

Between the Lines:
Reading about the Civil War
Book Discussion Group

**A Partnership between Linebaugh Library and
the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area**

***Cold Mountain* (1997), by Charles Frazier**

Questions--Desertion

What makes *Cold Mountain* different than other Civil War novels?

Do you get a sense of why Inman joined the army, and why he left?

Is Ada's view of the war surprising, given her upbringing in Charleston?

Is this an overly sympathetic portrayal of a deserter?

Questions—Women and the Home Front

What is the stereotypical image of the southern woman? Why does that image have such staying power?

Is either Ada or Ruby at all political?

Was Ada "overeducated" or just educated in a limited way? How does Ada change as the war progresses?

How often do we read about a character like Ruby in Civil War literature?

Are there any similarities between the character of Scarlett O'Hara and the characters of Ada and Ruby?

Cold Mountain is still a story about a man and his quest to get home. Is Inman's section of the book more compelling than Ada's?

Both Ruby and Ada are tied to a particular place, Cold Mountain. How does their sense of place define them as people?

Questions—Death and Destruction

At one point early in his journey, Inman draws a target on his jacket, over his breast, with mud (p. 55). Let's just review some of the destructive characters that people the landscape that Inman travels through on his journey home (the blacksmith and the other men from the crossroads town, Veasey, Junior, home guard that Junior turned Inman over to, Federal soldiers who visited the widow Sara, Teague).

Has the war made Inman a more violent person? Was his revenge against Junior expected? Was it necessary?

One historian has called Inman's journey a "road to redemption"—do you agree with that assessment? How is he transformed? (Ada on p. 335: "Certainly neither she nor Inman were the people they had been the last time they were together. And she believed maybe she liked them both better now.")

What in the novel counters the death, destruction, and violence that Inman seems to encounter so regularly?

Did Inman have to die at the end of the novel?

Questions—Memory

Why does *Cold Mountain* have such staying power? What makes it such a good novel?

Can a historical novel like *Cold Mountain* give us a better sense of the past than a history book? Why or why not?

Would you assign this book to a history class?

What is the difference between memory and history?

You are all probably aware of poet Walt Whitman's declaration that the real Civil War would never get into the books. What aspects of the Civil War have received the most attention in novels of the war—or in history books—or in movies? What are the neglected stories?

If you could write a CW novel, what would it be about?