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Nick Adams Stories by Ernest Hemingway

Discussion questions used at SPL May 2008

1. Who was a fan of Hemingway's before reading this? -- Did he make any converts?
2. How would you describe his writing style? Was it pleasing to read? Difficult? Hemingway was a reporter for 6 months and used that as a foundation – short sentences, short first paragraphs, vigorous English, be positive, not negative. Can you see that in his works?
3. These stories were placed in chronological order in Nick's world, rather than when they were written. Did that add or distract to your reading?
4. Did you feel like you were reading about Hemingway's life?
5. How did Hemingway use nature in his stories? Did you get enough about fishing?
6. What sort of hero was Nick? Does he seem similar to other Hemingway characters? Is that because he was basically writing his own life story in those books?
7. "Coming of age" was a big part of the early stories - we watched Nick change from a boy to a young man - what were some of the big steps for Nick?
8. War was another big part of Nick's life. Why do you think Nick volunteered for service? What was his attitude towards the dangers of war? How did that change?
9. What was life like for Nick after he returned home – in *Big Two Hearted River* and in *A Soldier Home*?
10. Do his actions and the reactions of his friends hold true today?
11. How did we see his relationships with friends and family change through the stories?
12. What did he think of his father? His sister? His mother?
13. How much influence did his father have on him throughout his years - did that relationship change?
14. What are his relationships with women? Was he ever in love?

15. It was brought up that Hemingway might have been racist in his language about Native Americans and African Americans. What do you think? What should we as readers think about something written so long ago since there were different standards and sensibilities?

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The Nick Adams Stories

Thoughts on the individual stories

Three Shots - foreshadowing of adult Nick's fear of dying - shows relationship with father.

Indian Camp - What were Nick's father's & uncle's attitudes towards Indians? Why would the husband kill himself?

Doctor and the Doctor's Wife - why did he react that way to being challenged by Dick? What did the conversation between the Dr. and his wife show you? What did you think when the Dr. started cleaning and loading his gun?

Ten Indians - What did this story tell you about attitudes towards Native Americans? Why would Nick's father tell him about seeing his girl out in the woods with another boy?

The Indians Moved Away - Sense of smell – attitude towards Native Americans - What did it tell you about Nick?

Light of the World - what was the meaning of the title? Why was it important that the boxer was described as pure and white and clean and smooth? Why was the boxer important?

The Battler - what did Nick learn from the boxer and his friend?

The Killers - what did Nick think about the Swede's response to the fact that someone was there to kill him? Did he act in a believable way? Why did the cook tell Nick to stay out of it? Why didn't the owner tell Ole?

Last Good Country - Nick and Litless run from game wardens - what was their relationship? What sort of outdoorsman was Nick - where do you think he learned those skills? Why did Litless cut off her hair? How important were the owners of the hotel/restaurant? What did you think of his statement to pick out one person to never lie to? Again, talk of killing people (from Suzy) - How did Nick see his running away? What about his sister? Why did she want to be a boy?

Crossing the Mississippi -- Why was it important for Nick to see the river? What did it stand for?

Night Before Landing – what was Nick thinking about before going to war?

Nick Sat Against the Wall - what does it say about war, in just those few sentences?

Now I Lay Me - what does this say about Nick's state of mind? Why did it give him some comfort to think about fishing and the streams of his childhood? What did you think of the actions of his mother after moving (throwing things out) -- did it seem like he believed in God? And what about those silkworms? What did you learn about Hemingway's view on marriage?

A Way You'll Never Be - How did you feel on reading the description of the battle scene? What was his job to do with the Italians? What good would that do? What did you learn again of Nick's level of courage? Did he seem nutty to you? This story had very long paragraphs – different than others. Why do you think that is? A sign of his craziness?

In Another Country – what was his relationship with the doctor and the other patients? Did he feel as though he deserved to be classed with them? Why/Why not? What did you think of his comparison of men and hawks? Again, a look at marriage - have his views changed?

Big Two Hearted River – how does the landscape match Nick? What about the grasshoppers? Again, very detailed, very lengthy descriptions - evolution of his writing style? Why was food so important again? Were the hoppers and the trout symbols of anything? Was this story a rebirth of Nick – back home from the war?

The End of Something – what did you learn about Nick and Marjorie's relationship. Do you know why he needed to end it? What did you learn about Marjorie?

Three Day Blow - what did their idle conversation show - what did you learn about the two men? Did he regret leaving Marjorie? Or did he regret not having someone in his life?

Summer People – Much less dialogue in this story - why? What was his relationship with Kate and the other 'summer people'? Why did it have to be secret?

Wedding Day – No dialog at all but what did you learn about Nick? Was he happy?

On Writing - Could he have lost his friends over fishing? Or why really? Is the only good writing what you make up? How would that apply to Hemingway's works? P 238.

Alpine Idyll - what was the point of the story of the peasant and the dead wife? Could you tell anything about Nick's personal life? Why was he in the Alps?

Cross Country Snow – what was Nick's frame of mind here?

Fathers and Sons - what did you learn about Nick and his father? Did he love him? Fear him? Is anyone ever gone from you? What was going on with Trudy and Billy? What was his relationship with his own son?

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General Discussion Questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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A link to a brochure put out by the State of Michigan

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal/lm_Nick_Adams_readers_guide_223863_7.pdf