Cormac McCarthy, [*All the Pretty Horses*](http://www.amazon.com/All-Pretty-Horses-Border-Trilogy-ebook/dp/B001L4Z6YO/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438613352&sr=1-1&keywords=cormac+mccarthy+all+the+pretty+horses) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992)

Summary:

Cormac McCarthy is one of America’s most respected and honored

novelists, even though until the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* none of his novels had sold over 5,000 copies. *All* *the Pretty Horses* won the National Book Award, a preview of another award, the Pulitzer, which McCarthy would win in 2007 for his book *The Road*. Of his style, the *New York Times* highlighted his “recondite vocabulary, punctuation, portentous rhetoric, use of dialect and concrete sense of the world.” *All the Pretty* *Horses,* the first of the Border Trilogy, follows John Grady Cole, a 16-year-old cowboy who in 1949 leaves Texas to live a life unencumbered by fences. The novel is unique in its ability to simultaneously embody and eschew two genres: the western and the coming-of-age tale.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* American West. This is a place of wildness, a place of testing, where the law is scarce and one’s worth is measured by skill. But even in 1949 the reality has disappeared into romanticized myth.
* Fate. John Grady takes responsibility and shuns the idea of fate. He chooses to believe and pursue the myth of the western cowboy and accepts the consequences of it, even if the world is not governed by providence.
* Journey/Quest. The journey is more important than the end goal, because one’s goal and all physical elements fade, while a journey can resume.
* Conflict & Loss. McCarthy’s story is consumed with both. The characters lose nearly everything: innocence, life, the past, relatives, money, their country/home, a ranch, and the girl.
* Nature. The natural world takes precedence over the psychological. Characters stoically endure great acts of violence and rarely display their interior selves. Nature is presented as harsh, loss, a place where “the world’s pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity.”
* Horses. People pass away, yet horses, as part of nature, endure. Consider also their connotations: wars/battles, medieval journeys, companions, innocence, ranch work, Indians. Nearly every character is connected by horses.

Discussion Questions:

1. Both Cole and Jimmy Blevins risk their lives for horses. Were their motivations the same?
2. What is the importance of the picture of horses in the Cole’s dining room?
3. If cowboys have a code of honor embodied by Cole, what is that code?
4. Compare the first scene with the last. Is this a happy ending?
5. Why does Alejandra reject John Grady?
6. What does John Grady learn from his conversation in the judge’s home?
7. Describe McCarthy’s writing style and its effect on the reading experience, particularly his description of landscape.
8. Analyze Cole’s dream of horses while he is in prison, especially the description that “they ran in that resonance which is the world itself and which cannot be spoken but only praised.”
9. Compare McCarthy and the novel to these two genres and authors: Southern Gothic and Western, and Hemingway and Faulkner.
10. McCarthy has done only three interviews, and one TV interview. Watch it [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3kpzuk1Y8I) and discuss.