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Lonesome Dove

by

**Larry McMurtry
1985**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel, *Lonesome Dove*, is set first in Lonesome Dove, Texas, and later in various states the characters pass through on the cattle drive, including Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska, as well as Arkansas when.....

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Woodrow F. Call - He is part owner of the Hat Creek Cattle Company along with Augustus McCrae and is the hardest worker of the two. Like Gus, he is a former Texas Ranger and because of his leadership role in the outfit, he is often called the Captain. He is a taciturn man who believes in completing his duties above.....

Augustus McCrae - Also a former Texas Ranger who won a merit award from the Governor of Texas for his courage under fire, he is the more sensitive and understanding of the two partners, although as.....

Lorena Wood - She is the "sporting woman" of Lonesome Dove and has such an impact on the men who live there that much is blamed on her when things go wrong. She is the prime example of a woman of.....

Jake Spoon - He is a former Texas Ranger and a dashing gambler who lives a "love 'em and leave 'em" life until he runs across Lorena Wood. His relationship with her will have a seriously adverse effect on.....

Clara Allen - The former lover of both Gus McCrae and Jake Spoon, she is now married to a comatose husband and is keeping their horse farm together. One of Gus' motivations for going on the cattle drive is to find her again and see if there's any hope for a future with her. She is a strong, opinionated.....

Newt Dobbs - A seventeen year old boy who has lived for ten years with Call and McCrae, he desperately desires to know who his father is and to be taken seriously as a cowboy. He goes on the cattle.....

Josh Deets - A black man and an excellent hand for the Hat Creek Company, he has known Call and Gus since their Ranger days. He is probably more competent at his job than any of the white men in the.....

Pea Eye Parker - The most loyal member of the Hat Creek Cattle Company, Pea Eye is not the smartest of the group, but he would die for Call and Gus if they asked him. He has a hard time with change, but.....

July Johnson - The sheriff from Fort Smith, Arkansas, he goes in search of Jake Spoon for killing his brother. However, he finds his attention diverted to finding Elmira, his wife who runs away as soon as.....

Many more major and minor characters are identified in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Protagonists - The protagonists are Woodrow Call and Gus McCrae, the partners who own the Hat Creek Cattle Company. During the Civil War, they were persuaded not to enlist by the Governor of Texas who needed them as Texas Rangers controlling the border with Mexico. They spent the ten years.....

Antagonists - One of the antagonists is Blue Duck, the Indian who kidnaps Lorena, and of course, there are all kinds of bandits, Indians, and murderers they have to face. However, the greatest

Climax - The climax is the death of Gus McCrae, because after he dies, Call decides to follow through with Gus' request to be buried in Texas and that decision has major repercussions on the.....

Outcome - Call buries Gus in Clara's Orchard outside of Lonesome Dove, but fails to claim Newt as....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

This novel relates the tale of two aging former Texas Rangers, Woodrow Call and Gus McCrae, who decide to go on one last major journey together, driving cattle north from Texas to Montana. Along the way, they lose friends and employees and come to some deep realizations about themselves. They leave the town of Lonesome Dove, Texas after Jake Spoon regales them with tales of the beauty of Montana. They travel.....

THEMES

The most prevalent theme concerns the idea of **death and its everpresent part of life** in the old west. When Call organizes the cattle drive, he sets into motion a dangerous period in the lives of many people. They experience not only terrible living conditions, but also the loss of many of the people who become their friends, sometimes in horrible ways. Newt is especially impacted when he loses his friends, Sean O'Brien to.....

Many additional themes are identified and discussed in the complete study guide.

MOOD

This story is filled with sadness, despair, fear, and loneliness throughout much of the novel. But there is also triumph at times and happiness for some of the characters. However, the story ends on a.....

BIOGRAPHY OF LARRY MCMURTRY

Larry McMurtry is an award winning novelist, essayist, and screenwriter. He is a descendent of ranchers and cowboys and has become an authority on stories of the Old West and its settlement. He was born in Wichita Falls, Texas on June 3, 1936, and grew up on a ranch outside of Archer, Texas. He earned degrees from North Texas State University (B.A. 1958) and Rice University (M.A. 1960). He taught English at several colleges and even opened his own rare bookstore in Washington, D.C. and later Archer, Texas, which he named *Booked Up*.

