

Montana 1948
Larry Watson

Reading Guide

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Reader's Guide

1. Bentrock is a fictitious prairie town in Montana that recurs as a setting in Larry Watson's novels. How would you characterize Bentrock? In what ways is the setting, both time and place, reflected in the characters?
2. What is the role and importance of loyalty in the Hayden family and how does it influence Wesley's reaction to the accusations brought against his brother? How would you characterize the relationships between the Hayden men, Grandpa Hayden, Frank, Wesley and David?
3. How would you characterize Wesley's opinions about the Indian characters in the novel, such as Ollie Young Bear and Marie Little Soldier? Do you think his prejudices complicate his role as sheriff?
4. David idolizes many of the adult characters in the novel—for what qualities does he admire Marie, Gloria, Uncle Frank and his parents? How do these affections contradict one another as the story unfolds? How do David's opinions of these characters evolve as the novel progresses?
5. Did you form any predictions as to why Marie was reluctant to see Dr. Frank Hayden, and if so, how accurate were they? At what point in the story did you begin to suspect Frank's character?
6. David's mother, Gail readily accepts Marie's allegations against Frank, while Wesley is reluctant to investigate. What factors do you think make Wesley hesitant to investigate Marie's accusations and what factors prompt Gail to believe her?
7. Toward the end of the novel, David observes a reversal of his parents' roles: "My mother now represented practicality and expediency; my father stood for moral absolutism" (144). What, in your opinion, causes this reversal? Do you agree with the assessment that releasing Frank is the practical and expedient option? Do you agree with the alternate implication, that prosecuting him is morally absolute?

8. At the novel's conclusion, it is decided to keep the scandal a secret from the larger Bantrock community. What do you think motivates this decision? If the accusations against Uncle Frank were publicized, who would it have affected and how?

9. In the epilogue David states that he "could never believe in the rule of law again" (164). Why do you think he is disillusioned with the justice system? To what extent do you think his father's, uncle's and grandfather's actions in 1948 shaped this opinion?

10. *Montana 1948* has been featured as required reading for high school students while simultaneously appearing on a few banned books lists. In what ways and to what degree is Watson's novel controversial? In what ways is it educational?