—all these once familiar sounds had taken on overtones of wailing, and he seemed to hear an echo of that wailing now. He shivered and looked away from his brother’s face.” (Pg. 44)

What is Jethro reacting to, and what mood is conveyed in this paragraph? What does the paragraph seem to foreshadow?

10. What has Bill decided he must do? What has forced this decision?
11. Why is the reader not all surprised by Bill’s decision?

## Chapter Four

1. This is a chapter of contrasts. What contrast is made between General McClellan and General Grant?
2. What problem does President Lincoln have with his commanding generals early in the war?
3. In response to his father's comment about General Buckner and General Grant, why does Ellen say, "Yes...and my Bill and Tom was even closer than that--"?
4. What is Ellen's reaction after reading Tom's letter?
5. Why has Jenny been crying?
6. Shad, who is twenty-one, and Jenny, who is fourteen, have a relationship. Today, it would be considered completely inappropriate; why does it appear acceptable in the story?
7. Do you have any response to the author's description of the weather on this cold, February day?

8. How does Shad's comment about himself and Jenny create a sense of divided loyalties for Jethro?
9. Shadrach makes an allusion to a line from Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* when he says, "Thou too, Brutus?" Explain what he means by the allusion.
10. What is Shad and Jenny's plan for Jethro?
11. What does the decision show about Shad's opinion of Jethro's talent; what advice and materials does Shad give Jethro?
12. What is your reaction to Shadrach's statement: "We were foolish enough to reach manhood just when the long fizzling turned into an explosion." (Pg. 55) Can you think of other times in U.S. history when this same comment may have been made?
13. After Shadrach rebukes Jethro for calling President Lincoln "Old Abe," the narrator tells us that Jethro, although he means no disrespect to Mr. Lincoln, "would remember the rebuke to the end of his days. He would remember and he would feel ashamed at the memory." (Pg. 59) Why does Jethro feel that ashamed at the memory of Shad's comment?

## Chapter Five

1. The author states that Ellen was “[s]chooled to believe that self-indulgence of any kind was morally unacceptable.” (Pg. 65) Ellen, Matt, and Bill all appear to be people who have strong principles and live by them. Do you have any opinion of people like that? Would you care to be that kind of person? Would self-indulgence be useful or harmful to the characters in the book? Why?
2. Why do people harass Jethro in the store in town? Who befriends Jethro?
3. How can Guy Wortman or any reasonable person think that a family that has three young men fighting for the North could be Southern sympathizers?
4. After Milton and Jethro talk, the editor becomes interested in helping the boy with his education. Why is this not surprising?
5. What most impresses Jethro about the editor, Red Milton?
6. What literary term is used in this sentence on page 85? “He felt as if he were someone else...who had started from home with a team and wagon on a March morning that was at least a hundred years ago.”
7. Why is the reader not surprised by the incident at the bridge on the way home?

8. Jethro is not going to tell his family about what has happened in town, but at the last minute, he does tell them. Why do you suppose that he makes that decision?
9. This chapter is about challenge, intolerance, kindness, and violence. It is also about the learned intolerance for Dave Burdow that is proven to be ill-founded. What in this chapter do you find the most moving or interesting?
10. Ed Turner's assessment of Dave Burdow proves false. Of Burdow, Turner has said:  
"Decency ain't in him....He's had nary a word of human feelin' fer what happened to that little girl, nary a word of thanks that Matt saved his worthless boy from his neighbors. He's more of a dumb brute than a man." (Pg. 84)

How do you suppose people can have been so wrong about Burdow?

11. What do you predict will happen in the next few chapters?

## Chapter Six

1. How and why has Jethro had to grow up fast in many ways? What significance does this have to the main theme of the book?
2. How has the relationship between Jenny and Jethro changed?
3. What causes Jethro's one attack of "childish fury"? (Pg. 96)
4. Aside from his work and family responsibilities, in what area of personal self-improvement is Jethro changing?
5. In what way has his sister-in-law changed, and what may account for this change?
6. Jethro's comments on the word "April" suggest that he may be interested in what kind of career when he is older?
7. Given the situation at home, do you think that a career in anything but farming is realistic for Jethro?
8. Find the metaphor a page 104.

9. What is thrown on the porch at night?
10. Though the fire is a horrible act, why does the coal oil seem worse?
11. This chapter shows a boy becoming a man; it is also about vicious, mean people and warm-hearted, helpful people. Gratitude, violence, and anger are also present. What in this chapter do you respond to the most?

## Chapter Seven

1. In this chapter, men come from all over the county to help the Creighton family, but there is also bad news. What is the news, and who is the bearer of it?
2. It is suggested by the author that Dan Lawrence himself has been changed. In what way may he be changed, and what would have changed him?
3. What is the tone and intent of Ross Milton's editorial?
4. The author uses the contrast between the stark somberness at the Creighton house and the gay parties in New York City to lead into the one incident that gives Jasper County a real laugh, as well as bring a sense of relief and security to the area. What is the incident?
5. That incident, plus the reciting of General Halleck's embarrassment, seems to serve as a bit of relief to the reader, who has read of one trouble after another hitting the Creighton family. At this point, the reader welcomes a little diversion. What makes the story of General Halleck and General Beauregard a welcome diversion?
6. Jethro is spoken of as a country boy "who was hungry for a hero." (Pg. 117) Why do you suppose, especially in bad times, people feel a need for a hero?



## Chapter Eight

1. Much of this chapter is filled with war news. At this point, what do Jethro's feelings about the war seem to be?
2. What is happening on the Creighton farm?
3. We learn that Dave Burdow has sent some logs "to the young one." In what little way has Dave Burdow changed since the incident at the bridge?
4. On the occasion of the barn raising, why is it necessary for Jethro to bite his tongue?
5. What is the opinion that the men building the barn have of General McClellan. How does this view conflict with the view that Shad informs Jethro that McClellan's men have of the general?
6. What is Shad's view of McClellan?
7. What does Shad write about the Battle of Fredericksburg and the Union's General Burnside?
8. What has happened to the morale in the Union forces, and what is now showing up as a result?

