



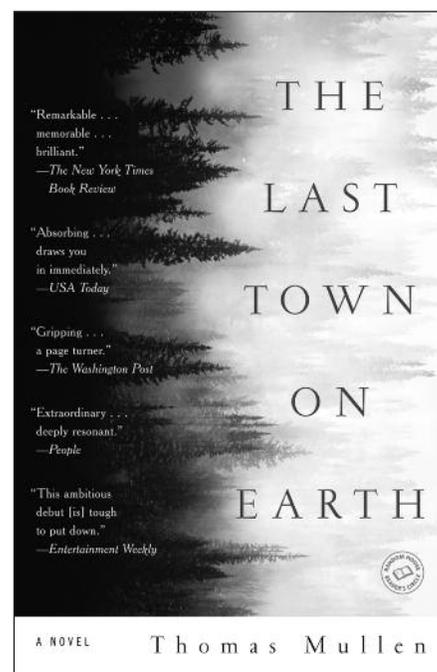
# The Last Town on Earth

A Novel

by Thomas Mullen

Random House | Trade Paperback  
978-0-8129-7592-5 | 432 pages | \$15.00/\$18.95 Can.

Reading Level: 9th Grade



## • note to teachers •

*The Last Town on Earth* is a compelling book that will allow you and your students to explore a multitude of literary, social, historical, and psychological issues. Set in 1918 in Washington State, the backdrop of the text is the outbreak of Spanish Flu that confronts the American home front in the midst of World War One and a town that attempts to quarantine itself against the ravages of the disease.

The text offers instructors the ability to choose from multiple areas of literary analysis. As a study of character, *The Last Town on Earth*, as Camus' *The Plague* before it, demonstrates the lengths to which some men will go to preserve the dignity of their existence while others fall to the destruction and despair brought about by the contagion that lurks all around them. Students can see characters of different types and at different stages of development. The text shows how characters cope and how they lack the capacity for coping.

While it's an exciting page-turner for students, *The Last Town on Earth* also offers the depth of development that teachers require. The parallel existence of Commonwealth and Timber Falls—the two primary towns in the novel—offers students the opportunity to analyze the parallels of plot, character, setting, and theme. Each town's struggle is similar; yet, the response of each to the epidemic is different and conflicting.

The social and psychological issues of how each town and each individual in these towns respond to the crisis are also compelling. Will neighbor help neighbor? Will fear lead to mistrust? Will conflicting desires result in physical conflict? How will individuals respond to isolation, temptation, frustration? These issues will propel students through the book.

Historically, the text fictionalizes real problems during a real crisis in American life. The plight of the flu victims, the hardships of working families, the harshness of war on both the fighters and those left behind—all these historical issues come to play in the novel. These historically accurate events allow for not only the analysis of the fictional motivations of the characters but also the historical motivations behind the people and events.

*The Last Town on Earth* can provide appropriate levels of challenging study for middle school students, high school students, and college students studying ethics. The text will help instructors broaden students' exposure both to historical and current events—the threat of a bird flu pandemic—while providing meaningful literary and moral challenges.

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## • about this book

Reminiscent of Camus' *The Plague*, *The Last Town on Earth* is as current as today's headlines while telling the story of the 1918 flu epidemic. Against the backdrop of World War One, Mullen's first novel introduces the characters of the town of Commonwealth—a lumber-mill town unlike any other.

Charles Worthy, the town's founder, has endeavored to create a kind of Utopia in the forests of Washington State. Disgusted by his family's treatment of mill employees, Charles, along with his wife, daughter, and adopted son, Philip, establish a lumber town in which employees share in profits, share in town decisions, and share the events of daily life. When the flu threatens their fledgling existence, the town decides to quarantine itself against the new flu that is ravaging the towns around them.

Setting up a blockade at the only road, guards sit round the clock to protect the town from any intruders. Unfortunately, a soldier shows up as Philip and his friend Graham, an older family man and surrogate father, keep guard. Graham kills the soldier as he refuses to turn back.

Only days later, Philip confronts another soldier at the barricade, setting into motion the events that threaten to destroy the town despite their precautions. Philip, having seen the effects of Graham's actions, hides the soldier in order to keep the town safe but not shoot the second soldier. Discovered in his plot, Philip must be separated with the soldier from the town. Meanwhile, flu comes to Commonwealth. Townsman turns on townsman, and Graham attempts to purge the town of its plague. Meanwhile, the suspicious residents of Timber Falls come to find out what is going on behind the barricade.

## • teaching ideas

Ideas for incorporating *The Last Town on Earth* into the classroom fall into a number of categories—historical, social, psychological, literary—and classes can skim over or delve deeply into these areas.

*The Last Town on Earth* treats historical events with accuracy. Even the concept of the novel itself comes from the author's discovery that there were towns that attempted to quarantine themselves against the influenza outbreak. Topics such as the events of World War One, home front initiatives (the "four-minute men," victory gardens, gold stars in windows, rationing), the Spanish Influenza, working conditions in logging mills (the Industrial Workers of the World, Pinkerton Guards, strikes), and others all provide topics for discussion, activities, and research.

The novel introduces many of the social issues that were important during the novel's time period. A class could easily explore American reluctance to enter WWI, the opposition that ensued after American involvement, and the measures the government took to quash that opposition. The plight of the working man in early-twentieth-century America presents another topic for research. The socialistic nature of Commonwealth and its Utopian ideals provide further areas of exploration and discovery.

*The Last Town on Earth* can also be seen as a psychological thriller. The text lends itself to an exploration of character motivation and change, of cause-and-effect relationships, of underlying motivations, and of the overt manifestations of covert beliefs and desires.

## • teaching ideas (continued)

Finally, *The Last Town on Earth* possesses promising literary merit. Its descriptions, its actions, and its themes—all lend themselves to study as literary elements. For example, Mullen introduces Commonwealth as being down a road “where the trees grew taller still as if trying to reach the sun that teased them with the paucity of its rays. Douglas fir loomed over the rock-strewn road like two warring armies perched on opposing cliffs. Even those travelers who all their lives had been reminded of their insignificance felt particularly humbled by that stretch of road and the preternatural darkness that shadowed it” (3). The descriptions mirror the parallel plots of Commonwealth and Timber Falls, the parallel actions of Graham and Philip, and the parallel motivations of those men who guard the town and those men who sneak out for liquor and prostitutes. The irony of a town that has established itself as a vestige of hope yet turns its back on the hopelessness of the flu introduces the theme of isolation and despair—one of many thematic elements worthy of exploration.

## • comprehension and discussion

**“Prologue”** – The prologue introduces the ravages of the disease that has overtaken the logging town, Timber Falls. As an anonymous doctor and his volunteer nurses go from home to home, they find a family decimated by the disease—the surviving children of the home “too oddly dressed, dirty, wraithlike” (xii).

