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Sample MonkeyNotes

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Shane

by

Jack Schaefer

1949



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes.com Staff

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel is set in the early twentieth century in a Wyoming valley, where the pace of life is simple and slow and the inhabitants are moral and ethical. Joe Starrett is a homesteader farmer in the valley, and much of the novel takes place in and around his farm. Other than the rural farm setting, the novel

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Shane – a mysterious gunman who enters into the life of Joe Starrett and his family and carves a place for himself in their hearts. Although he tries to leave his gunslinging past behind, refusing to even carry a gun, he decides to fight Fletcher, the town nemesis, in order to save Joe Starrett's farm. After he

Joe Starrett – a Wyoming farmer who develops a rare and strong friendship with Shane.

Marian Starrett – Joe's wife, who is attracted to Shane.

Bob – Joe and Marian's young son, who almost worships Shane.

Luke Fletcher – a rich landowner. He is greedy for more land and causes trouble as he.....

Minor Characters

Wilson – a gunman who is commissioned by Fletcher to fight with Joe, Shane, and the other

Chris – a farmhand of Fletcher's who gets badly beaten up by Shane. After Fletcher and Wilson.....

Morgan – another of Fletcher's farmhands who is beaten up by Shane.

Ernie Wright – a homesteader with a hot temperament; he is shot by Wilson when he refuses to

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. The novel is named after and revolves around the protagonist and main character, Shane. He is a gunman who wanders on to Joe Starrett's land

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the character that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. Shane's antagonist is Luke Fletcher, a greedy landowner. Shane must fight him to prove his

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. Shane confronts Fletcher and his assistant, Wilson, about their underhanded tactics in trying to take Joe's land from him. The ensuing battle is gory and fierce with Shane first shooting and.....

Outcome - The novel ends as a tragic comedy. Shane succeeds in proving his loyalty to Joe and saving his land, but he kills two men in the process. As a result, Shane knows that he cannot

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The novel opens with the entrance of a mysterious stranger into the life of Joe Starrett, a moral, hardworking Wyoming farmer. The stranger reveals little about himself except that his name is Shane. Joe, however, trusts the man and offers to let him stay on the farm. Before long, Shane becomes a part of the household. To Joe, he

is a worker and friend on whom he can rely. To Joe's son, Bob, he becomes a hero. To Joe's wife, Marian, Shane becomes a dear companion.

While staying on the farm, Shane fights his own emotional torment. He longs to settle down as a farmer and forget his past deeds as a gunman, which haunt him. When he learns about the tensions in the village, he does not want to become involved, fearing his own reactions. He cannot, however, stand by and let Fletcher, a wealthy and greedy villager, seize the land of Joe and the other farmers who have homesteaded their farms. In the end, he decides he must use his ability as a gunman to fight for Joe and protect.....

THEMES

Major Theme

The major theme of the novel is the difficulty of escaping one's past. Throughout the book, Shane intensely struggles to forget his past and live a normal, civilized life. Although the mystery behind Shane is never revealed fully, the words that slip out of his mouth, in moments of intense emotion, reveal the.....

Minor Theme

A minor theme of the novel is the innocence of childhood. Although Joe and Marian Starrett accept and care about Shane, they are somewhat suspicious and uncomfortable about his past. Bob, their young son, however, idolizes the gunman without question. In the boy's eyes, Shane is.....

MOOD

The predominant mood of the novel is somber as Shane broods in silence over his past wrongs as a gunman. When he develops a friendship with the Starretts, there are some lighter moments. Although he is a man of few words, Shane sometimes banters with Marian, breaking the sober mood. When the.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Jack Warner Schaefer was born on November 19, 1907, in Cleveland Ohio, to Carl Walter and Minnie Luella Schaefer. He attended public schools, where he was a good student. After high school graduation, Schaefer attended Oberlin College, from where he graduated in 1929. For the next year, he did graduate studies at Columbia University. He married Eugenia Hammond Ives in August of 1931. They had three sons and one daughter before they divorced in December of 1948.

Schaefer's career was devoted to working for various newspapers. His first position was as a reporter for United Press, where he worked from 1930 – 1931. He next worked as an editor for the *New Haven Journal-Courier* from 1931 – 1942; simultaneously, he served as the assistant director of education for the Connecticut State Reformatory. From 1942 until 1949, he served in editorial positions at the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Norfolk Virginian*, and the *Shoreliner*. He left newspaper work in 1949 to pursue a full-time career in.....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Although written in 1949, *Shane* is set in the very early twentieth century and belongs to the genre of literature known as the Western novel. Set in Wyoming, on the far reaches of the frontier, it portrays a small, rough Western town and a group of hard-working farmers who have homesteaded their land. They are portrayed in the typical western fashion, riding horses, toting guns, and possessing fierce.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1

Summary

Bob, Starrett's young son, remembers seeing a stranger riding into the valley where he lives in Wyoming. As the stranger nears the house of his parents, the boy notices the horseman's fine clothes, which have

magnificence about them even though they are not new. The boy notices that the man who wears the fancy clothes is quite frail in comparison to the considerable hulk of his own father. Bob also detects an air of tension about the stranger.

