

The Searchers Study Guide



1. **Listen** to the lyrics that are sung by Stan Jones in the opening number that is played with the opening credits. Some of the lyrics include, “What makes a man to wander? / What makes a man to roam? / What makes a man leave bed and board / And turn his back on home? / Ride away, ride away, ride away.” How do these lyrics underscore the central theme of the movie? **Answer this question at the end of the movie.**

2. When Ethan kisses Martha, Aaron’s wife and Ethan’s sister-in-law, she closes her eyes. What does this look and moment suggest to you? How would you characterize their relationship?

3. How does Ethan treat Aaron’s adopted son, Marty, who is part-Cherokee? What does this tell you about Ethan’s prejudices?

4. We learn that Ethan served in the Confederate army in the Civil War and that Ethan never relinquished his Confederate cloak or saber. He even says, “I don’t believe in surrenders.” What does this statement tell you about Ethan’s character?

5. What moments and/or cinematic techniques foreshadow the Comanche attack? How does the afternoon sky’s color symbolize what will happen soon?

6. The pre-massacre scene reveals Chief Scar standing over a frightened Debbie who is crouched by a family grave. How does the grave explain Ethan’s hatred of the Indians? Who died?

7. Does Ethan seem interested in rescuing the girls or getting revenge? Why?

8. Why does the rescue party diminish to just Ethan, Marty, and Brad?

9. What does Ethan find in the canyon when he goes off by himself? What happened to Lucy?

10. How does Brad, Lucy's boyfriend, react to this news? What happens to him, or what do you assume happens to him?

11. In your opinion, is Brad's action foolish, noble, etc.? Why?

12. Why does Marty leave Laurie, who clearly likes him (and he likes her, too), to return to Ethan to find Debbie? Ethan tells Marty that Marty's "no kin to [Debbie]." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

13. What information is revealed in the "letter scene" (the letter Marty sends to Laurie when Charlie comes to court Laurie)? How much time has passed? What's happened?

14. What has happened to Debbie when Ethan finally sees her after five long years? What does she say? How does Ethan react to this news? How does she change when Marty arrives at her tent later?

15. When Ethan is wounded with an arrow in battle, Marty prepares to open the wound up to suck out the poison. What is the poison a metaphor for, and what does this metaphor mean?

16. What information does Ethan share with Marty about Marty's mother? How does this information show a connection between Ethan and Marty?

17. Study the closing shot of the film. It mirrors the first shot of the film, which showed a silhouetted Martha from the inside of the cabin. Why is Ethan outside of the cabin out in the West?

18. Is The Searchers a great western based on the conventions of its genre? Why or why not?

