**All The Pretty Horses Discussion Questions (Part I, II, III, and IV)**

Questions must be answered in complete, well-structured sentences; write all answered are to be in pen; cite with chapter/page your answers. All responses must be hand written with Chapter and question included.

***Chapter I***

1. What is the occasion at the outset of the book, and what does it mean to John Grady?

2. After his grandfather's funeral, John Grady Cole rides along an old trail, dismounts at the crest of a rise, and stands "like a man come to the end of something." [p. 5] What has John Grady come to the end of? What might the future hold for him?

3. Why does John Grady's grandfather reflect upon primogeniture (inheritance by the first-born son)? [p. 7]

4. How would you characterize John Grady's relationship with his father? What do their conversations consist of? [pp. 8, 9]

5. What do we know about John Grady's father? About his mother?

6. What does John talk to Mr. Franklin about? What is it John wants? Is he able to accomplish it?

7. What does John Grady expect to find out when he watches his mother perform on stage? In contrast, what does he learn?

8. ". . .as if were he begot by malice or mischance into some queer land where horses never were he would have found them anyway." [p. 23] What does this mean? What is the author trying to say about John Grady?

9. What is Goshee? Why was John's mother so important to his father while he was there?

10. In the first chapter, John Grady's father tells him two things he has never told him before. [p. 25] What are they, and why does he choose this opportunity to tell him?

11. Why do John Grady and his father study the two horsemen who pass the cafe window? [p. 25] What does this tell you about father and son?

12. What does Rawlins mean when he says, "I could understand if you was from Alabama you'd have ever reason in the world to run off to Texas. But if you're already in Texas. I don't know?" [p. 27]

13. Who is Mary Catherine, and what is John Grady's relationship to her?

14. "He stood back and touched the brim of his hat and turned and went on up the street. He didn't look back but he could see her in the windows of the Federal Building across the street standing there and she was still standing there when he reached the corner and stepped out of the glass forever." [p. 29] What does McCarthy mean by this?

15. Why is Rawlins worried about his father catching him? [p. 30]

16. What does McCarthy mean by "ten thousand worlds for the choosing?" [p.30]

17. John Grady and Rawlins set out on this trip together. Who instigated it and why?

18. Why don't John Grady and Rawlins want to ride with the Jimmy Blevins? Why do they think someone is hunting the horse he's riding, and why do they let him come along?

19. When they find out Blevins can shoot, does it change their attitude toward him?

20. Why does Blevins abruptly leave the Mexican household? How do John Grady and Rawlins feel about his leaving? How do you feel about it? Was it an appropriate response to the situation?

21. What do you think of the zacateros they encounter, who are riding up into the mountains? [pp. 61, 62] How are they dressed? What are their skills as horsemen? What does John Grady think of them, and what does this tell you about him?

22. How does Blevins lose his horse, gun, and clothes? What do you think of this scene? Is it comic or tragic?

23. Why does Rawlins want to leave Blevins? [p. 76]

24. How do John Grady and Rawlins feel when the arrive at the hacienda? Why do they feel that way?

***Chapter II***

1.Have John Grady and Rawlins broken horses before? Do they seem knowledgeable about it?

2. Why does John Grady talk to the horses before he rides them? Why is this effective?

3. John Grady sets out to break all sixteen horses. Why is this important to him?

4. Does John Grady tell Don Hector about Blevins? Why not? Does this seem like a wise choice?

5. John Grady shares with Don Hector the belief that "other than cattle there was no wealth proper to a man." [p. 127] Why do they believe this? What does it say about them?

6. What does Alejandra mean when she says, "You are in trouble?" [p. 131]

7. What does McCarthy mean by "Real horse, real rider, real land and sky and yet a dream withal?" [p. 132]

8. "Scars have the strange power to remind us that our past is real." [p. 135] What does dueña Alfonsa mean by this? Do you agree with her?

9. Why is John Grady so confused by his conversation with dueña Alfonsa?

10. Compare the game of chess with the grandmother and the game of pool with the father.

11. What is John Grady's relationship with Alejandra? What do they have in common, and what sets them apart?

12. What does Don Hectór mean when he says, "Beware gentle night there is no greater monster than reason?" [p. 146]

13. Why do the soldiers come to take John Grady and Rawlins away? Was this situation

avoidable?

14. Why do you think Rawlins will not meet John Grady's eyes as they are taken away by the Mexican soldiers?

***Chapter III***

1.Describe the image of Blevins in jail.

2. How would you describe Blevins' code of honor? What do you think of his leaving the house of the Mexican family after falling over backward? What about getting his horse back and then returning for his gun? Are his actions partially responsible for the trouble they all face?