Vocabulary: wraithlike (xii); beseeching (xiv)

1. What is the name of the town the flu has attacked?
2. What is the situation revealed in the description of the town?
3. To what war do you believe the text refers when it says, “husbands fighting in France” (xii)?
4. Why have no medical personnel been to this particular part of town yet?
5. What attitude does the lack of medical attention in this area of town reveal?
6. What do the doctor and his staff find at the house they enter?
7. The Spanish flu seems to attack what age people most?
8. Describe the symptoms revealed in this episode.
9. What do the descriptions of the doctor reveal about the situation in the town?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

### Part One

“**One**” – Chapter One introduces the town of Commonwealth—a town fifteen miles from Timber Falls that has so far avoided the Spanish Flu and has barricaded itself against the world in order to preserve its immunity. Graham and Philip sit guarding the entrance to the town when an American soldier approaches the barricade. Tired, hungry, and apparently sick or injured, the soldier asks to be allowed into Commonwealth, but, Graham and Philip refuse him. The soldier approaches, and Graham shoots and kills him.

Vocabulary: Paucity, Preternatural, Tenacity (3); Stint (6); Surreptitious (7); Wincing (9); Exasperation (11); Putrid, Mustered (12)

1. The very first paragraph of the chapter describes the road to Commonwealth. What does this description reveal about the town and its people?
2. The very first page tells the reader that the road has been blocked but does not reveal why or that the two men at the felled tree are guards. Why do you believe the author held back this information until later in the chapter?
3. What are the names of the two guards?
4. What is revealed about the two men initially? What do you find out about them as the chapter progresses? What do the actions of each man reveal about them before the chapter ends? What questions do you still have about who they are and what their relationship is?
5. Why/how is Commonwealth a unique town?
6. Both men are “damaged,” but only Graham’s “damage” is revealed. What is Graham’s physical damage? Why does the author fail to reveal Philip’s “damage”?
7. Who challenges the barricade?
8. Describe the soldier. What traits make Graham and Philip suspicious of his intentions?
9. What is revealed about the town’s decision to quarantine itself?
10. What happens to the soldier as he approaches?
11. What does the line “The grayness was anything and nothing” reveal (12)?
12. Why is Phillip’s rifle no longer cold?

“**Two**” – Chapter Two flashes back to the decision to quarantine the town. At the town meeting, readers learn about the make-up of the town and the divergent views of the townspeople. Readers learn how Charles Worthy’s family had come west, how Charles had broken with his family over the treatment of mill workers, and why Charles and his wife, Rebecca, had begun the town of Commonwealth.

Vocabulary: Arduous, Suffrage, Fecund, Intelligentsia, Disquisitions (15); Eloquent, Benevolent, Wistfulness (16); Hobnobbing, Tainted, Avarice, Calamities, Exorbitant (17); Skullduggery (18)

1. Why is flashback an effective technique for Chapter Two?
2. What is Philip’s handicap?
3. What is Philip’s relationship to the Worthys?
4. What is Rebecca Worthy’s past?
5. How does this past impact her relationship with her husband, Charles? With Philip? With the other townspeople?
6. What is Charles Worthy’s position in the mill and in the town?
7. How did Charles Worthy’s family end up out west?

8. Why is the town of Everett significant to Charles Worthy? How does Everett create a parallel to Graham?
9. How did Charles and his brothers differ on matters of running the Everett mill?
10. What is the doctor's name?
11. What does the doctor tell the group about the "new form of influenza" (19)?
12. What is Charles' proposal for saving the town?
13. What issues are raised about Charles' proposal?
14. Does Rebecca Worthy agree with her husband?
15. At the end of the meeting, Philip moves to sign up to be a guard. How does Rebecca react? How does Graham react? What does the contrast of reactions show?

**“Three”** – Chapter Three focuses on characters' reactions to the shooting of the soldier. Philip cannot eat and cannot get thoughts of the soldier from his head. Rebecca blames herself for allowing Philip to be a guard and for allowing Commonwealth to become a police state. Charles believes that Graham did the right thing.

**Vocabulary:** Advocate, Feminism (32); Bowler hat, Welling up, Malignant (33); Abdicating (34)

1. The chapter opens with Philip's questions. What do these questions reveal about his reaction to killing the soldier?
2. What did Rebecca typically do on Wednesdays that the quarantine is making her miss?
3. What does Rebecca's Wednesday schedule reveal about her?
4. In what war is the United States involved? What sacrifices that result from the war are people making on the home front?
5. What is the contrast between Philip's birth mother and Rebecca, his adopted mother?
6. Why does Philip want to help bury the soldier?
7. What is the parallel between Rebecca's sisters and Rebecca's current situation?
8. What is Rebecca's view of the war?
9. What is the contrast between Rebecca and her younger sister, Maureen?
10. Why is it ironic that Charles' son is involved in killing the soldier?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Four**” – In Chapter Four, Philip goes shopping at Metzger’s general store. He comes across a townsman buying whiskey. Mrs. Metzger sends Elsie, her daughter, to help Philip with his bags. Elsie questions Philip about the shooting.

Vocabulary: Sawyer, Banter, Transaction (35); Steadfastness (36); Rummaging, Laconic, Preoccupied (37); Serene (38); Inevitable, Instigate, Legacy (39); Deprive, Conspiratorial, Matrimonial (40); Inquisitive (41); Writhing (42); Dexterity (43)

1. Describe Flora Metzger’s personality.
2. Based on this chapter, what role does Metzger’s store play in Commonwealth?
3. What purchase does Leonard Thibeault make? How is Flora’s reaction to him different from her reaction to her other customers?
4. Philip buys two bags of flour and cornmeal. Why? What does the purchase reveal about the future of the town?
5. What seems to be the relationship between Philip and Elsie Metzger?
6. What is revealed about Philip’s physical condition?
7. What does Elsie know about the shooting? How much does Philip reveal?

“**Five**” – In Chapter Five the town magistrates bury the soldier’s body.

Vocabulary: Amnesiac, Arduous, Talisman (47)

1. How long do the townsmen wait to bury the body?
2. Why is Deacon called “Deacon”?
3. What do readers learn of Jarred Rankle’s past?
4. How do magistrates function in Commonwealth?
5. Graham digs like “a man possessed” (46). What does Graham’s style of digging reveal about his personality? About his reaction to the soldier’s shooting?
6. Why do the men not check for identification on the body?

“**Six**” – In Chapter Six Philip goes to see Graham. Philip wants to talk to Graham to make sure that Graham is okay after the shooting. Graham is quiet and distant but says nothing is wrong.

