

Discussion Questions for Book Clubs and Reading Groups

The Road to Beaver Park

by

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Chapter 1. The Pacific Coast

1. Have you ever considered escaping the workaday world and living close to nature? Why? Why not? Where would you go? What would you hope to gain?
2. How should a person prepare for such a trip? Objectives? Research? Basic needs? Finances? Communication? Trouble shooting? Time constraints?
3. Living close to nature is living close to the elements: rain, wind, sun, heat, cold, storms, night/day, seasons, weather. What can you learn from that? How can you prepare for that?
4. Have you ever looked at nature as an art form? How is that different from just being there?
5. Do you notice differences in plant cover when you are outdoors? What are the dominant native plants in your area? Can you describe the overall topography (foothills, river valley, mountains, plains, savannah, etc.)?
6. Have you ever felt like you were at one with the earth?

Chapter 2. The Great Basin. Eagle Lake. Bob Scott Campground.

1. Where is the Great Basin Desert? Why is it called a “basin”? Can you describe “Basin and Range topography? Have you ever driven across Nevada or seen that topography from an airplane?
2. What common plants did the family find as they drove across the Great Basin? Have you ever enjoyed the fragrance of wet sagebrush after a rain?
3. Observation is using eyes and ears to take in every detail. Basic to drawing and painting, it is also the primary skill of scientists. What does it take to be a good observer?
4. Is it a good idea to “collect” plants and animals in the outdoors? How long do they last in captivity? Do the specimens have a meaningful use, or are they simply discarded?
5. Mass, space, and light are considered the most basic elements that Art is made of. Is there

something more?

6. A shift into “drawing mode” is a different way of seeing. How did that affect the artist?

Chapter 3. The Great Basin. Snake Range. Lehman Creek.

1. What did the naturalist do first when in a new area?

2. What did the artist see on her morning walk?

3. What are the common plants found around the Lehman Creek campground? On the lower slopes? Along the creek? What kind of forest covers the upper slopes of the mountains?

4. Have you ever observed the mass of stars in a desert night sky? What was your reaction? Did it expand your thinking?

5. What was the artist sensing at the campfire when she felt that strange yearning? Has that ever happened to you? What did it lead to?

Chapter 4. The Great Basin. The Playa.

1. Have you ever seen a playa? Describe the artist’s feelings in that lonely place.

2. Was the playa an absolute desert? What was the plant cover in the surrounding hills?

3. The artist noted several art components in the landscape—perspective, contrast, monochrome colors, negative/positive space. Can you define those terms? Is it easier to see those in a desert?

4. What did the children find out there? Why is exploration so important to children?

5. Silence is considered a spiritual value of wilderness. Have you ever experienced complete silence?

Chapter 5. The Rocky Mountains. San Miguel River. Woods Lake.

1. What are the color differences between the dry desert playa compared to high mountains with meadows, forest, springs, and rivers. Which color scheme offers more appeal for you?

2. What does the artist remember most about her sketching time at the lake? Can you describe her feelings about the light? Has that ever happened to you?

3. Name the two major life support systems around the lake, the major plant communities. Are there more than two?

4. Spring wildflowers are abundant here. List the ones mentioned. Do you know what they look like? Can you identify wild flowers in your area?
5. Define “haloed”, “hallowed”, “Holy”. Can you explain the differences? Have you ever experienced that outdoors?
6. Have you considered the principle of “proportion” in your own life relationships?

Chapter 6. The Rocky Mountains. Fishing on the San Miguel. Tomboy.

1. Have you ever seen a “Banner Cloud”? What makes it form?
2. The artist identifies “flow patterns”. What causes a “flow pattern”? Where can a person look for them? Are they important?
3. Have you ever considered learning to sketch? Can you shift your vision into “drawing mode” when you want to? How would you describe that sensation?
4. Have you noticed that science, for all its value in explaining how things work, sometimes shifts from “what” and “how” to more personal questions, like “who”? Has that ever happened to you?
5. High altitude areas above timberline offer entirely different nature lore. Can you describe what the family found?

Chapter 7. Canyon Country. Mesa Verde NP.

