



Gap Creek by Robert Morgan

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Discussion Questions

1. *Gap Creek* is, among other things, a story about two people facing the turn of the century and the onrushing modern world. Julie and Hank sometimes seem confused and intimidated by the changes happening to them and to their community. How does the modern world look through their eyes? As you begin the 21st century, do you share any of the uncertainty they experience as they began the 20th? How do they overcome that uncertainty?
2. People say Julie works, "Hard as a man." At the beginning of the novel, is she happy to be doing all that hard work? How does her relationship with work change over the course of the novel? After reading the slaughtering scene, will you ever look at a hog the same way again?
3. What does Hank think it means to be a man? How does this explain his behavior with Julie? Why does he come undone when the creek floods? Even if you are appalled by his behavior then, can you understand it?
4. Julie is often visited by visions and portents. Do you believe she is actually seeing these things or are there other explanations? Is a world of portents, signs, and visions frightening to Julie, or does it give her a weird sort of strength? What does she learn from the vision that comes to her when she's sick? Why does she ask the man in her vision, "What kind of dream am I dreaming?"
5. After she witnesses the death of her little brother, what does it mean to Julie that she sees, "the moon was shining above the trees and the woods was peaceful"?
6. Can you tell that Robert Morgan is a poet? Is there anything different about the way he uses language, compared with other novelists? How does he represent Julie's and Hank's ways of speaking? What kind of place is Gap Creek? What is the mood of that place, those hills and valleys? How does Morgan use descriptive language to build that mood?
7. Julie and Hank fall victim to con artists more than once, each in their own separate way. What is it about Julie that makes her vulnerable? What about Hank? How does Morgan use these grifters to advance his themes, particularly this theme about the modern world?
8. What does Ma Richards represent to Julie? Why does she aggravate Julie? What motivates Ma Richards jealousy or love?
9. Faith is important to Julie and Hank, and yet for a long time they never go to church. Why? How are they changed by faith? Describe the different ways that Hank and Julie experience God.
10. Consider this from Homer's *The Odyssey*: "...For nothing is greater or better than this, when a man and wife dwell in a home in one accord, a great grief to their foes and a joy to their friends; but they know it best themselves." Do Julie and Hank ever achieve this state of grace in their marriage? When, and how?
11. Will Julie and Hank survive?