

Discussion Questions

1. Have you traveled through the region of South Dakota described in this book? Were any of Manfred's descriptions familiar to you? How have things changed in the area since 1934, in your opinion?
2. What descriptions of the weather and the environment in the book do you find the most interesting or surprising?
3. How do you assess Manfred's style of writing? What do you like best or least about it?
4. Are the main characters in the book believable — Maury, Kirsten, Pa, Ma, Ol' Gust?
5. Who are you most inclined to identify with — roamers and seekers after freedom like Maury, stayers and seekers after roots like the Thors, or people whose main purpose in life is to have babies like Kirsten?
6. How do you respond to Kirsten as a person? What kind of person is she? Are her motives and actions understandable and laudable?
7. How about Maury? Is he an admirable character? Or is that the right question to ask about him?
8. How about Pa and Ma Thor? Are their characters fully developed? Do you know people like them?
9. How have people changed since the 1930's?
10. Describe economic and environmental conditions in 1934-1935, as discussed in *The Golden Bowl*.
11. How is the land depicted in the book? What role does it play in people's lives?
12. The author indicates that the Thors are church people, but we don't hear much about their religion because the church is gone now. Is there much to indicate in the book that they are indeed church people, or what their politics are, or what their social views are, or who their friends are, or what their role in the community is? Or are all of these dimensions necessary or relevant to the story?
13. Four episodes provide opportunities for Maury to learn more about himself and obtain a deeper understanding of life: (a) his descent into the well to retrieve the dropped wrench; (b) his encounter with the rattlesnake; (c) his viewing of the amazing sights in

the Badlands; (d) his interactions with the hoboes around the fire in the hobo jungle. What did he learn or how did he change because of these events?

14. Was Maury's dream of freedom realistic? Was his decision to go back to the Thors and Kirsten correct? Do you think he found happiness?
15. Does a story about the "Dirty Thirties" and the depressed economic conditions of the decade that largely leaves out societal and governmental efforts to respond to and ameliorate these conditions provide a full or accurate picture of reality? In other words, is there enough historical context provided in this story?
16. Maury keeps thinking the Thors are crazy to live in the area during the dust storms until he goes back to join them. Were they crazy? Was he?
17. Lots of song lyrics are recorded in the text. What do they add to the story?
18. The author took the book's title from Ecclesiastes 12:6. The notion of a "golden bowl" is obviously a play on words of "dust bowl." Manfred has Pa Thor say, "Son, when I look out that winder there, I kin see this land as it's been. They say it's a dust bowl now, an' maybe it is. But I can close my eyes and see the golden bowl it's been This land ain't empty for me. It's the only land I know. It's been full a gold before an' it'll be full a gold again. I know." Is this typical South Dakota talk? How do you respond to this attitude of optimism and hope?

Note: Information was attained from one of the South Dakota Book Bag Study Guides (a project supported with funding from the South Dakota Humanities Council).

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