He has won many awards including the Texas Institute of Letters Jesse M. Jones Award and a Guggenheim Grant. He also won the Pulitzer Prize for *Lonesome Dove*, and most recently, a Golden Globe along.....

McMurtry's other writing credits include:

1961 - *Horseman, Pass By* - later adapted as a screenplay/film (*Hud*)

1963 - *Leaving Cheyenne* - adapted as screenplay/film (*Lovin' Molly*)

1966 - *The Last Picture Show* - adapted as a screenplay/film

1968 - *In A Narrow Grave*

1970 - *Moving On*

1972 - *All My Friends Are Going To Be Strangers*

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

PART I

Chapter One

Summary

This chapter is an introduction to the characters of the novel and the life they lead near Lonesome Dove in southern Texas about ten years after the Civil War. The first character introduced is Augustus McCrae who is part owner of the Hat Creek Cattle Company. Besides Gus, there is Woodrow F. McCall, his partner, and Pea Eye Parker, Josh Deets, and Newt Boggs, men who worked on the ranch, and Bolivar, the Mexican cook.

Each man is described through stories and experiences that surround their lives. For example, Augustus thinks of himself as the “thinker” of the partners. Augustus had also worked at one time on the river boats working the Rio Grande. He claimed he quit, because he was so young and pretty that the whores wouldn’t leave him alone! Woodrow Call is the other half of the partnership and is the complete opposite of Augustus. He is such a hard worker that he finds something to do even when everything appears to be done. He’s tough and has little time or respect for most people, but appears to suffer Augustus, because Gus isn’t any more impressed by him than Call is by himself. He loves a beautiful, but surly filly that he enjoys riding, but which enjoys taking bites out of him. He also appears to be the one who makes all the decisions about raids across the border to steal cattle and horses from the Mexicans and the Indians when possible. He was born in Scotland, so Gus insists, as a way of teasing the man, that he’s no more American than Bolivar or the “Africans” for which the Civil War was fought.

Pea Eye is an older man who is one of the ablest workers on the ranch. He is slow in thought and becomes slower as he drinks more whiskey. He is in awe of Call whom he calls Captain, and will follow him on raids or trail drives whenever he ordered to do so. He’s deaf in one ear from a fight with the Comanche, and Pea Eye uses this as an excuse not to listen to Augustus when he begins his arguments.

Newt is a young boy of seventeen who is full of imagination and romance when it comes to fighting Indians and carrying a gun. Unfortunately, Captain Call won’t allow him to do so until he’s grown up. When “grown up” actually will occur, however, Call won’t say.

Bolivar is a former Mexican bandit who has given up those days since the end of the Civil War. He is believed to steal goats and fry up their meat for dinner, which Gus believes he fries in tar! He only bathes once every two weeks or so when he goes home to see his family. He also likes the sound of the dinner bell, which, because it has lost its clapper, he strikes with a crowbar for a full five minutes.

The chapter also gives us details of the hard life these men live in south Texas. The days are supremely hot and dry with rain only falling once or twice a year, and they are under constant danger from the Comanche and the Mexicans. As a result, these men have deep ingrained prejudices and mistrust for both groups. They often lose their herds to cattle and horse thieves and find themselves raiding across the border to get them back. Except for Gus, they work fifteen hour days and fall into bed late at night, only to rise early again the next day to do their work all over.

Notes

The descriptions of the main characters are important to note as their habits and beliefs are integral to the story. The reader will need to understand what has formed these men into the individuals they are. Call, Gus, and Pea Eye are all Texas Rangers, but life has changed since their fighting days, and now, they seem to just run a livery business and sell cattle and horses when they can. Their lives are hard, and yet, there seems to be a bond among them that is strong and deep from the experiences they have had together.

