Charles Frazier’s *Thirteen Moons*

Chapter Discussion Questions

***Part One: Bone Moon***

Chapter 1

1. The opening lines of a novel are always significant and worthy of study. Explain and analyze the possible significance of the opening line: “There is no scatheless rapture” (3). Why would Frazier open with a short, five word sentence?
2. What is the Nightland? How do you know?
3. Will makes note of “the hideous railroad, of which I own quite a few shares” (4). What does this tell us about our main character?
4. “Memory is about the only intoxicant left” (5). What does this mean?
5. What is Will’s relationship with May? What words would you use to describe their relationship? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
6. Based on this chapter, how does Will view himself? Use textual evidence to support your answer.
7. Will remains adamant that there is no need for a telephone. In fact, he believes people should “Use the post and learn the virtues of patience and silence” (10). Today, news and information spread at a faster rate than ever before. Compare and contrast the benefits of “using the post” and today’s modern systems of communication (email, text, social media, etc).

Chapter 2

1. Explain and analyze the following quotation: “Bear loved all the tangible manifestations of Creation as fervently as Baptists do King Jesus” (12).
2. Why did Bear **choose** to remain illiterate?
3. How does the inclusion of the story about Blossom—the nine year old girl who had been “stolen by slavers” (13)—add to our perception and understanding of Bear?
4. In discussing Featherstone, Will says the following: “When I think back on the single instance when we actually exchanged pistol fire, I sometimes still wish I had taken him down. Also I still miss him, and the world seems poorer for his absence” (15). How can this be?
5. What is Featherstone’s mother’s response when she learns he must die in place of Slow Water? What does this reveal about her opinion of their culture?

Chapter 3

1. What issue does Bear have with writing?
2. How does Will’s view of writing differ from that of Bear?
3. In regard to the first two questions, with whom do you agree? Explain your reasoning and use textual evidence to support your answer.

***Part Two: Arrival***

Chapter 1

1. Why would Will refer to his younger self as a “version” of him, an incomplete draft (28)?
2. This chapter (and much of the novel) is filled with vivid imagery. Choose a few lines from this chapter and discuss how the imagery creates or adds to the tone of the scene.
3. What details hint at what Will believes to be his aunt and uncle’s opinion of him?
4. List and discuss at least three of the difficulties Will has faced on his journey.

Chapter 2

1. Tired and hungry, Will is finally able to find his horse outside a cabin where Featherstone and his friends are staying. How do they treat Will?
2. How did coins from diverse nations end up at Featherstone’s cabin (50)?
3. While playing cards, one man drunkenly passes out. How does Featherstone trick/outsmart him twice?
4. “We played on long into the night. The women slept like a pair of puppies on the straw tick in the corner” (54). What type of figurative language is used in this quotation? How is it effective?
5. How would you describe Will’s first encounter with Claire?

Chapter 3

1. How is Bear described? Use textual evidence to support your answer.
2. What is the store? What is Will most excited to find there?
3. Why does Will welcome the sounds of the night at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 4

1. Although it’s clear Will and Bear do not speak the same language, how do they begin to bond?
2. Analyze and discuss the meaning of the following quotation: “It is tempting to look back at Bear’s people from the perspective of this modern world and see them as changeless and pure, authentic people in ways impossible for anybody to be anymore. We need Noble Savages for our own purposes. Our happy imaginings about them and the pure world they occupied do us good when incoherent change overwhelms us” (71).
3. How have women’s roles within the community changed? Why are they referred to as “powerless as white women” (72)?
4. Does it matter that some members of Bear’s community changed their traditional names? Why would they? Why does Bear keep his name?
5. Why are communities—both Bear’s community and your local community—important?
6. How does Bear’s opinion of animals differ from that of the typical American?
7. According to Bear, why should we **not** fear all of creation? Explain.
8. How is adoption different for the Cherokee people?

Chapter 5

1. What is so unique and awe-inspiring about Bear’s house?
2. Describe the dance at Bear’s house.
3. Why does Will join in with laughter when they are clearly making fun of his former community?
4. “When we all stepped outside, hot from dancing, and stood about saying our good-nights, steam rose from us, all as one, and we were haloed in the moonlight” (103). What spiritual implications is Frazier making with this quotation?