Vocabulary: Relegate(d), Lavish(ed), Maim(ed), Surreptitiously (48); Egalitarian, Utilitarian, Billows (49); Disquieting (51); Grapple, Groggy (52); Bedridden, Charade, Nocturnal, Sentinel, Gothic (53); Malevolent (54); Stark (55)

1. What do readers learn of Philip’s past in this chapter? How does this past affect Philip’s present actions/attitudes?
2. What role has Graham played in Philip’s life?
3. Why is it significant when Graham shows his maimed hand to Phillip?
4. How do the Worthy and Stone’s houses show the beliefs of the town?
5. What is Graham’s wife’s name?
6. What is Graham’s baby’s name?
7. Why is Graham and Philip’s conversation awkward?

**“Seven”** – Chapter Seven tells the story of Graham’s move west and his involvement in the Everett strike. Readers learn how Graham lost his finger in a work-related accident. Graham meets and falls in love with Tamara, who leads Graham into the workers’ movement. Tamara is killed in the “Everett Massacre.”

Vocabulary: Fraught, Strife (56); Bindlestiffs, Flophouse, Roustabouts (57); Morphine (58); Pallor, Indigo, Bade (59); Taboo, Albeit, Armada, Inquisitor (60); Thwarted (61); Scant, Vigilantes, Doyenne (62); Exhortations (63); Penchant, Nonchalant (64); Serenade(d) (67); Belligerent (68); Cowering, Indiscriminately (69)

1. What prevents Graham from sleeping?
2. Graham thinks, “Ain’t nothing a man has can’t be taken away” (56). What do you think he means by that statement? Why is it the “Damnedest thruth there ever was” (56)?
3. Describe Graham’s life and experiences after he leaves his family in Kansas.
4. Graham describes Everett as “the playground of second-tier timber barons” (57). What does he mean by this description?
5. Why does Graham make the switch to sawyer?
6. How did Graham lose his finger?
7. How does the fact that Graham has to work out a payment plan with the doctor to pay for the injury to his finger reflect on the status of the working men in timber mills?
8. How does Graham meet Tamara?
9. Tamara is a Wobbly. What is a Wobbly?
10. Describe the escalating violence in Everett.
11. Describe the events that happen to Graham and Tamara on the Verona.
12. How did the events at Everett impact Graham’s actions in Commonwealth? How do those events impact his attitude toward his family?

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**“Eight”** – This short chapter lets readers see the attitudes of the townspeople of Commonwealth as rumors begin to spread. The town runs out of whiskey.

Vocabulary: Ruckus (71)

1. What kinds of rumors are spreading around Commonwealth?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Nine**” – Philip and his sister, Laura, talk about the rumors and truth of the flu. Philip is reminded of going to a movie before the quarantine and of the “Four-Minute Men” who stood up in the movie to encourage patriotism in America. Philip lets Laura borrow some war books.

Vocabulary: Plush, Pillage(d), Loath(ed) (75); Virulent, Defer, Tutelage (76);  
Ferried, Hew(ed), Fearmongers (78)

1. About what rumor are Philip and Laura talking?
2. What does the reader learn about Elsie’s family’s nationality?
3. What does this knowledge reveal about the attitude of Americans during the war? About the attitude of Philip and Laura?
4. Why does the speech by the Four-Minute Man make Philip ashamed?
5. What does Philip believe Rebecca’s attitude is toward the Four-Minute Men?
6. What are Philip’s feelings about Elsie?
7. What is revealed about Philip when he tries to give Laura all of his war books and thinks that he will never read them again?

“**Ten**” – Charles and Rebecca argue about the decision to quarantine and its resulting actions. Both fear for Philip and his involvement. Jarred Rankle visits and talks to Rebecca about events.

Vocabulary: Cantonments, Profiteering, Moot, Paternal (81); Steadfastness (36);  
Decorum (82); Acquiescence (84)

1. What are Charles and Rebecca’s reactions to the shooting and to Philip’s involvement?
2. Do you think Rebecca blames Charles for these events? Why might she?
3. What seem to be Rankle’s political views?
4. Are they different or similar to Rebecca’s?
5. What happened to Rankle’s family?
6. How did Rebecca vote on the quarantine issue?

“**Eleven**” – The setting of this chapter shifts to Timber Falls. There, readers meet J.B. Merriwhether. J.B. has a son in the war and a daughter with the flu.

Vocabulary: Emanating, Bludgeoned, Succumbed (86); Cowed, Forgo, Paragon, Coup (87);  
Percussive, Litany (88); Guffawing (89)

1. Who is J.B. Merriwhether?
2. What are the names of his son, wife, and daughter?
3. What do you learn about J.B.’s family?
4. How does J.B. make his living?
5. Why does J.B. know about the quarantine at Commonwealth?
6. What does this chapter reveal about the flu in Timber Falls?
7. The last line of this chapter says that J.B. steps back into “a world he had learned not to trust” (90). How might this line be a theme of the novel?

“**Twelve**” – Philip and Elsie talk. Elsie had been out walking and had seen the men burying the body. She questions Philip about what happened.

Vocabulary: Muted, Unitarian (91); Demurred (92); Congregants (95)

1. At what task is Philip working when Elsie comes to talk to him?
2. Why does Philip's task seem odd? Why might he be working?
3. Why is Commonwealth without a minister?
4. What do readers learn about Philip's mother's death?
5. What is the rumor about Philip's mother's belief in God?

“**Thirteen**” – Mo, another mill worker and guard, and Philip are on guard duty. Mo leaves briefly to help a friend who is injured, leaving Philip alone when a second soldier arrives. Philip cannot shoot him and almost gets shot himself. Philip decides to hide the soldier in an empty, isolated house until he can determine what to do. Mo comes back, and Philip and the soldier become prisoners in the house.

Vocabulary: Detriment, Prowess, Dexterity, Indefatigable (96); Interminable, Armistice, Pique(d) (97); Infatuation, Despondency (99); Wraith, Fraternize (100); Immutable (102); Shrapnel, Forceps (103); Imminent (104); Stalemate (105); Serpentine, Nonchalance (107); Malevolent, Berth, Dissipate, Mottling (109)

1. At what job had Mo worked before timber?
2. What are the latest rumors about the war?
3. From where does Mo think these rumors come?
4. How does Mo think they will be able to tell when the war ends?
5. On what natural phenomena does Mo blame bad events?
6. Why does Mo leave Philip alone at their post?
7. How far is Commonwealth from the nearest town?
8. Why does Philip tell this soldier about the death of the other soldier?
9. Who shoots first – Philip or the soldier?
10. How does Philip “get the drop” on the soldier?
11. What does Philip decide to do with the soldier?
12. Do you think Philip made the right decision?
13. How does Philip end up trapped with the soldier?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

### Part Two

“**One**” – A group of men in Timber Falls meets – J.B. Merriwhether included. They are curious about Commonwealth. Readers learn of an incident at Fort Jenkins.