As the stranger draws near, Joe Starrett, Bob's father, comes forward. The stranger asks him for permission to use the water pump. When permission is granted, the stranger leads his horse to the water for a drink and also takes a drink himself. When the stranger gives thanks for the water and readies to leave, Joe detains him, inviting him to share their meal and spend the night in their house. The stranger quietly accepts the generous offer and introduces himself only by his first name, Shane.

Marian, Joe's wife, quickly sets another plate on the table for the stranger. As they eat their meal, Bob's parents try to gather information about Shane, but he offers no explanations. In spite of his silent ways, the Starretts like the stranger. After dinner, Joe even discusses with Shane his plans for his farm. He also mentions Fletcher, his archenemy, who is bent on taking over his land.

After Shane is made comfortable in the barn for the night, Joe and Marian discuss him. They both agree that he has a mysterious manner, but they like him in spite of it.

Notes

In this first chapter, the key characters of the novel are introduced, including Shane, Marian and Joe Starrett, and their young son, Bob. From the beginning the narrative is told in first person, with the young Bob serving as the speaker. His innocent, immature attitude while telling the story lends a certain charm to the novel.

Although not much information is learned about Shane in this first chapter, it is obvious that this stranger who rides on to the Starrett farm is not a simple farmer or rancher. He is dressed in fine clothes, even though they are not new. There is also an aura of tension and mystery about him as he says little about himself. In fact, he only introduces himself to the Starretts as Shane, not giving a last name.

Bob is immediately attracted to this mysterious stranger. The fact that he is well-dressed and seems to ride in the valley from nowhere makes him seem like the epitome of mystery, danger, and excitement to Bob's young mind. Joe Starrett, however, immediately trusts this stranger. He allows him to take water from the pump and then offers him a meal and a bed in the barn for the night. It is obvious that Joe does not judge this stranger as dangerous. He is a trusting and hospitable man.

During the meal that Marian serves, she and Joe try to find out information about this mysterious stranger, but he volunteers nothing. In spite of Shane's silence, Joe continues to trust him, telling him about the future plans for his farm and about his archenemy, Fletcher. After Shane retires to the barn for the night, Marian and Joe discuss this stranger further. It seems that Joe has an idea about Shane's past, for he says, "He [Shane] is a special brand we sometimes get out here in the grass country...A bad one's poison. A good one's straight grain clear through." Young Bob is confused by his father's word, and the reader is also left wondering about Shane's background at the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

Bob awakens in the morning to find his father and Shane eating pancakes that his mother has prepared. Marian is delighted that the stranger eagerly devours the pancakes, seeming to like her cooking. Shane's reference to the pancakes as "funnel cakes" indicates that he comes from Tennessee. When he is questioned about it, he admits that Tennessee was his home.

The Wyoming weather has turned bad. As a result, Joe and Marian ask Shane to stay with them for a while.

When Shane does not immediately accept the offer, Joe says he is planning to take a day's rest from work until the weather clears and would enjoy his company. Marian adds that she is going to make an apple pie from a new recipe she has been wanting to try. Shane finally agrees to stay.

As they wait for the weather to improve, Marian tries to get Shane to tell her what he knows about the latest fashions in the civilized world, especially what hats are in style. Shane tells her about floppy-brimmed bonnets with flowers on top and slits in the brim for scarves to come through. Marian is delighted to hear news of the outside world.

Joe is equally pleased with Shane's presence. It is enjoyable to converse with another adult male. Joe tells Shane all about the farm, and when the weather clears, he eagerly shows his land to the stranger. As they pass the stump of a large tree that has died, Joe complains about the difficulty he is having in removing it.

Joe spies Ledyard, the peddler, riding towards them. He had earlier asked the peddler to find him a cultivator. When Ledyard arrives, he shows Joe a cultivator, which he praises as unique and utilitarian. He says it costs only one hundred and ten dollars. Shane intervenes, saying that he has seen a similar one for just sixty dollars. Ledyard is obviously offended by Shane's comment and discounts him as a no-good stranger. Joe defends his guest, saying that he has more faith in Shane than Ledyard. In the end, Joe offers Ledyard eighty dollars for the cultivator. The peddler accepts the offer, takes Joe's money, and rides away.

After Ledyard departs, Shane takes an axe and goes out to the old tree stump and begins to work on it. Joe tries to dissuade him, but Shane answers, "A man has to pay his debts." Joe understands Shane's thoughts and words; therefore, he joins him and starts hacking away at the dead tree. Though they work in silence, both men feel camaraderie as they attack the old stump.

Notes

Shane is immediately accepted by the family. Bob is delighted to have this mysterious stranger in his midst, for life on the farm can seem very monotonous to a young boy. Joe is also pleased to have his company. Since the weather has turned bad, he insists that Shane stay with them for a while longer. He even says he will take the day off to spend with Shane, an offer that shocks his wife, for she has never seen her husband rest from his work.

Marian also shows her pleasure in having Shane at the farm. She revels in hearing about the latest female fashions in the civilized world. She also reveals a girlish delight when Shane compliments her cooking and voraciously gobbles her pancakes. She tempts him into staying longer by promising to bake for him an apple pie from a special new recipe. After hesitating at first, Shane soon accepts the generous offer of the Starretts to stay for a few more days on the farm.