3. Discuss John Grady's "horse dream" on pages 161-62. What does this dream mean to him?

4. Why doesn't the captain believe Rawlins is who he says he is?

5. Why is Rawlins so angry at Blevins? Is he fair to blame Blevins for their predicament?

6. When they stop at the abandoned estancia, Blevins is nervous. Why does Blevins give John Grady his money?

7. How do John Grady and Rawlins feel about the execution of Blevins? How do you feel about it? Is it just?

8. "Yet the captain inhabited another space and it was a space of his own election and outside the common world of men. A space privileged to the men of the irreclaimable act which while it contained all lessor worlds within it contained no access to them. For the terms of election were of a piece with its office and once chosen that world could not be quit." [p. 179] What does McCarthy mean by this?

9. What does the captain mean when he tells them to "make arrangements?" What does he expect of John Grady and Rawlins?

10. How would you describe the prison in Saltillo?

11. What does John Grady mean when he says, "Horse had nothing to do with it?" [p. 185] Do you agree?

12. How would you describe the boy John Grady has a knife fight with? What caused it, and was there anything John Grady could have done to avoid it? How does he feel about it afterward?

13. What does McCarthy mean when he describes the prison as "So like some site of siege in an older time, in an older country, where the enemies were all from without?" [pp. 208-9]

14. Who gets John Grady and Rawlins out of prison? Why?.

***Chapter IV***

1. Why does John Grady return to the hacienda?

2. "And after and for a long time to come he'd have reason to evoke the recollection of those smiles and to reflect upon the good will which provoked them for it had power to protect and to confer honor and to strengthen resolve and it had power to heal men and to bring them to safety long after all other resources were exhausted." [p. 219] What do you think of this passage? What does it mean for John Grady?

3. Why do the people from the hacienda treat him so indifferently when he returns?

4. Discuss the passage about dreams on page 225.

5. What does the aunt mean by "The societies to which I have been exposed seemed to me largely machines for the suppression of women." [p. 230] Do you agree about this in her case? What about your own?

6. What does Grady learn in the final confrontation with the aunt? What do you think of the aunt in the wake of their discussion? What does John Grady think? Why does the aunt reject John Grady's plea for Alejandra?

7. "Those whom life does not cure death will." [p. 238] What is the meaning of this passage?

8. What does John Grady discuss with the children on page 244? Why? What do the children think of his predicament? How does the Mexican culture of the time affect their reaction?

9. What do we learn about John Grady's capture from the grandmother? Do we believe her?

10. "He saw very clearly how all his life led only to this moment and all after led nowhere at all." [p. 254] What does this mean for John Grady? Is this further commentary on the role of fate in the novel?

11. "He saw a light over a doorway in the corrugated iron wall of a warehouse where no one came and no one went. He saw a vacant field in a city in the rain and in the field a wooden crate and he saw a dog emerge from the crate into the slack and sallow lamplight like a carnival dog forlorn and pick its way brokenly across the rubble of the lot to vanish without fanfare among the darkened buildings." [p. 255] How are John Grady's feelings reflected in this paragraph?

12. Why does John Grady go to retrieve his horse? Would he have taken this action at the beginning of the novel?

13. How does he get away from the posse?

14. Why does he take the captain with him? Is John Grady planning to kill him?

15. What happens when he is awakened by "the men of the country?" Why do they take the captain, and what is his ultimate fate?

16. What does the wedding near the end represent? What does it mean to John Grady? What is McCarthy implying here?

17. Why does John Grady confess to the judge?

18. What does he tell the reverend? Why?

19. The reverend says "There's a purpose for everything in this world." [p.296] In light of this statement, discuss the reverend's philosophy.

**Questions for further discussion**

1. *All the Pretty Horses* opens with one death—that of John Grady's grandfather--and ends with the death of the family servant called Abuela, "grandmother." (At the novel's end, John Grady How do these deaths impel the novel's plot? What larger meanings do they suggest?

2. Compare and contrast John Grady, Rawlins, and Blevins. Is one of them the leader? If so, who and why?

3. John Grady experienced a number of profoundly significant events in the course of the novel. How do they affect him? What qualities does John Grady develop as he matures during the course of the novel? What role does the killing of the boy in prison play in his development?

4. Why does John Grady feel he needs to return the horse? Would he have gone to such lengths at the beginning of the story?

5. In chapter one Rawlins tells Grady "Ever dumb thing I ever done in my life there was a decision made before got me into it." Do John Grady and Rawlins do any dumb things that cause them harm?

6. Dueña Alfonsa discusses two views of fate. The first, regarding the connectedness of things, is shown in the example of a "tossed coin that was at one time a slug in a mint and of the coiner who took that slug from the tray and placed it in the dye in one of two ways and from whose act all else followed." And then: "For me the world has always been more of a puppet show. But when one looks behind the curtain and traces the strings upward he finds they terminate in the hands of yet other puppets, themselves with their own strings which trace upward in turn, and so on." [pp. 230-31] Discuss these two passages and the meaning of fate in the novel.

7. Do Blevins's fate and John Grady's confrontation with the boy in prison seem inescapable? What purpose does violence serve in the narrative?