Vocabulary: Persistent (115); Financiers, Disheveled (116); Impeccable, Sanguine (117); Guffawed, Disparate, Fomenting, Dissent, Disparaging (118)

1. Why do the events of Chapter Thirteen offer an excellent place to stop and begin Part Two of the novel?
2. What do you believe motivated the author to shift focus to Timber Falls in this chapter?
3. What is the status of J.B.'s family?
4. As this chapter begins, where is J.B.? Why does he feel useful here and not at home?
5. Who summoned J.B. to this meeting?
6. Who else comes to this meeting? Identify each man and his position in the town.
7. What symbol in a home's window tells of a son in the war? A death from the war?
8. How has the war affected the Winslow's mill?
9. What is the American Protection League?
10. What suspicions do the men seem to have about Commonwealth?
11. What do you think happened at Fort Jenkins? What connection to the fort might you already know?

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“**Two**” – Mo gets Doc Baines, Charles, Jarred Rankle, and Graham. They determine that they must leave Philip in the house with the soldier for two days to determine whether either is contaminated.

Vocabulary: Sundry (119); Reveling, Wafting (120); Incubation, Decrepit (122); Disquiet, Tourniquet (123); Macabre (125)

1. What is the irony of Philip's situation?
2. How does the soldier react to Philip's being locked in with him?
3. What are your initial impressions of the soldier?
4. Why does Graham not trust/respect Doc Baines?
5. What plans do Baines and Charles make for Philip's imprisonment?
6. What explanation does the soldier give for being lost in the woods?

“**Three**” – Doc Baines stays up all night researching the flu. He has had contact with a former patient, now a doctor. Nothing Baines finds comforts him.

Vocabulary: *Pestilence, Venisection* (127); *Regaling, Scourges, Condescension* (128); *Esteemed, Cyanotic* (129); *Jaundice, Incubate* (130)

1. How are Doc Baines, Charles, and Rebecca reacting to Philip’s imprisonment?
2. Describe Doc Baines medical training.
3. What is Baines’ first name? Why does the author wait until now to mention that name and never use it again?
4. How has Baines tried to keep abreast of medical breakthroughs?
5. What major change(s) has Baines seen in his career?
6. What earlier plague does Baines remember?
7. What do readers learn of Baines’ personal life?
8. What does Baines find out from his former patient about the flu?
9. Where did the flu begin and how has it spread?
10. Is Baines sure of the precautions he has taken/the decisions he has made concerning the soldier and Philip?

“**Four**” – Charles and Rebecca argue over leaving Philip and quarantining the town.

Vocabulary: *Internment, Exasperated* (132); *Riled, Imploring, Resignation* (133); *Transgression* (134)

1. What task is Charles trying to accomplish when Rebecca enters?
2. What are the two sides of their argument? With whom do you agree?
3. How long has it been since Charles found Philip?
4. What had Philip’s father done to him? Do you believe Charles sees his own current actions as similar to Philip’s father’s?
5. Why can Charles not finish the letter?

“**Five**” – Sleeping in isolation with the second soldier, Philip dreams of his past—of the events leading up to his being discovered by Charles Worthy. Fiona, Philip’s mother, had taken him to live with another of her lovers. This man, Carl, abruptly takes Philip and his mother away at night in a snowstorm. They crash. Philip is the only survivor.

Vocabulary: *Idyll* (135); *Confounding, Disconcerting, Dissipate, Tenancy* (136); *Celestial* (137); *Discreet* (138); *Hyperventilation* (139); *Bestowed, Contemplate, Vestiges* (140); *Impeded* (141); *Cow* (not bovine), *Transgression* (142)

1. Philip dreams of taking flight and then “hurtling toward something unknowable” (135). How is this dream significant to his past? His present?
2. What is Philip’s mother’s name?
3. What are Philip’s earliest memories of her?
4. What was the typical pattern of his life with his mother?
5. Why do you believe Uncle Ike’s wife called Fiona “a tramp” (136)?
6. With what man do Philip and Fiona live in Redmond, Washington?
7. Why do you believe the “family” had to leave Redmond? What evidence can you provide to motivate their hasty departure?
8. What causes the wreck?
9. What results from the wreck?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Six**” – In Chapter Six, readers learn of Deacon’s past life as a Catholic seminary student.

1. Who is standing guard over Philip and the soldier in this chapter?
2. What significance does the description of the night’s beauty hold?
3. How old is Deacon?
4. How old was Deacon when he decided to become a priest?
5. What motivated Philip’s telling his parents he “heard the voice of God calling him” (143)?
6. Why does Deacon leave Seminary?
7. What is significant in the last line of the chapter – “the silence would follow him home” (144)?

“**Seven**” – In Chapter Seven, morning comes and Philip learns more about the soldier. Flu has indeed come to the soldier’s base. Philip gets the letter from Charles.

Vocabulary: Menacing, Divvying, Discrepancy (146); Transpired, Folly, Unperturbed, Doughty, Steely (148); Novelty (149); Doughboy, Fixated, Vengeance, Trolling (150); Riposte, Jostling (152); Josting (153)

1. What does Philip’s awkwardness with the gun show about him?
2. What is stored in the house in which Philip and the soldier are imprisoned?
3. About how many men has Commonwealth sent to war? Does that number seem large or small?
4. What makes up the meal left for the men? Why is the sugar significant?
5. What is Philip’s attitude toward the soldier?
6. What seems to be the soldier’s attitude? Is either attitude surprising?
7. Why is the corn bread only for Philip?
8. What does Charles’ letter say?
9. What is Philip’s relationship with Charles like?
10. What does the soldier tell Philip about why he was lost in the woods?
11. What is the soldier’s name?
12. Has the soldier been exposed to the flu?
13. What is the soldier’s home?

“**Eight**” – This short chapter reveals a conversation between Charles and Graham at the mill. Graham wants time off work to serve full time as a guard.

Vocabulary: Martyr, Satiated, Ravenous (154); Subjugate, Nostalgic (155); Vigilance (156)

1. What terrifies Charles?
2. Why does Charles regret having not been to church lately? What does the text mean when it says “an almost nostalgic need to subjugate his fears to something even greater, if such a thing existed” (155)?
3. What request does Graham make of Charles?
4. What motivates Graham’s request?
5. What seems to be Graham’s attitude toward Philip now? Toward Philip’s actions?
6. What decision of Doc Baines does Graham question? What motivates Graham’s mistrust?

“**Nine**” – Chapter Nine is a flashback to a church service before the quarantine. The town’s divergent attitudes toward the war are exposed. Ten men enlist. Others see the war as futile.