Chapter Two

Summary

This chapter begins with a long explanation of the reason why Captain Call walks the river every night. He thinks of it as a time to hone his instincts for any danger that may be lurking around them. He knows that it’s unlikely that there are any Indians even 500 miles near them, but it’s a habit he has practiced most of his adult life and it’s become hard to break. He also seems to need the time for his own privacy as he feels the weight of being their Captain hanging heavy upon him. He had been occupied with fighting Indians for many years, so he knows that the safety of all the men who live with him is his responsibility. However, he has grown tired of being the one to always make the littlest of decisions and being the example for all the others. He finds himself thinking back to the old days and it annoys him, because it makes him feel like an old man. So he walks the

river until he stops daydreaming and feels he could still be captain if the need arose. Then, he can return home again.

Meanwhile, the usual activity for the other men after supper is to sit on the porch, talk, and practice the same things they do every night: drink whiskey (Gus and Pea Eye), sharpen a knife (Bolivar), or wonder when the Captain is returning (Newt). Newt is very insecure about who will take care of him if the Captain would decide to leave. He worries over it like any seventeen year old, innocent boy who knows little about the ways of the world. He alludes to the fact that he had come to this business by accident, but the reader is given no details at this point. Newt also dreams about Lorena Wood, a woman whom he knows is the town whore, but whom he loves anyway. He's very aware that he has few friends in the world and he's anxious not to lose any one of them.

Pea Eye dozes on the porch and only awakes when he hears the word Indians. He's been afraid of Indians for more than thirty years and hates them, especially because his fear of them has kept him from a decent night's sleep all this time. He believes that Captain Call is right to walk the river every night, because the Indians could come.

When Call returns to the house, he notes to Augustus that it would have been a good night to "cross some stock, " i.e., cross the river and steal some cattle and horses. However, Gus feels it would be a waste of time until the cattle buyers arrive. Newt asks if he can go the next time, but Call still won't allow it. He remembers too clearly how, during the war, he saw too many boys Newt's age fight and die. The two partners remain the last two on the porch and for a moment they sit silently listening to Lippy Jones play the piano at the Dry bean Saloon. Eventually, however, Augustus tells Call that it's time for him to let Newt cross the river with them. Call chooses not to respond to that comment, so Augustus heads toward the saloon, saying he thinks he'll play a few hands of cards. Call though knows that Gus is going to see Lorena and warns him that if she suckers Gus into marrying her, Call won't allow her to live there. Augustus just laughs, and so ends a typical day at the Hat Creek Cattle Company.

Notes

This chapter continues to flesh out these interesting characters. There is much alluded to that we don't yet know, such as the reason Newt ended up with these men on the ranch. However, each comment they make and each action they take gives us a much deeper look at what makes them tick. We discover that Call is not a sociable man, is in fact a loner, and feels the weight of his responsibilities too heavy at times to bear. We learn that Bolivar has a deep seated love for his wife and nine daughters and would kill Gus if he tried anything with the three who remain unmarried. We find out that Newt has a crush on a whore, but is so innocent that he constantly thinks about the right words to say to her if he ever meets her and doesn't even know what to do with her if she would let him! This information not only fleshes out the characters, but it further reinforces the bond between them. In spite of the way they mock and tease each other, in spite of how Newt fears they might leave or kill each other, the reader can sense that they would probably die for each other.

Chapter Three

Summary

This chapter introduces the reader to Lorena Wood, the "sporting girl" of Lonesome Dove. She has a dream to someday make her way to San Francisco where she can finally be cool again. She is now 24 years old and once had lived in Mobile, Alabama. Her parents became worried when she was just about twelve years old that the Yankees were coming too close and decided to move west. Her father died at Vicksburg, and her mother only made it as far as Baton Rouge. Then, Lorena was alone at the age of seventeen. That was about the time she met up with Mosby Marlin, who made her believe that he would marry her. Instead, he brought her to live with his mother and sisters in a house without windows in a place called Gladewater. They burned smoke inside all day to drive off the mosquitoes, but it didn't work. Also, the other women were meaner to her than they were to

their nigras. Unfortunately, Mosby saw her as his own meal ticket and forced her into the sporting life by threatening to kill her if she tried to run away.