Chapter 6

1. What event changed Will’s life? How?
2. What is surprising about Will’s impression of Featherstone now compared to when he first met him?
3. What brutal act did Featherstone commit against his brother-in-law? Why did he do this?
4. Featherstone says that a pure mind and a mind free of desire are only attainable at death. Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. Compare and contrast Featherstone and Bear.
6. Why do you think Claire is so cautious and withholding in her relationship with Will?

Chapter 7

1. While Will was away, Bear had three bad encounters. What were they?
2. What made Bear’s marriage with Sara complicated?
3. How do Sara and her family treat Bear? Why is this surprising?

Chapter 8

1. What happened during Will and Claire’s three days on the mountain?
2. What does he mean when Will says he “took youth as a special pact with God” (143)?
3. What does Claire mean when she says she feels like an apostrophe? How does this help us to understand her character?
4. What shocking news about Claire does Will discover in this chapter?

Chapter 9

1. When Waverly is missing, Will knows to check with Featherstone. Why do you think Will stands up to Featherstone now, when he previously wouldn’t because of Featherstone’s strength and power?
2. Why is Featherstone’s initial “deal” of a duel unusual, especially for him?
3. Before the duel, Will felt a “kind of hysterical clarity” (164). What does this mean?
4. Summarize the three versions of the duel that were mentioned.

***Part Three: Removal***

Chapter 1

1. What regrets does Bear admit to at the start of this chapter?
2. Who was Dull Hoe, and why is he significant?
3. Bear wondered “if you could be said to have survived if at the end you didn’t even recognize yourself or your new life or your homeland” (178). What does he mean, and do you agree with him? Explain your answer.
4. Many of his people were afraid of “The Removal,” but according to Bear, what two things were in their favor?
5. How has Will enjoyed his trip and the experiences along the way?
6. What does Will mean when he says he arrived “green as a barrel of June apples” (184)?
7. What is the outline of Will’s argument as to why Bear should be able to keep his land?
8. Is it surprising to learn about the significant role lobbyists played in politics even during the time of Jackson’s presidency?
9. What were Will’s experiences with Davy Crockett?

Chapter 2

1. How would you describe Will’s emotions and/or state of mind at the start of this chapter?
2. Describe and explain Bear’s relationship with mountains.
3. Based on the novel, have politics changed much since the 19th century? Explain your reasoning and use textual evidence as support.
4. Instead of referring to it as “The Trail of Tears,” Frazier mentions “the trail where they cried” (204). Why? How is this effective?
5. Smith—a young, nervous soldier—explains his experiences. What was a typical day for him?
6. How do Smith and the two soldiers with him try to accept what they are doing?
7. Why do you think Claire gets up in the middle of the night, walks slowly through the house in the dark, then goes into the river by herself?
8. How does Frazier—specifically with the relationship of Will and Claire—take emotions and moments that are unique to the Removal and make them universally relatable?
9. There are several similes used on pages 218 & 219. Choose one and explain how it is effective.

Chapter 3

1. What problems are starting to arise?
2. How is Colonel Haden described before we hear from him? How does this affect our judgment of him?
3. What deal does Will make? Does this surprise you? Why or why not? Use examples from the text to support your reasoning.
4. Many of the soldiers, like Smith, live in fear of the woods and want to go home. Does this make you more sympathetic toward them? Explain.
5. Briefly describe the situation with Charley and his family.
6. How did Bear acquire his name?

Chapter 4

1. What happened to the young soldiers who were with Will?
2. In discussing battles, Will notes that “the losers leave their dead and wounded where they fall and flee in vomitous panic” (252). How is this word choice effective?
3. Why does Will decide to pray—something he typically does not do—for the young soldiers?
4. What new deal does Will make with the colonel?
5. How does Will convince Lichen and his family to join them in tracking down Charley?

