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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Crossing to Safety by Wallace Stegner

Summary

Two young ambitious couples become friends in Madison, Wisconsin, when the two husbands begin their academic careers as professors at the University of Wisconsin in the 1930s. The novel follows their friendship through forty years of career ups-and-downs, health problems, children, successes, and failures.

Discussion Questions

1. Given the difference between their upbringings (social class), what is the basis of friendship between these two couples? What does each couple gain from the friendship? Is it an equal or unequal relationship?
2. Talk about the nature of the two marriages, how they differ. The Langs' marriage seems to be the one most under the microscope here, the most complicated of the two marriages.
3. Then there's Charity—clearly the most complex character of the four. Do you like her, despise her? What drives her?
4. What are Charity's expectations of Sid? Does she desire academic status? Does she want him to realize his full potential or live up to his best self? What does she want from him?
5. Why does Sid stay with Charity? What do you think will happen to him after she dies? Will he choose to go on without her?
6. Stegner is very much a nature writer, using the natural beauty of Vermont as a sort of back drop to his human drama. In what way might he be making a comparison between the immutable natural world and mutable human world?
7. What is the significance of the title "Crossing to Safety"?
8. Compare and contrast the Langs' and Morgans' marriages.
9. How is Sid like Sally?

10. How is Charity like Larry?
11. Compare and contrast three generations of Ellis women: Emily, Charity, and Hallie.
12. How does polio change Sally's character?
13. How does Sally's polio change Larry's character?

Summary from BookRags

Discussion Questions from LitLovers and BookRags