Lorena's life continued in this vein to the point that Lorena ceased to talk any more than she had to. One night, Mosby needed gambling money and sold Lorena's time to a man named John Tinkersley, who was the tallest, prettiest man she had ever met. He suggested she accompany him to San Antonio and Lorena agreed. Mosby was no match in a fight with Tinkersley so he gave in, and Lorena left with John. Once in San Antonio, living conditions were much better, because Tinkersley rented two rooms in a hotel for them. However, he proved to be no different than Mosby. He hit her when she talked back and set her up in the sporting life just as Mosby had done. He even discovered all the places she hid money from him and cleaned her out to the last penny. One day they headed down toward the border and ended up in Lonesome Dove. There, if she had known how to cock the trigger, she would have killed Tinkersley while he lay drunk on the bed. As a result, he decided to leave her there in Lonesome Dove, but not before trashing her reputation, calling her a murderous woman.

Lorena convinced Xavier Wanz, who owned the Dry Bean Saloon, to allow her to cook for him while she also continued making money in the sporting life. It was Augustus who helped her make a living by becoming a regular. She no longer trusted any man, but she realized that Gus was in a class by himself. He was never mean to her and didn't treat her like a whore. She knew he would help her if she ever needed him, and he became a man she could talk to a little. Nonetheless, she still was a mystery to most of the men who sought her charms, because she never spoke to them, and she bore a small scar above her lip where Tinkersley had bit her in their last fight.

Gus was even different when it came to her silence. He found it amusing. One day he gave her a \$10 gold piece instead of his usual \$5 just so she would carry on a conversation with him. When she asked him why, he told her that a bit of talk with a female was worth any price to him, and he figured she had a story to tell and that he was available to listen. Lorena responded by returning the money, because she wasn't interested in being someone's temporary wife. Some of the other girls in the business would play this role for the cowboys who were heading up the trail soon and wanted a "little marriage." But it wasn't the life Lorena envisioned nor was she ready to tell Gus her life story. Gus just grinned and observed that he ought to have known better than to try to buy conversation.

Notes

Yet another interesting character is introduced in this chapter: Lorena Wood, the town prostitute. She is presented by the author as a very young girl who has been supremely abused by men since she was seventeen. Her experiences have caused her to shut down to the point that she barely speaks. She trusts no man, not even Gus, whom she realizes is the nicest man she's ever known. Her experiences are a reflection of the little respect any woman can obtain in this ultimate macho world. For example, Call doesn't want a woman in his house, Newt dreams of her as a fantasy, and Mosby and Tinkersley wanted her for their own needs, including money. No one ever thought of what was good for Lorena except Augustus, and she doesn't trust even him. For this reason, her character seems to be one that will have a great impact on the men in this story. It's also ironic that she won't play the game of "little marriage" with Gus as later she will seek that exact promise from him.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Woodrow Call - Call is the most frustrating character of the story for the reader. Because of his strong sense of honor, we can't help but like him, but his overwhelming pride frustrates us and makes us want to shake sense into him. He has always been an extremely private man, who has in essence been a loner on the plains, in the towns, and in his relationships. He turns to work and duty to fill his life, because he is uncomfortable with emotions that force him to be close to those he loves. He can't keep himself from loving Maggie and producing

Newt, but he also cannot bring himself to commit to them either. His inability to claim Newt publicly has devastating effects on both of them, and his inability to stay with Maggie leads to her.....

Augustus McCrae - Gus is the “sweetheart” of the two men. He seems to understand the needs of nearly everyone around him and is a source of comfort when they are most troubled. He is as brave and as skilled as Call and served as a Ranger along with him during the Civil War. However, unlike Call, who feels duty-bound most of the time, Gus prefers not to work so hard and comes to believe the cattle drive is a mistake. He is the one who rescues Lorie when she is kidnapped by Blue Duck, and he is the one who finds a.....

Lorena Wood - In spite of the fact that she is a “sporting woman,” there is something deeply touching about Lorie. She services men’s sexual needs, because she knows no other way to care for herself, but she always keeps part of herself aloof from others. She wants more than anything to be a respectable woman and.....

Additional major characters are analyzed in the complete study guide.