Vocabulary: Perplexing, Implore(d), Advocating, Murmur (158); Conscripting, Greenhorns, Reticence Doting, Deferments, Cloaked, Moot (159); Broach(ed), Devout, Abstain(ed), Fealty, Denomination, Veer(ed), Degenerate (verb), Boisterous (160); Dismissive (161); Deployment (163)

1. How long had Commonwealth existed when America entered WWI?
2. Does the youth of the town influence its attitudes?
3. How does the war impact Commonwealth’s business of producing lumber?
4. What should each mill worker have done to ensure that he was not avoiding the draft? Do you believe most of the men have done it? Why?
5. What is the minister’s name?
6. With what denomination does he associate?
7. What are the different opinions that exist in the town about church and this minister in particular?
8. How does a discussion of the war come about in church?
9. What are the different views held by the church-goers?
10. What is Walsh’s opinion?
11. What does he do to demonstrate his view?

“**Ten**” – At school, Elsie thinks about Philip and his situation. She writes and delivers a letter to him.

Vocabulary: Pester(ed) (164); Embodiment, Snippets, Stammered (165); Empathy (166); Wary, Concoct(ed) (167); Predisposition, Drudgery, Jaunts (168); Coax (169)

1. Who tells Elsie of Philip’s imprisonment?
2. Who runs the school?
3. Who is on guard duty when Elsie delivers her letter?
4. After delivering the letter, what does Elsie do?
5. What is implied by the last line of the chapter – “The trail seemed darker as she walked back home” (170)?

“**Eleven**” – Philip and Frank (the soldier) pass time by playing cards. Philip learns more about Frank’s life. Elsie’s letter comes.

Vocabulary: Ruefully (173); Dispel (174); Embezzlement, Reprieve, Requisite (175); Interrogation, Fixated (179)

1. What do Philip and Frank use for chips in their card game?
2. What does Philip do with the rifle and pistol?
3. Why does Philip share his cornbread this time?
4. What is the name of Frank’s sweetheart back in Missoula?
5. What does Philip learn about Frank’s life before the war?
6. What does Philip learn about Frank’s life At Fort Jenkins?
7. What does Elsie’s letter say?
8. What does C.O. stand for?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Twelve**” – Leonard Thibeault is sick—or is it a dream. He isn’t sure.

Vocabulary: Recalcitrant, Balk (181); Lucid, Adamant (182)

1. What is wrong with Leonard Thibeault?
2. What does the final scene of this chapter—about tossing a ball with his dead cousin—tell readers about Leonard’s situation?

“**Thirteen**” – Graham spends a sleepless night. Readers learn about his relationship with Amelia and his grief over Tamara. He is very tired but does not sleep.

Vocabulary: Vigilance, Precarious (183); Recoil(ed), Languid (185); Beseeking, Disparage, Saturnine (186); Amorous (188)

1. Why does Graham feel the responsibility for the town so personally?
2. What is Amelia’s father’s name?
3. What is implied about him and his relationship with Amelia?
4. How does Amelia react when she first sees Graham’s mangled hand? What does her reaction reveal about her? Why is the event so significant to Graham?
5. What is the name of Graham and Amelia’s baby?
6. Amelia knows that Graham’s silence has types? What types?

“**Fourteen**” – A group of men from Timber Falls comes to make trouble. Graham and Mo are on guard duty. They get Charles who assures the Timber Falls men that everything is fine in Commonwealth. The Timber Falls men imply that German spies might be in the woods. They refer to the incident at Fort Jenkins. Is the soldier in Commonwealth a spy?

Vocabulary: Scion, Senescence, Obsequiousness, Incarnadine, Truculent (191); Venture(d), Suffice(d) (192); Defuse, Patronizing, Transpiring, Ruefully, Benevolent (193); Scoff(ed), Seethe(d) (194); Agitators, Veneer (195)

1. What crisis has spread an alarm through the town?
2. Who comes to get Charles?
3. Who does Charles recognize from the Timber Falls group?
4. Who else makes up the Timber Falls group?
5. What crime does the Timber Falls group suspect of men in Commonwealth?
6. What has happened at Fort Jenkins?
7. What does the discovery about Fort Jenkins imply about the captive soldier?

“**Fifteen**” – Charles, Rebecca, and the magistrates meet to discuss what the Timber Falls men (Miller) had said. They worry if the soldier is a spy. They stick to the original plan. Graham feels something coming.

Vocabulary: Incredulously, Pensively (196); Interrogate(d), Sabotage (198); Pacifist, Obstinacy (199); Deterrent (201); Dire (202)

1. Is Rebecca a magistrate? Why does she come to the meeting? Why do the magistrates allow her to come?
2. What issues are raised at this meeting?
3. What decision is made?
4. What is Rebecca’s view of the decision?
5. Does anyone’s opinion shock you?

“**Sixteen**” – Philip is released from the house, but Charles and Doc Baines believe the soldier does have something to hide. They decide to keep him locked up.

Vocabulary: **Tenuous** (204); **Jovial**, **Bodes** (207); **Farcical** (208); **Inquisitors** (209); **Tatterdemalion** (210)

1. After Philip is released, how do Graham and Mo react to him?
2. What seems suspicious about Frank's story?
3. What accusation does the soldier not deny?

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### Part Three

“**One**” – Timber Falls speculates about Commonwealth. J.B.'s daughter dies.

Vocabulary: **Petty**, **Engendered** (214)

1. The section heading for Part Three says, “Sacrifice.” To what sacrifice is it referring? To what future sacrifice might it be referring?
2. What is the status of Timber Falls?
3. Why are the men suspicious of Commonwealth?
4. What specific aspect of Commonwealth do the men decide to investigate?
5. What has happened with J.B.'s daughter?

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“**Two**” – Flu strikes Commonwealth. Doc Baines goes to see one sick husband. Then, he finds Leonard dead.

Vocabulary: **Unkempt**, **Fidgeting** (216)

1. Who is the first sick man?
2. What is the story of his developing flu?
3. What are the symptoms of his illness?
4. With whom has the couple had contact?
5. How does Baines find out about Leonard?
6. What does Baines find at Leonard's house?

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“**Three**” – Philip wakes up in his own bed. He and Charles discuss the soldier and the town's situation. Doc Baines arrives.

Vocabulary: **Intermittently**, **Malevolent**, **Halcyon**, **Sinister**, **Hue** (219); **Importune** (220); **Chastise**, **Mute** (222)

1. About what does Philip dream?
2. Who wakes him?
3. About what do Philip and Charles talk?
4. What does Philip say about Frank?
5. What has motivated Charles suspicions of the soldier?
6. Why has Doc Baines been running?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Four**” – Flu spreads quickly in Commonwealth. Elsie’s mother, Flo, gets sick. Graham blames “the spy.” He wants to do something about it.