Ledyard, the peddler, is portrayed in the traditional Western manner. A smooth-talking salesman, he is out to make a quick buck. Unbothered by cheating his customers, he raises his prices far too high, because he knows that there are few places in Wyoming for the farmers to go and buy their needed equipment and wares. Shane, however, comes to the rescue. He tells Ledyard that he has seen a similar cultivator, selling for \$60 rather than \$110. In the end, Joe pays eighty for the needed piece of equipment.

Little new background information is learned from Shane in the chapter, for he is a man of few words. When the Starretts suspect him of being from Tennessee, Shane agrees that he is; but the reader is not convinced, for his answer was much too easy. Shane, however, reveals a great deal about himself through his actions. Throughout the chapter he endears himself to Joe, even though he is a mere stranger. He listens carefully and with interest as Joe talks about the farm and his problems. He sympathizes with Joe about the old stump and

then sets out to dig up the remains of the dead tree. He also causes Joe to pay thirty dollars less for the cultivator than Ledyard tried to charge.

The chapter ends in a picture of camaraderie. To thank Joe for his trust in him, Shane finds an axe and is hacking away at the old tree stump that troubles his host. When Joe insists that it is not necessary for him to work, Shane refuses to quit. As a result, Joe joins in the effort, and the two men hack at the tree stump in happy silence, lost in their own thoughts. It is a picture of acceptance of one another.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Shane - The author intentionally depicts Shane as an enigmatic character, with an aura of mystery surrounding him. He is simply a stranger who rides into the valley, enters into the lives and hearts of the Starrett family, and then leaves the town as quietly as he came. No information about his past is ever given, and his last name is never even mentioned. The townsfolk and the reader are left to infer information about Shane's past by his dress, his thoughts, and his actions.

Shane is a hard worker who wants no favors. When Joe Starrett offers him a job on his farm, he immediately accepts and does his best to help his employer. He also tries to do extra things to repay Joe for his kindness. When Joe mentions that an old tree stump is a real nuisance to him, Shane begins to dig it up. When Joe goes out of town for work, Shane builds an addition to the house. When Fletcher threatens to....

Joe Starrett - Joe Starrett is a big, hulk of a man, who lives a quiet life with his family. He has homesteaded a farm in a Wyoming valley, working hard to carve out a place for himself, his wife, and his son. He is proud of his accomplishments and his land. He is also well respected by his family and the surrounding farmers. In fact, he is the unofficial leader of the town. When there are problems with Fletcher, the townsfolk always gather at the Starrett farm and listen to Joe's advice.

Joe is a kind and trusting man. When Shane arrives on his farm, he immediately asks the stranger to come inside for a meal. Sensing the basic goodness of the man, in spite of his dress and.....

Marian Starrett - Marian, Joe's spouse, is an ideal wife and mother, who tends to all the needs of her husband and her son. She is also a good hostess to Shane. Even though she is a little wary of him in the beginning, she cooks him special things, like pancakes for breakfast and apple pie for dessert.

Marian's life on the farm is hard, dull, and routine. Her only diversion is an occasional trip into town, where she can shop in the general store and gossip with some of the other women. As a result, Shane is.....

Bob Starrett - Bob, the young son of Marian and Joe, is the first person narrator of the story. Everything that the reader learns about Shane, Marian, Joe, or the other townsfolk comes from his point of view. Because he tells Shane's story, it is not surprising that Bob is the first one to spy Shane coming into the valley; he is also the last one to see him leave.

Like Marian, Bob lives a quiet, dull, and routine life in the Wyoming valley, where he.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The plot of *Shane* is developed in a straightforward manner through sixteen chapters. Since the narrator is a young boy, it is simple in its presentation. The novel moves systematically from the entrance of the protagonist, through his stay at the Starrett farm, and finally to his departure from the valley.

The first two chapters are largely expository, introducing Marian, Joe, Bob, and Shane, presenting the conflict, and developing the setting. It is obvious from the beginning that Shane is trying to flee from his past. He eagerly accepts Joe's offer to remain at the Starretts as a farmhand. He enjoys the peaceful life that....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Major Theme

The main theme of the novel is the difficulty of escaping one's past. Shane comes to the Wyoming valley to put his past existence as a gunslinger behind him. He eagerly accepts Joe's offer to become a farmhand and settle down to a comfortable and peaceful life at the Starretts, where he is made to feel like one of the family. He sheds his gunslinger attire and never mentions his background. He also refuses to carry his gun like Joe and the other farmers.

Shane does not have an easy time in the valley. Although he is immediately liked and accepted by the Starretts, he must prove himself to the other farmers, who are suspicious of him and his past. It is only when....

STUDY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS

1. Although the details of Shane's past life are not detailed by the author, it is obvious that he has been a gunslinger. How is this shown in the novel?
2. Fully explain why Shane has come to the valley and how he tries to change his life.
3. Explain how Bob, Joe, and Marian each react to Shane upon first meeting him. What do their very different reactions reveal about him as a person?....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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