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is told from an omniscient point of view, but the reader sees events through the eyes of several of the characters even though they are not actually narrating. The novel is divided into three major parts that be simplistically labeled: life in Lonesome Dove, the cattle drive to Montana, and Clara.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The most prevalent theme concerns the idea of **death and its everpresent part of life** in the old west. When Call organizes the cattle drive, he sets into motion a dangerous period in the lives of many people. They experience not only terrible living conditions, but also the loss of many of the people who become their friends, sometimes in horrible ways. Newt is especially impacted when he loses his friends, Sean O’Brien to snake bites, and Pete Spettle to a lightning strike, and his mentors Jake Spoon and Gus McCrae. Part of growing.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins when the Hat Creek Cattle Company is introduced as having been in an uneasy existence for about ten years after the Civil War. It continues with Call’s decision to drive a.....

FALLING ACTION

The falling chapter involves Call’s decision to fulfill Gus’ request to be buried in Texas. He travels.....

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is omniscient and yet the action is seen from the perspective of many

FORESHADOWING

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

- 1.) The comment Jake makes about Montana is foreshadowing in that, combined with Gus and Call’s desire to move their company north, it seems as if it might be a place where they’ll eventually end up.
- 2.) Call believes Newt could handle the ranch they would build, because eventually he’ll leave it in the boy’s hands when he returns Gus’ body to Texas.....

21 additional examples of foreshadowing are identified in the complete study guide.

IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) It's ironic that Lorena won't play the game of "little marriage" with Gus as later she will seek that exact promise from him.
- 2.) It's ironic that Gus thinks about driving a herd north, because later, when they ate well into this drive, he will regret leaving Texas.....

22 additional examples of irony are identified in the complete study guide.

METAPHORS

There are also examples of **metaphors** which are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas:

- 1.) The storm then is a metaphor for the life of a cowboy on the western trail after the Civil War – life throws these men many problems to deal with and how they deal with them often is a measure of their character.....

4 additional examples of metaphors are identified in the complete study guide.

QUOTES - IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The following quotations are important at various points in the story:(Pocket Books, A Division of Simon and Shuster, 1985)

- 1.) "It's best to help such boys have their moment of fun, before life's torments snatch them away." (pg. 48) This comment by Gus shows his particular sensitivity to the needs of others.
- 2.) "It was only the Christian thing. Taking him in, I mean. After all, one of you boys is more than likely his pa." (pg. 72) Gus makes this observation about Newt to Jake Spoon and Call. It's a commentary on a major idea of the novel – kinship.
- 3.) "Lorena had stopped expecting ever to be surprised, least of all by a man, and then Jake Spoon walked in the door and surprised her." (pg. 152) This observation about Lorena details how she has kept herself aloof from others, especially men, who always disappoint her. But Jake is a surprise with his charm and good looks. It's ironic, however, that he will turn out to disappoint her just like all the others.....

20 additional quotations are identified and analyzed in the complete study guide.

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. There are many symbols used by the author such as:

- 1.) The pigs are symbolic of Gus. He loves them and admires their perseverance in walking the entire distance to Montana. Ironically, after he dies, they seem to have no purpose and become Christmas dinner for the hands.
- 2.) The Hell Bitch is the perfect horse for Call, because she is just like him. She'll bite you the minute you lower your guard, but she'll respect you if you keep her in line, love her, and care for her. She also is reflective of the whores in the story who like the horse are just looking for respect, love, and caring.....

Many other examples are identified and analyzed in the complete study guide.

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *Lonesome Dove*

Author: Larry McMurtry

Date Published: 1985

Meaning of the Title: *Lonesome Dove* is the title of the story, but the greatest part of the plot takes place away from it. Therefore, it comes to represent loss and regret for what is lost and also.....

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. How does Gus make the Hat Creek Cattle Company seem more important than it is?
 - a.) By advertising in the Dry Bean
 - b.) By word of mouth
 - c.) By a huge sign outside the ranch
2. In what organization, do Gus and Call first form a partnership?
 - a.) The Union Army
 - b.) The Texas Rangers
 - c.) The Confederate Army.....

ANSWER KEY

- 1.) c 2.) b 3.) b 4.) a 5.) c 6.) b 7.) b 8.) b 9.) c 10) a 11.) b 12.) c 13.) c 14.) c 15.) b

ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Analyze the difference in the characters of Gus and Call, emphasizing how these differences affect the decisions they make.
2. Explain how Lorena can be called a catalyst to the movement of plot in the story.....

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