1. What is so special about Mesa Verde? Aside from subject matter for drawing and painting, what intrigued the artist?
2. What is a quest? Is this a common occurrence? Why do people go on quests? What is the artist searching for?
3. The Anasazi lived on the mesa for about 1400 years as farmers, hunters, weavers, crafts people. Did they disappear all at once? What do you think happened to them?
4. The artist finds examples of major art principles: rhythm, pattern, balance, harmony. Can you find examples of those same principles in natural surroundings where you are?
5. The plant cover at Mesa Verde is pinon/juniper forest mixed with sage, rabbitbrush, and mountain mahogany. Is this a transition area? Does that affect the spiritual qualities the artist

noticed there?

6. Do you consider our present day cultural ways to be in balance with the environment?

Chapter 8. Canyon Country. El Morro. The Rainy Season.

1. Have you ever experienced the onset of rain after a long dry spell? Describe your experience.

2. Can you find spiral patterns in your local landscape? In the garden? In the sky? In waterways?

3. Describe the Rainy Season in the Southwest. When does it occur? How does it affect desert plants?

4. Discuss earthwork order. Can you find examples in your area? Is there disorder?

5. The artist took time for reflection on events that happened. Do you have time for reflection? How does it benefit your daily life?

6. Do you ever have spontaneous prayers?

Chapter 9. Colorado Plateau. Santa Fe. Haviland Lake. Silverton.

1. What 3 primary colors did you learn in school? What other hues can you make from mixing them? How do they differ from outdoor colors? Or are they the same?

2. How does an artist see the colors of the rainbow? What does the scientist see in rainbows?

3. Do you notice differences in natural light from place to place? What makes the difference?

4. Where can you find ripple patterns in the landscape? In the skyscape?

5. What is an “epiphany”? Have you ever had an epiphany outdoors? How did it affect you?

Chapter 10. Colorado Plateau. Colorado National Monument.

1. When looking at watercolor paintings, can you identify wet-on-wet technique? Dry brush technique? Describe the differences, the uses.

2. Discuss the skill of observing. Does a person actually see every detail? or do they simply know it exists? How does that difference affect the artist, the scientist?

3. Can you identify bird species by means of their songs? What local bird songs do you know?

4. What flow patterns do you observe in flowing water?

5. Find a map of the Western U.S. and follow the course of the Colorado River from the high

Rockies of Colorado to the outlet at Gulf of California. Name the types of ecosystems the water flows through on its journey. What are the political ramifications between states and with Mexico? What are the biological ramifications?

6. The artist experienced two realities, the material and the spiritual. Has that ever happened to you? What insights did you gain?

Chapter 11. Colorado Plateau. Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Great Sand Dunes.

1. Where do you go to see fall colors? Can you find painterly names for the many hues?
2. Describe the flow patterns that the artist found on the dunes. Where can you locate flow patterns in your environment?
3. Consider the Art Principles of economy/limitation. Do you ever use that in your daily life?
4. What is the history of the San Luis Valley area? Who was there first? What early explorers came into the valley?
5. What is a foreshadow? Have you ever seen one?
6. Do you agree that beauty surpasses knowledge?

Chapter 12.

1. When the family turns around and heads for home, the artist notices the landscape colors are changing. What happens to fall colors? Are winter colors bright? Muted? Are sunset/sunrise colors different in the wintertime?
2. Pull out a Southwest map and follow the zigzag drive the family followed. Can you name the topographical areas, the biomes they drive through? How does the plant cover change from place to place? Why?
3. The artist enjoys a special day along the Virgin River in Zion Canyon. What does she see there? Can you name painting techniques that make a painting expressive?
4. Can everything in the natural world be explained through scientific investigation? Is there something more? If so, how can it be explained?
5. How would you share the stunning vistas, the beauty, grandeur, and overwhelming sensations of such an experience?

Chapter 13. Southwest. Death Valley National Park.

1. What's a rain shadow? How does it work?
2. What are the hazards of a dust storm? Are there any benefits?
3. If you decided to draw or paint, what media would you use?
4. Does anything grow in Death Valley? What? Where? When?
5. Describe the night sky in the desert. What's the appeal? Which is stronger, light or dark?

Chapter 14. Southwest. Organ Pipe National Monument. Tucson.

