

GONE WEST

Reading Group Questions

1. What are John Henry's two goals when he first arrives in Texas? Does he achieve them? Does not achieving goals mean we have failed?
2. While staying at his Uncle Jonathan McKey's house in Washington County, John Henry has a strange dream. What does the train represent?
3. Although John Henry has several signs of illness, what does he think is causing them? How can denying the truth be dangerous?
4. When John Henry starts gambling in the town of Eagle Ford, he thinks his actions aren't hurting anyone. Who is ultimately hurt? How far-reaching can our own hidden bad habits be?
5. John Henry visits the town of Fort Griffin three times and has to escape three times. Symbolically, what might Fort Griffin represent?
6. John Henry uses an alias in the city of Denver. Whose name does he take? Who is he hiding from?
7. On returning to Texas, John Henry gets into a fight with a Jewish card dealer. Why might he be accused of anti-Semitism? Why not?
8. When John Henry is seriously injured, his cousin George Holliday travels to Texas. What does George expect to find there? When John Henry asks, "Does my father know?" what is he really asking? Why does he choose not to return to Georgia with his cousin?
9. Who is the dance hall girl John Henry meets in Fort Griffin? Why does he have ambivalent feelings toward her?
10. When Kansas lawman Wyatt Earp comes to Fort Griffin, John Henry quickly decides to trust him. What are the heroic qualities John Henry sees in Wyatt? Who does Wyatt replace in his life?
11. Why does John Henry decide to take Kate along with him to Dodge City? How is this a turning point in his outlaw life?
12. In Dodge City, John Henry meets another Earp brother. How might Wyatt and Morgan be two sides of the same personality? Why does John Henry yearn to befriend the cooler tempered brother?
13. When an Indian raid threatens Dodge City, John Henry chooses to stay behind and not join the men defending the town. What happens that makes him finally choose sides and stand with the law?
14. Why does John Henry stay with Kate after he learns of her murderous plans for his friend Wyatt?
15. When Las Vegas gambler Mike Gordon is shot and killed outside the Holliday saloon, why does John Henry not consider himself responsible for the death?
16. The coroner of Las Vegas is a gambling man known as Hoodoo Brown. What does John Henry know about him?
17. Hoodoo Brown delays making judgment in the Mike Gordon shooting case. What do you think he is really after?
18. How does John Henry's gold Irish ring help him to beat Hoodoo Brown?
19. The gold Irish ring symbolizes friendship, loyalty, and love. How are these qualities shown in John Henry's life? Who does the ring represent to him?
20. Thematically, *Gone West* is a story of escape, starting with one escape and ending with another. What are some of the things we have to escape from in our lives? How can the qualities of friendship, loyalty, and love help us to make our escape?