Vocabulary: **Donned** (224); **Peaveys**, **Cant hooks**, **Recalcitrant**, **Skidways**, **Mirage**, **Apex**, **Equilibrium**, **Laconic** (225); **Lanky**, **Pariah** (226); **Wary** (227); **Vetted** (229); **Rampant** (230)

1. Why is “forest fire” an appropriate way to describe how news of the flu spread through the town?
2. How does O’Hare respond to Philip?
3. How many of O’Hare’s men are missing from work?
4. What are the first signs of Flora’s illness?
5. Why does Philip feel responsible for the flu?

“**Five**” – In this brief chapter, Philip talks to Laura about his fear that it is his fault the flu is in Commonwealth.

Vocabulary: **Ventured** (233); **Exonerate**, **Transitory** (235)

1. At the beginning of the chapter, what thoughts push thoughts of flu and Frank from Philip’s head?
2. What does Philip’s discussion with Laura reveal about American suspicions of people of German descent?

“**Six**” – The flu spreads wildly. This chapter follows Doc Baines travels as he tries to stem the tide.

Vocabulary: **Immolating** (236); **Imprecation** (237); **Tangible** (240); **Aggrieved** (241)

1. What is the status of Yolen when Doc Baines comes to check on him?
2. What signs of death does Doc Baines find?
3. Why is Yolen’s house being guarded?
4. Why has no one from the community come to check on Yolen and Jeanine?
5. Why is Flora Metzger a particular worry for Doc Baines?
6. What does he say they should do with the store? How might this decision impact the town?
7. Can Baines trace the path of infection from the flu? What does the answer imply about stopping it?
8. Of what do the logs bobbing in the water remind Baines?

“**Seven**” – Rumors spread—people kill dogs to stop the flu. Whiskey will stop it, some believe. The Worthys have a cellar with food stored.

1. What rumors spread?
2. What do the rumors reveal about the people?

“**Eight**” – Rebecca and Amelia go to pick at the communal garden. They find it ransacked.

Vocabulary: **Rambunctious** (246); **Empathy** (247); **Bereft**, **Oblivious**, **Excavation(s)**, **Plundered** (248)

1. What does the planting of the garden reveal about Commonwealth and its people?
2. What does the robbing of the garden reveal about Commonwealth and its people?
3. What does the last line of the chapter reveal?

“**Nine**” – Graham returns home briefly from his duties. He hears about the garden. He installs locks on the home’s doors. He makes a decision that there is something he can do to save the town.

Vocabulary: Relent(ed), Seethe(d) (251)

1. What does the fact that houses in Commonwealth have no locks reveal about the town?
2. What does the fact that Graham installs locks reveal about how the town has changed? About how Graham has changed?
3. Graham tells Amelia he is going to see Mo. Is this story true?
4. What might Graham do to set things right?

“**Ten**” – More sickness. Men confront Philip after work. Philip runs into Elsie. They kiss. Philip heads for the storage building.

Vocabulary: Ravishing (252); Endemic (254); Cowering, Stigmatized (257); Tempered (262)

1. How many men are away from the mill with sickness?
2. How long does Doc Baines estimate the flu has been in Commonwealth?
3. How many have died so far?
4. What happens to Philip after work?
5. What is Philip accused of doing to Michael’s boy?
6. What do the men want to do with Philip?
7. What does Michael say? What does his response reveal about him? About the situation?
8. Where is Elsie headed when Philip runs into her?
9. What happens with Philip and Elsie in the store?
10. Why is Philip’s joy “tempered by guilt” (262)?

“**Eleven**” – Philip goes to talk to the soldier. Philip learns why Frank was really in the woods.

Vocabulary: Stealthily, Emanating, Innocuous, Mundane, Ubiquitous (263); Nocturnal (264); Bemoan (in), Subdued (265); Disheveled, Demeanor, Eremite (266)

1. What does the darkness of the town symbolize?
2. What are the only sounds Philip hears?
3. Why is Philip glad to see Lightning on guard duty?
4. What news does Philip tell Frank?
5. Did Frank try to kill Philip in the woods?
6. Why is Frank running from the army?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Twelve**” – Frank tells the story of why he left his base. Frank came to the defense of a conscientious objector and became part of a murder.

Vocabulary: Ruckus, Brothel(s) (269); Disingenuous, Motley (271); Dank (272); Avert (end), Cowering (276); Incisor (usage) (278); Eviscerate (d), Concoct (end) (283); Inane, Banter (284)

1. What is going on the first time Frank meets the C.O.?
2. Why are the other soldiers abusing him?
3. Who seems to lead this abuse?
4. How does Frank describe his camp?
5. Who confronts Frank about not participating in abusing the C.O.?
6. What logic does Ollie use to justify his own attitude?
7. Why do C.O.'s object?
8. When Frank meets the C.O. in the mess hall, what does he discover about the man? His name? Anything else?
9. Describe the scene Frank encounters the next time he sees the C.O.? How is this beating different from the others?
10. How does Frank attempt to save Lyle?
11. What happens after Frank hits Sepenski?
12. How do Frank and Lyle escape the base?

“**Thirteen**” – Philip promises to get Frank out. Philip leaves to figure out how.

Vocabulary: Ramifications (285); Ire (286)

1. What does Philip think about Frank's story?
2. Does Philip believe Frank? Why?
3. Frank prefaces his story by telling Philip, “I'm just like you” (285). Why do those words chill Philip? How are Philip and Frank alike?
4. What will Philip risk if he helps Frank?
5. Who might be Philip's primary enemy?
6. What sound brings Philip back from his thoughtfulness in the swing?

“**Fourteen**” – Philip writes to Elsie and plans for Frank's escape.

Vocabulary: Vector (usage), Disjointed, Inept, Admonished (289); Mull(ed) (290)

1. What does Philip say in his letter to Elsie?
2. Why do his words seem inadequate to him?
3. Why does Philip decide to wait a day to try to help Frank?
4. What is Philip's plan?
5. Why does Philip return to the memory of Charles rescuing him from the wreck? Is there a connection to what Philip is planning?

“**Fifteen**” – Elsie's mother gets worse.

Vocabulary: Disheveled, Muster (291); Staccato (292)

1. What wakes Elsie?
2. What is the irony of Flora being unable to speak? What is the horror of it?

“**Sixteen**” – Graham kills Frank.

