

Memory of Trees

Discussion Questions

1. What are the book's themes?
2. What is the role of the trees in the story?
3. Who are the ghost characters in the story, and how do they influence the living?
4. Aunt Margaret is described as something "like drought and heavy labor, like illness and death...that has been overcome to preserve and build up our farm." Are the family's attitudes toward Aunt Margaret fair?
5. Why was the 1902 barn so important to the narrator?
6. How do the Bible verses at the beginning of each chapter relate to the story?
7. What is the significance of Tunisia in a story about a farm in the Midwestern United States?
8. Living in the city, the narrator comes into contact with American Indian communities whose ancestors had roots in rural places. How does this change her understanding of her family's history and her own loss?
9. What factors contributed to the Marty farm's sale? Was it inevitable? Why or why not?
10. How does the narrator's point of view grow and change over time?
11. What does the narrator discover she still has in common with Uncle Gaylon at the end of the story? What else do they have in common?
12. Was the federal dairy buyout in 1986 successful? Is there a role for small farms in the future? What can people who don't live on farms do to support them?
13. In Chapter 9, the narrator asks—
Why do we love places at all when we must continually leave them? Why do we trouble to make homes and farms with the illusion that they will endure and be holy? Or is every place holy, drawing us to itself, to care for creation?
How does this view of the world affect the narrator in her life away from the farm? Is there a place that is holy to you? What difference does it make in your life?
14. What cultural and historical insights did you gain from reading the book?

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