

wallace stegner big rock candy mountain

Wallace Stegner Big Rock Candy Mountain is a notable piece of literature that reflects the intricacies of American life, particularly in the West. Written by Wallace Stegner, a celebrated American author and environmentalist, the novel published in 1943 encapsulates themes of family, struggle, and the quest for identity. Set against the backdrop of the American West, particularly during the Great Depression, "Big Rock Candy Mountain" is not just a title that invokes a whimsical image; it delves deep into the realities faced by families and individuals during tough times. This article will explore the novel's themes, characters, plot, and its significant impact on American literature.

Overview of the Novel

"Big Rock Candy Mountain" follows the life of the protagonist, Bo Mason, and his family as they navigate the tumultuous landscape of early 20th-century America. The narrative is semi-autobiographical, drawing from Stegner's own experiences growing up in the West. The novel captures the essence of the American Dream while also portraying its darker sides.

Setting and Context

The novel is set in various locations throughout the American West, including Utah and Montana. The Great Depression serves as a significant backdrop, influencing the characters' lives and decisions. The harsh realities of the time—economic instability, drought, and societal changes—are intricately woven into the fabric of the story.

- Key Locations:
- Salt Lake City, Utah
- The mountains of Montana
- The small towns and rural settings that reflect the struggles of the characters

Main Characters

The characters in "Big Rock Candy Mountain" are richly developed, each contributing to the overall narrative and themes of the novel.

Bo Mason

Bo Mason is the central character, a restless and ambitious man who dreams of striking it rich. His pursuit of the American Dream often leads him to make questionable decisions, affecting his family deeply.

- Traits:
- Ambitious yet reckless
- Charismatic but flawed
- Torn between his dreams and family responsibilities

Lexie Mason

Lexie is Bo's wife, whose character embodies strength and resilience. Throughout the novel, she struggles with Bo's relentless pursuit of dreams that often leaves her and their children in precarious situations.

- Traits:
- Strong-willed and nurturing
- Grounded in reality but dreams of stability
- Represents the sacrifices made for family

Their Children

The Mason children, particularly the eldest son, are impacted by their father's ambitions and their mother's struggles. Their development throughout the novel provides insight into the generational effects of Bo's choices.

- Key Children:
- Frank Mason: The eldest, who grapples with his identity and his father's expectations.
- The younger siblings, who add depth to the family dynamic.

Thematic Exploration

"Big Rock Candy Mountain" explores several themes that resonate throughout the narrative, reflecting both personal and societal struggles.

The American Dream

The pursuit of the American Dream is a central theme in the novel. Bo Mason's relentless quest for success and wealth represents the ideal that many strive for, yet the novel ultimately questions its attainability.

- Key Points:
- The allure of wealth and success
- The consequences of ambition on family dynamics
- The disillusionment with the American Dream

Family and Sacrifice

Family is at the heart of the story, illustrating the complexities of familial relationships during challenging times. Lexie's sacrifices for her children and her attempts to maintain stability highlight the theme of maternal strength.

- Key Points:
- The impact of Bo's dreams on family unity
- Lexie's role as the emotional anchor
- The children's struggles with their identity and familial expectations

Nature and Environment

Stegner's love for the American West is palpable in the novel, with vivid descriptions of the landscape that shape the characters' lives. The environment serves as both a refuge and a source of hardship.

- Key Points:
- The beauty and brutality of the Western landscape
- Nature as a character in its own right
- The environmental concerns that echo throughout Stegner's works

Literary Style and Technique

Wallace Stegner's writing style in "Big Rock Candy Mountain" is characterized by its descriptive richness and emotional depth. His ability to convey complex emotions and vivid imagery makes the narrative engaging and relatable.

Symbolism

The title itself, "Big Rock Candy Mountain," symbolizes both the allure of dreams and the harsh realities of life. It serves as a metaphor for the idealized life that is ultimately unreachable.

- Key Symbols:
- The mountains: Representing both aspiration and the obstacles faced
- The journey: Reflecting the struggles of life and the search for meaning

Narrative Structure

The novel employs a linear narrative structure that allows readers to follow the Mason family's journey through time. Stegner's use of first-person and third-person perspectives provides depth to the characters' experiences.

Impact and Legacy

"Big Rock Candy Mountain" is considered a classic of American literature and has had a lasting impact on readers and writers alike. Its exploration of the human condition, particularly in the context of the American West, continues to resonate.

Influence on Literature

Stegner's work has inspired countless authors, particularly those who write about the American experience and the complexities of family dynamics. His emphasis on place and environment has influenced the genre of Western literature.

Cultural Significance

The novel reflects the broader cultural narrative of America during the Great Depression, highlighting the struggles faced by many. It serves as a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit amidst adversity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "Big Rock Candy Mountain" by Wallace Stegner is a profound exploration of the American experience, family dynamics, and the pursuit of dreams. Through the lens of the Mason family, Stegner invites readers to reflect on the complexities of ambition, identity, and the environment. Its themes remain relevant, and the novel stands as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling in capturing the human experience. Whether for its rich character development, evocative setting, or its critical examination of the American Dream, "Big Rock Candy Mountain" deserves a prominent place in the canon of American literature.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' about?

'Big Rock Candy Mountain' is a novel by Wallace Stegner that explores the life of a family in the American West during the early 20th century, focusing on themes of ambition, adventure, and the complexity of familial relationships.

Who are the main characters in 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'?

The main characters include Bo Mason, a restless and ambitious man, his wife, Elsa, and their two children, Frank and Helen, who navigate the challenges of life in a rapidly changing America.

What themes are prevalent in Stegner's 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'?

Key themes include the search for identity, the impact of the American Dream, the dynamics of family relationships, and the tension between freedom and responsibility.

How does the setting influence the story in 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'?

The novel is set against the backdrop of the American West, which serves as a symbol of opportunity and adventure but also highlights the harsh realities and struggles faced by the characters.

What narrative style does Stegner use in 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'?

Stegner employs a third-person narrative style that allows for a deep exploration of the characters' inner thoughts and emotions while providing a broader view of the societal changes occurring in the West.

What is the significance of the title 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'?

The title refers to a mythical place of ease and abundance, symbolizing the dreams and aspirations of the characters, particularly Bo Mason, who is constantly in search of a better life.

When was 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' published?

'Big Rock Candy Mountain' was published in 1943 and has since become a significant work in American literature, particularly in the context of Western fiction.

How does 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' reflect American history?

The novel reflects the post-World War I era, the Great Depression, and the quest for the American Dream, capturing the aspirations and disillusionments of that time.

What literary techniques does Stegner use in the novel?

Stegner uses vivid imagery, rich characterization, and a blend of realism and symbolism to convey the complexities of his characters' lives and the landscape they inhabit.

What impact has 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' had on literature?

'Big Rock Candy Mountain' is considered a classic in Western literature, influencing subsequent writers with its themes of exploration, human struggle, and the intricate dynamics of family life.

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