Chapter 5

1. “We are all mad when we are twenty. And because of it we cause pain farther on down the road. And then, if we are not weaklings, we have to take possession of our old madness and try to soothe its issue” (264). What does Will mean?
2. What hardships has Charley faced?
3. What was Charley’s end?

***Part Four: The Nightland***

Chapter 1

1. Once Will had purchased most of the Nation’s land, what occupied the thoughts of both Will and Bear?
2. Even after all this time, Will is madly in love with Claire; however, in her letters she is often cold and distant. Why would Claire continue to write him if she doesn’t seem to have feelings for him?

Chapter 2

1. Why do Bear and Will decide to tell Charley’s story?
2. Why do Bear and Will decide to build a town?
3. Why do you think Will chooses to “embellish” some of his stories when he talks to the various writers that have come to see him?
4. Describe the game Will and the young men play.
5. What do you take from the final lines of Langham’s chapter about Wayah?

Chapter 3

1. What does Will’s daily routine consist of at this point?
2. What inspires Will to travel?
3. What is unique about Will’s view of death?
4. What is the “great facilitator”? Explain how this is so.
5. When Will finally sees Claire again, their meeting is somewhat anticlimactic. Why?
6. Why is Claire’s baby compared to a barn owl?

Chapter 4

1. Explain the following quotation: “Alarming, really, how all the wheels of the world...begin spinning faster and faster the closer we get to the Nightland . We’re called to it and it pulls us. And the weaker we become, the harder and faster it pulls” (321).
2. According to Will, if you live long enough what will you inevitably feel?
3. What specifically does Bear regret?
4. How do we know Will regrets owning slaves?

Chapter 5

1. “Year after year, I did not know whether Claire loved or hated me or, worse, did not think of me at all” (333). Why would it be worse for her to not think of him at all?
2. Will often references the importance of his ledgers and journals and the necessity to write. Why is it important to write constantly? How do people keep personal records of events and daily life today?
3. Why does Will note that on the day Bear died there was not a “clash with Nature or sudden revelatory conflict against his fellowman. He was just old and worn out” (339)?
4. What is the significance of Bear’s body being washed away by spring floods?
5. Describe Hindman. Who was he? Why was he there? What was his opinion of Will?

Chapter 6

1. What was Will’s rank in the war, and how was it obtained?
2. Will often rereads the same stories over and over again. Why would someone read a novel more than once? Is there a novel you’ve read more than once, and if so, what is it?
3. How does Will hear of the end of the war, and what is his reaction?
4. Will says that the “bowl and fish represented the Yankee vision of life” (359). How?
5. Why are Will’s last words to Tallent significant? What does it show about their relationship?

Chapter 7

1. What is Will’s attitude toward work at this stage of his life?
2. What bit of advice does Will wish he would have followed? Why?

Chapter 8

1. Describe the atmosphere of the Warm Springs Hotel.
2. With whom do many of the people at the hotel seemed to be obsessed? Why?
3. Describe the run-in Will has in the hotel with two men. What did they want?

Chapter 9

1. Why is Claire in mourning?
2. Choose two adjectives to describe Will & Claire’s encounter at the hotel. Explain your reasoning.
3. “Though the rational, unenraptured part of me figured that no one, man or woman, gets to be full and complete ever. We all go about burdened with the reality that we are the broken-off ends of true people. It is the severe vengeance Creation takes on us for living” 389). What does this mean?
4. Why are things so awkward for Will and Claire?

Chapter 10

1. Why was Will in so much financial trouble?
2. What were Will and Dony’s opinions of each other?
3. What was the result of Will’s time in court?

***Part Five: Bone Moon***

1. Why does Will believe “a strict sense of justice would call it only fair for [him] to live in poverty” (412)?
2. Why does Will believe it is best not to focus on or think about people getting what they deserve?
3. Why is Will pleased when he thinks about the fact that there are no pictures of Bear or Claire?
4. What simple but profound notions about time and space are mentioned?
5. Why do you think Will shoots at the train of tourists when it passes his house?
6. Just as important as the first line, analyze the significance of the final line of the novel. What does it mean, and how does it add to the overall message of the novel?