8. What is the role of death in *All the Pretty Horses?* The novel opens with the death of John Grady's father and closes with the death of Abuela. Why do you think this is the case?

9. *All the Pretty Horses* is set in 1949. Why that year? Could this story take place today? How would it be different? How does the time period affect the story?

10. What do you think of McCarthy's portrayal of Mexico in 1949? Do you think it is like the Mexico of today? What role does Mexico itself play in the narrative?

11. What does the judge represent? Compare him to the captain. What does this say about Mexican law versus that of the United States? How would a Mexican have fared in Texas in 1949?

12. What is the nature of religious beliefs in *All the Pretty Horses?* Compare and contrast the roles of the judge and the reverend. What does this say about the respective places of religion and law within the narrative?

13. Why all the blood-red imagery? Why are the landscapes often described as blood-red? On page five you find images of blood and the recent frontier, and the threat of Comanche warriors still echoing in the air. What feeling is McCarthy trying to create?

14. What role do horses play in the novel? Do they represent anything beyond what they are?

15. The dreams in this novel are suffused with images of horses. What do the dreams represent?

16. Discuss the role of the landscape in the narrative.

17. How would you describe McCarthy's language? Does he use the vernacular often? And what about the passages that are not delivered in the voice of the characters?

18. What other events in this novel occur more than once? How does McCarthy use repetition as a structuring device?

19. How does the author establish John Grady's character?

20. What attributes does McCarthy seem to value in his characters? Explain.

21. On the hacienda an old man named Luis tells the boys that "the horse shares a common soul and its separate life only forms it out of all horses and makes it mortal... that if a person understood the soul of a horse then he would understand all the horses that ever were" (p. 111). "Among men, " Luis continues, "there was no such communion as among horses and the notion that men could be understood at all was probably an illusion." How are these statements borne out or contradicted within the novel? To what extent does the author allow us to "understand" his horses, while keeping his human characters psychologically opaque? What sort of contrasts does McCarthy draw between the communal soul of horses (see especially pages 103-107) and the profound solitude of men? What role, generally, do horses play in this book?

22. On page 89 Rawlins says: "A good lookin horse is like a good lookin woman... They're always more trouble than what they're worth." How does this statement foreshadow events to come? Where else in the novel do casual statements serve as portents?

23. How does the author establish the differences between the United States and Mexico? How do their respective inhabitants seem to view each other?

24. Alejandra's aunt offers two alternative metaphors for the workings of destiny, comparing it both to a coiner in the moment he places a slug in the die and to a puppet show in which the strings are always held by other puppets (pages 230-231). Which of these metaphors seems more apt to the narrative as a whole? Is what happens to the boys in the course of the novel the result of character or fate?

25. Do the boys' journey and subsequent ordeals ever seem foolish, futile, or anachronistic? If so, how does McCarthy suggest this?

26. All the Pretty Horses is spare in exposition (note the economy with which McCarthy establishes John Grady's situation at the book's beginning) yet lavish in the attention it devotes to scenes and details whose significance is not immediately clear (note the description of the cantina on page 49 and the scene in which John Grady and Rawlins buy new clothes on pages 117-121). Why does the author chose to weight his narrative in this way?

27. Although John Grady and Rawlins are innocent of stealing horses, McCarthy suggests that they are culpable of other crimes. At different points in the book he compares them to "young thieves in a glowing orchard" (p. 31) and "a party of marauders" (p. 45). When John Grady makes love to Alejandra, we are told that it is "sweeter for the larceny of time and flesh" (p. 141). What kinds of theft might McCarthy be writing about? Might the boys' suffering be seen as warranted by earlier transgressions? What sort of moral system applies within the universe of this book?

28. Is *All the Pretty Horses* a violent book? How do the novel's characters feel about the deaths they cause? At a time when graphic and gratuitous descriptions of mayhem are standard in much popular fiction for purposes of mere shock and titillation, does McCarthy succeed in restoring to violence its ancient qualities of pity and terror? How does he accomplish this?

29. All The Pretty Horses is not a violent book. It does have some scenes containing violence, but McCarthy does not rely on violent and gruesome descriptions to set up a feelin of fear and violence. To do this, McCarthy relies describing everything but the violence, like the eyes and hair of John Grady’s attacker in prison. It is everything that is omitted that is important, and by describing everything the violence is not, we get a clearer idea of what it really is.

30. What role does history play in McCarthy's narrative? To what extent are his characters products of a particular era? In essence, what role does the character of history play in the novel?

31. Although the occurrences in *All the Pretty Horses* are, strictly speaking, plausible and its human voices, in particular, are nothing if not realistic, the book also contains a strong mythic component. How, and where, does McCarthy introduce this? What specific myths and fairy tales does the book suggest?

32. Read Faulkner's short story "Spotted Horses" and compare the role of the horse in this to All the Pretty Horses.