Vocabulary: Purge(d), Nocturnal, Taciturn (293); Meager, Drivel, Dispel(ed) (294); Sustenance (296); Compliant (297); Behemoths, Vindicating (299); Memento (300); Assent(ed) (301)

1. Why does Graham see himself as an instrument of God? Do you see him that way? Would Philip? Would anyone?
2. Whose horse does Graham have? What is its name? How is it misnamed?
3. Why does Graham believe that Doc Baines has given up?
4. What thoughts occupy Frank’s mind as he waits in darkness?
5. What does Frank hope his family can understand?
6. What about the C.O. angers Frank?
7. How does Graham kill Frank?
8. What are Frank’s final thoughts?
9. What do Graham’s thoughts of his father’s hogs reveal about his actions?
10. Graham believes the dying will stop now. Why? Will it really?
11. What about the horse is strange?
12. What was Mo’s role in Graham’s plan?
13. Why does Graham believe Rankle would not approve of his plan?

“**Seventeen**” – The Metzger’s store is ransacked. Floral dies. People see the empty store and almost panic. Rankle helps calm them. Charles decides to open the town.

Vocabulary: Muted, Backlog, Dividends, Communal (303); Recesses (usage), Logistical, Tangibility, Ajar, Ransacked (304); Perpetrators, Quiver (usage), Sedating (305); Meager (306); Interposed (307)

1. How is Charles’ reality like his dreams?
2. What has happened at Metzger’s store?
3. Why does Charles resist the urge to put on his mask while talking to Metzger?
4. From where did the blood on Metzger’s shirt come?
5. What has happened with Flora? Why are these two events significant in their timing?
6. Charles tells Metzger that his neighbors will help him. What is the irony of that idea? What does the statement reveal about Charles?
7. Whom does Metzger blame for his plight?
8. What is the attitude of the townspeople who gather?
9. How does Rankle help disperse the crowd?
10. What decision does Charles make concerning the quarantine?

“**Eighteen**” – The decision is made to open the town but to close the mill to prevent the spread of the flu. The guards discover the prisoner’s “escape.” Philip visits the Metzgers, but Mr. Metzger dismisses him.

Vocabulary: Doleful, Prevaricating (310); Heretical, Respite (311)

1. What does Rankle notice on Graham’s hand?
2. Who joins Rankle for guard duty and discovers the soldier missing?
3. What does Philip suspect when Charles says not to visit the Metzgers?
4. What decision about the mill does Doc Baines suggest?
5. How does Mr. Metzger respond to Philip’s visit?

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## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Nineteen**” – Philip learns of the soldier’s escape from Charles. Philip goes to the storehouse and discovers evidence of Frank’s death. Rankle tells Philip not to confront Graham.

Vocabulary: Sustenance (313); Altruism, Emanating, Mimic, Trekking (314); Donning, Terse (315); Ruse (316)

1. What are the possible impacts of closing the mill?
2. How does Philip react to Frank’s escape? Why does that reaction puzzle Charles?
3. As Philip heads to check the site of Frank’s escape, “The sky’s color was draining away, revealing the darkness that had been hiding behind the clouds, crouching in anticipation of the bitter black night to come” (315). What symbolism is in these lines? What foreshadowing?
4. Who is at the storehouse? Why?
5. What of Frank’s does Philip find? Why does this item make him suspicious?
6. What else does Philip find?
7. What does Rankle tell Philip not to do?
8. What is the significance of the last line of the chapter?

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### Part Four

“**One**” – J.B. Merriwether’s son has died in France. J.B.’s wife has shut herself off from him. Joseph Miller comes to enlist J.B.’s assistance. .

Vocabulary: Specters (section heading) (320); Bickering, Fathom (usage), Minuscule (321); Disperse(d), Empathetic (322); Stammers, Dispelled (323)

1. The section heading for Part Four says, “Specters.” To what is it referring?
2. What is the state of Violet Merriwether?
3. What has happened to the Merriwethers’ son?
4. What does Joseph Miller’s arrival remind J.B. of?
5. What does J.B. see as the irony of his prayers?
6. What connection does J.B. now have to Hightower? Why does this connection disconcert J.B.?
7. What is Miller’s plan about?

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“**Two**” – Philip has the flu. He confronts Graham, and, in their confrontation, coughs in Graham’s face.

Vocabulary: Pummel(ed) (325); Cadence, Tenor (usage), Heed, Accentuate, Lucid (326); Excruciating, Avert(ed) (327); Transfix(ed) (328); Abate(d), Taint(ed), Stifle (329)

1. What is wrong with Philip?
2. Where does Philip go from his sickbed?
3. With what does Philip confront Graham?
4. Why does Graham say he did what he did?
5. Of what do the two accuse each other? Do you see truth in Graham’s accusation? Do you see truth in Graham’s defense of himself?
6. How does Graham react to Philip’s cough?

**“Three”** – Elsie comes to the window of Philip’s sickroom and writes him messages. Charles discovers that men have been sneaking off to Timber Falls and probably brought the flu. Philip sees Frank and his mother on a train, but Philip gets off of the train.

Vocabulary: Clavicle, Cacophony, Vitality (332); Ligament(s), Dissipate(d), Genuflect(ed), Visage (333); Jostle(d), Chimera (334); Sinister (335); Ambivalence (338); Talons (340); Swooning (342)

1. Examine the metaphor of the train ride in this chapter. What does the ride represent? Who is on the train?
2. Is the scene with Graham a dream?
3. Is the scene with Elsie a dream?
4. What has actually brought the flu to Commonwealth?
5. In his dream, what does Philip discuss with Frank?
6. Who else does Philip see on the train?
7. What is the significance of Philip getting off of the train?

**“Four”** – The flu abates. A little boy sees the specters gather. Graham contemplates his deed.

Vocabulary: Wane (342); Lithe, Timbre, Taciturn, Mundane (344); Malcontent, Crepe (346); Indefatigable (347)

1. How much time has passed since flu came to Commonwealth?
2. How many people have died?
3. Who has begun helping Baines with his rounds? Why?
4. Who is the first to see the specters? What do you believe the specters are?
5. Has Graham or his family become ill?
6. Does Graham feel justified in what he did?
7. When Amelia looks out the window, she sees the year’s first snow. What does Graham see? Do you find this difference significant?

**“Five”** – Sheriff Bartrum’s group from Timber Falls (the specters) arrives and begins going door to door looking for draft evaders. They find a “slacker” whose wife sends for Charles Worthy. Philip recovers. Elsie is sick.

Vocabulary: Pallor, Cohorts (349); Panjandrums (350); Paltry, Haughty (351); Wrangle, Feigning, Shirking (352); Quash (353); Exodus, Delirium, Auspicious (354); Albeit (355)

1. Why are Bartrum and the men from Timber Falls in Commonwealth?
2. Who is the first man challenged by the Timber Falls men?
3. What do they discover about this man?
4. How is J.B. acting? What do his actions reveal about his attitude?
5. How many men have come from Timber Falls?
6. Who is the first slacker they find?
7. How does his wife respond to her husband’s arrest?
8. What is the status of Philip? Laura? Elsie?