## Chapter Nine

1. Why would the soldiers who come to search the house not go to Prospect Point?
2. What is Jenny's reaction to the visit of the soldiers? How does Jethro feel Jenny handles it?
3. In his continuing education about life and language, what does Jethro learn from these soldiers?
4. Why does Eb say, "I've been a long gettin' home, and now that I'm here, it ain't no comfort"? (Pg. 135)
5. The story of Hig Phillips and the reason he is shot presents an interesting sidelight on the Civil War that some people may not be aware of. What is that sidelight?
6. After two years of fighting, what is it that Eb says caused him to desert?
7. As in earlier situations, Jethro faces another instance of divided loyalties in regard to Eb. While one side argues he should help Eb, the other argues he should not. What is it that pulls Jethro in each direction.

8. Why does Jethro decide that going to his father is really no solution to the problem? What do you think this says about Jethro?
9. When Jethro mentions to his father that he (Jethro) has to go to Hidalgo, why does Matt not question the decision?
10. What action does Jethro take to try to solve his moral problem?

## Chapter Ten

1. In this book, the reader learns a great deal about the Civil War. For example, we learn that the Battle of Chancellorsville is an important one in which, although the Union forces enjoy a great numerical superiority, they lose the battle. Why do they lose this battle and fail to follow up on other victories?
2. After Shad survives the Battle of Chancellorsville, in which seventeen thousand Union soldiers are killed or captured, what does he write in his letter to Jenny?
3. Why is Gettysburg an important battle of the war?
4. Why does Ross Milton say to Matt, “As I see it, you’d better gamble, Matt. It will be better for the girl to have tried to get to him even if it is too late?”
5. In his statement, what does the editor imply might be a negative consequence for Matt if he does not let Jenny go at this point?
6. Matt lets Jethro stay home from school because of his own opinion of the new teacher. What is that opinion, and what may it tell us about Matt?

## Chapter Eleven

1. In the Battle of Chickamauga, which is a terrible defeat for the Union forces, how do General Thomas' troops stand out?
2. What prompts the narrator to say:  
    "Other names prominent in that battle were, true to the temper of the times, disgraced and dragged through the mud. Those who fought battles comfortably within their homes or newspaper offices had more than enough mud to spare. Rosecrans, McCook, and Crittenden, who in the bewildering mountain terrain had completely lost control of the men they were supposed to command, were now accused of everything from downright stupidity to traitorous complicity with the enemy." (Pg. 161)
3. In the quote above, how would you describe the narrator's tone?
4. Why is Chickamauga viewed as a dreadful reversal?
5. What is there about this book (and this chapter is a particularly good example) that makes reading about the Civil War here more interesting than reading about it in a history textbook?
6. In the fourth year of the war, General Grant is made commander of all the armies of the United States. What distinguishes General Grant from the line of generals who have had this job before him?

7. Why is President Lincoln hated by members within his own party?
8. What may you infer from this chapter is a major controversial issue of the 1864 presidential election?
9. What seems to have ensured the re-election of President Lincoln?
10. Shad says of General McClellan that he “lacked not the courage to face personal danger, but the courage to risk being wrong.” (Pg. 169) How much courage do you suppose it takes to risk being wrong?
11. When John meets Bill, what is the one thing Bill wants John to tell their mother?

## Chapter Twelve

1. Why is Ed Turner concerned about his eighteen-year-old son's future?
2. When Ed Turner compares his son to Jethro, what is he saying about Jethro?
3. Why does Ross Milton's comment to Jethro about peace depress Jethro?
4. Why does Jethro's mother view him with anxiety and concern?
5. The coming of the fifth April brings peace, but what desolation follows on its heels? Why does Jethro take it so hard?
6. How does the author portray Jethro's feelings of inner desolation?

7. What does the following passage tell us about Jethro?

“It was the saddest and most cruel April of the five. It had held out an almost unbelievable joy and had then struck out in fury at those whose hands were outstretched. Jethro had learned to accept the whims of fate, schooled as he was in the philosophy of men who work the soil. The rains came or they were withheld, the heat ripened the grain or blasted it with a scorching flame, the ears of corn matured in golden beauty or they were infested by worms or blight. One accepted the good or the evil with humility, for life was mystery, and questions were not for the lowly. But on the last Sunday of the April, a Sunday of sunlight and bright sky, Jethro lay in the grass on Walnut Hill, and rage mingled with the grief in his heart.” (Pg. 184)

8. In the quotation above, the popular literary motif of “the question of evil” (i.e., why God permits evil to exist in the world) is introduced. How does the author answer this question?
9. What is your opinion of the ending of this story? Would you consider it a romantic or realistic ending? A pessimistic or optimistic ending? An appropriate or inappropriate ending?



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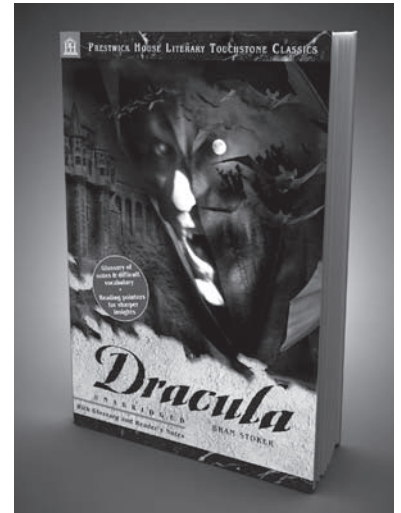
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