1. What makes Organ Pipe N.M. a botanical transition area? How is that a metaphor for life?
2. Do you have strong visual memory? Photographic memory? Is it useful? How would you explain the "intuitive painting"?
3. The naturalist thinks life is a miracle. Do you? Why or why not?
4. How does perception work? What does it mean to change one's perception? Have you ever done that?
5. Father Eusebio Kino established the San Xavier mission in 1692. Why was he in the area?

Discuss the role of Spaniards in the New World.

Chapter 15. Southwest. Traveling north. Roosevelt Dam. Colorado Mountains.

1. Discuss the drive across the Roosevelt Dam. Have you ever been in a similar situation? What were the options, given the situation?
2. Discuss the artist's transition to a better drawing pen. Can that be thought of as a symbol of progress on her pilgrimage? How would you explain that.
3. Is *en plein air* sketching always done under perfect conditions? Would that stop you?
4. Have troublemakers ever infringed on your outdoor enjoyment? What did you do? How could you have avoided the situation?
5. Would an unexpected snowstorm on your vacation cause a celebration? Has it ever happened?
6. Do you agree with Albert Einstein's quote about his idea of God being in the details of an "incomprehensible universe" that revealed "the presence of a superior reasoning power"? Why or why not?

Chapter 16. Colorado Prairie. Old farm and confession.

1. Describe the plants and animals found on the old farm. How did they contribute to the ecosystem? Are today's mega-farms home to such an array of native animals and plants? Why or why not?
2. What is an organic farm? What is the significance? Is true organic farming possible in the 21st century?
3. What kind of spiritual witness does the natural world hold for the artist?
4. Has the artist's story changed the way you look at nature? Do you agree about the detail? Do you recognize the rhythms, patterns, balance, and harmonies in nature?
5. Are you ready to pick up pen, paintbrush, sketchbook, camera, journal, poetry notebook, or craft materials so that you can remember or express what you find in nature? What happens when you do?

Chapter 17. The Rocky Mountains. Ouray Fourth. Fishing camp. Woods Lake.

1. By this time in the story, the family has gained a great sense of "belonging" in the outdoors. Do you feel like you belong in nature? How can you develop such a familiarity?
2. The naturalist notes behavioral characteristics of animals he finds. Why is that important? Do animals have a story?
3. What is "inscape"? How does an artist notice the special reality of a given subject? Is it just a matter of focus?
4. What circle of influence does an aspen tree have? What does that mean?
5. Do you think the Creator loves the creation? Why or why not?

Chapter 18. The Rocky Mountains. Beaver Park.

1. Why did the author shift into poetry for this portion of the story?
2. Did the author's reflection give you any special insight into the possible role of nature?
3. Have you ever had such an experience of "otherness"? What was the result?
4. What was the plant cover at Beaver Park? Are such "parks" common in the Rockies?
5. Historically, what early travelers would find the open parks useful? In what way?

Chapter 19. Canyon Country. Bryce Canyon National Park.

1. The systems of Planet Earth function in dynamic equilibrium. What does that mean? Does that touch your life?
2. Do you agree that earth systems are more than the sum of their parts? Why or why not?
3. The artist/scientist connection begins at ground level observation. After diverse studies and drawing conclusions, does the art/science connection end up with the same understandings?
4. After traveling with the family on this 6-state odyssey, are you ready to try it yourself? Where would you go? What would do?
5. What conclusions does the artist draw about everything she has observed and experienced. Does she have resolutions for the future?
6. The spiritual connection includes epiphanies, “otherness”, and extrasensory perceptions, also called “sixth sense”. What does that mean to you? How else can we experience God? Who is God for you?

Final thoughts if you care to share:

1. After reading the book, do you see the outdoor world differently? Has it expanded your viewpoint? Changed your outlook? Your life focus?
2. Do you want to learn to draw? Paint? Photograph? Journal? Record nature sounds? Keep a bird list? Learn the native plants in your area? The geology? Other?
3. What was the overall impact of the book for you personally?
4. Did the story lead you to the radical activities of “seeing” and “hearing” outdoors more sounds, colors, and details than you did before?
5. Have you made any life-affirming resolutions as a result of the story?

Thank you for reading *The Road to Beaver Park*.

May it enhance and inform your world.

I wish you well on your own life pilgrimage.

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