## • comprehension and discussion (continued)

“**Six**” – Charles confronts the Timber Falls men. Rankle is arrested, as is Deacon. The men come for Graham.

Vocabulary: *Irate*, *Bellowing* (358); *Shirk*, *Lackey*, *Rapscallions*, *Impotent* (359); *Amiably*, *Subsuming*, *Flayed* (360); *Reverberating*, *Grapple*, *Wont to* (362); *Cascading*, *Discern*, *Bereaved* (363); *Beseeching* (364); *Inept*, *Mustered* (365); *Scrum* (366); *Primeval* (367); *Rail* (usage) (368)

1. How do the Timber Falls men differ in their motivations for arresting the Commonwealth men?
2. What action of Charles Worthy shows the urgency of the situation?
3. Why had Charles allowed his men not to enlist or get deferments as they should have?
4. Why has Corinne Hunt helped Rankle through the flu?
5. Why does Rankle know Bartrum? What does this knowledge imply about Bartrum's motivation?
6. What can Philip still see on his window?
7. Why does Philip believe he has an obligation to Graham?
8. What develops with J.B.'s role in the arrests?
9. From where does Hightower recognize Graham?

“**Seven**” – Philip saves Graham by killing Sheriff Bartrum. They run the Timber Falls men out of town.

Vocabulary: *Brandish*, *Disparage(d)* (371)

1. Describe the events that unfold at Graham's house?
2. Why does Philip see shooting Bartrum as “unimpeachable” (374)?
3. What does Graham confess to Miller? What threat does he make?
4. Who does Philip find among the men he frees from Miller's truck? Why does Philip believe this man would be better off in jail?

“**Eight**” – The book ends with Philip leaving Commonwealth, accompanied by Charles and Graham.

Vocabulary: *Inexorable* (379); *Contingent* (380); *Scrivener*, *Abominable* (381); *Proffered* (382); *Nefarious* (383); *Interminably*, *Irrefutable*, *Kiosk*, *Scant* (384); *Benign*, *Revel* (386); *Sojourn*, *Intern(ed)* (387)

1. How does Philip feel about his fate?
2. What does the snowstorm do for Commonwealth? How is it symbolic?
3. What happened to Elsie?
4. When was the armistice declared? What is the irony of this event?
5. What do Rebecca's actions say about her and how the events of the book affected her?
6. What do Doc Baines' records show about the flu in Commonwealth?
7. What do the vigilantes find when they try to attack the men who brought flu to Commonwealth? What does this discovery say about justice?
8. What is Charles' plan for Philip?
9. How does killing Bartrum impact Philip? Why?
10. What will Graham do?
11. Why does Philip feel truly alone? Why is he unafraid?
12. Do you find the ending of the book satisfactory?
13. What does the future hold for the main characters?

## • suggested activities

1. Examine the parallel plots of Commonwealth and Timber Falls. Trace these plots on separate lengths of paper and connect them when the plots connect. Examine the characters in each town in the same way. Are there connections between these characters? Do these connections help explain the characters' motivations?
2. Examine the conflicts at work in this novel. The novel contains man versus man, man versus nature, man versus society, man versus self, and man versus God conflicts. Major and minor characters enter these conflicts. Writing assignments might examine the impact these conflicts have on the characters as well as the motivation the conflicts have on the action of the plot.
3. Interviews may be impossible considering the time frame of the novel, but students could interview the children of people who lived through the 1918 flu epidemic and/or World War One and remember how that epidemic influenced the later lives of those who lived through it. Interviews with war veterans from any war could shed light on issues of the novel such as conscientious objectors, war's horrors, etc.
4. Examine family relationships. Philip's life with the Worthys is very different than his life with his mother. Examine Philip's relationships; how are his relationships shaped by his past? Examine the issues of child neglect/abuse and adoption and foster care. How are these still major issues in today's world?
5. Examine current newspapers or magazines for articles concerning modern plagues—the possible bird flu, the spread of AIDS. What has been done to stop the spread of AIDS? What issues still exist? What is being done to stem the spread of a future pandemic? What varying opinions exist?
6. Examine the changes in Philip's character. Construct a character chart in which you show the ways in which he changes throughout the text.
7. Research one of the social or political issues raised in the book. In a presentation for your class, profile Woodrow Wilson, the Everett Massacre of 1916, the Industrial Workers of the World, etc.
8. Research the activities of the “home front” in World War One or any war. How has people's work at home contributed to American success in battle? How has citizen opposition to the war affected war efforts?
9. Analyze Commonwealth as a setting. How does the isolation of the town reflect the theme of the text? Make a drawing of this setting to demonstrate its significance to the plot.
10. Examine the themes of the novel— isolation, man's inhumanity to man, family relationships, the futility of human conflict, etc. Trace one of the themes through the events of the book. Trace a character's encounters with a particular theme.

## • beyond the book

1. Read and compare *The Last Town on Earth* to Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Compare the settings, the plots, the themes, and the characters. Parallels exist in the reactions of characters, the isolation of the towns, the attempts to control the epidemic, the desperation of both those within and outside of the towns.
2. Examine the history of the logging industry in the United States. Topics can include the development of logging techniques, conservation and exploitation of the environment. Classes can plant trees to commemorate the study of this text.
3. Viewing movies that show the time period of this novel can provide enrichment. Movies such as *Gallipoli*, John Huston's *A Farewell to Arms*, John Ford's *What Price Glory*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front* provide theatrical views of the First World War.
4. Trace the development of the bird flu. Where has it already developed? What has been its movement and progression? Trace bird migration patterns. What do these patterns tell you about the future of bird flu?
5. Examine the actual events that inspired this book. In addition to the flu itself, the author gives reference materials for towns that attempted to isolate themselves, for the actual events of the war, for the real Everett, Washington.

## • for further reading

### *The Plague*

by Albert Camus

### *A Farewell to Arms*

by Ernest Hemingway

### *The Great Influenza*

by John M. Barry

### *America's Forgotten Pandemic:*

*The Influenza of 1918*

by Alfred W. Crosby

### *Lumberjack*

by William S. Crowe

*Mill Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington, from Its Earliest Beginnings on the Shores of Puget Sound to the Tragic and Infamous Event Known as the Everett Massacre*  
by Norman H. Clark

### *A World without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I*

by Frances H. Early

### *All Quiet on the Western Front*

by Erich Maria Remarque

PBS examines the 1918 flu on *The American Experience* – includes teacher's guide and other materials on the movie  
([www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/))

Arlington National Cemetery

World War One Memorial

([www.arlingtoncemetery.net/ww1-mem.htm](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/ww1-mem.htm))

## • about this guide's writer

**David Corley** teaches high school English in South Carolina. His experience is with many different levels of students in grades 9-12. He has also taught courses for adult education, college, and graduate-level students.