

Discussion Questions

1. What major points does Hamlin Garland seek to make in *Main-Travelled Roads*?
2. Do you think Garland's own rural background gives his stories credibility?
3. How much does the meaning of the varied short stories in *Main-Travelled Roads* overlap?
4. How does Garland present rural life?
5. Which story makes Garland's point most clearly?
6. Which story is the most engaging?
7. Which story works least effectively?
8. Does Garland offer any suggestions for reform, either explicitly or implicitly?
9. Is Garland's work reinforced by anything else that you have read from the time period (Frank Norris, William Dean Howells, for instance)?
10. "A Branch Road" paints a depressing, but ultimately hopeful, picture of wounded pride, stubborn revenge, and ultimate redemption. In your opinion, has life in rural America changed much since the late 1880's, when the story is set?
11. In "Up the Coulee," a farmer who stays at home in a life of poverty, while his brother becomes a successful and well-paid actor in the East concludes that "life's a failure for ninety-nine percent of us." Is that too bleak a view of conditions on the prairie or just hard realism, in your opinion?
12. "Among the Corn Rows" impresses us with the hard work that prairie homesteads required of everyone, male and female alike, whether it was demanded by others or self-imposed. What kind of new life do you imagine Julia Peterson had with her new husband, Rob?
13. What do you think Garland was trying to do in his story "The Return of a Private"?
14. What do you think the message of "Under the Lion's Paw" is, and what do you think the story might reveal about Garland's political views?
15. "The Creamery Man" is a story about unrequited love and love on the rebound. Part of the dynamics relates to the influence of ethnic background upon what we might call

the “marriage market.” How, in general, would you compare and contrast today’s courting and marriage patterns with those described in the story?

16. What does “A Day’s Pleasure” have to say about gender relations and class divisions on the prairie frontier?
17. “Mrs. Ripley’s Trip” is revealing about gender relations, marital communication (or the lack thereof), geographical mobility, and the aging process during the late nineteenth century.” Comment.
18. “Uncle Ethan Ripley” relates a story about people being suckered into doing things they really don’t want to do. Does the story have contemporary relevance?
19. After many stories describing the harshness, drudgery, and financial insecurity of rural existence, “God’s Ravens” depicts a Chicago man who wants to ditch city life for a nostalgic return to the country living of his boyhood. What does this story tell us about farm life, city life, and life in general?
20. “A Good Fellow’s Wife” is a tale of a man’s fall and redemption, but, more poignantly, it is a story of a woman’s strength, assertiveness, and ultimate triumph. To what extent do you think the story constitutes a manifesto for feminism?

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<http://library.sd.gov/PROG/sdbookbag/index.aspx>