

## ***Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger**

As we read *Peace Like a River*, we will be analyzing each chapter. We will look at everything from the chapter titles to the motifs and themes. Like any great novel there is more to the story than just the plot. One aspect that adds depth to this novel is the allusions – historical, literary, and biblical – that Enger has used. We will research some of these allusions as we read. Another quality of this novel that I really enjoy is its poetic nature. The word choice and phrasing are outstanding. We will so some work with vocabulary as well. This story neatly ties together several of the themes and ideas we have been working with thus far: coming of age, loss of innocence, the hero's journey, justice and morality. As opposed to most of the literature we have studied this year, this book was published in this century! 2001 to be exact. That being stated, the story mostly takes place in the early 60's.

### **Setting**

1951, 1961-62, present day. Most of the story is set in the early 60's. What associations do we make to this time period?

### **Literary Terms**

Allusion-

Heroic verse-

Irony-

Motif-

Theme-

### **Other:**

The Wild West-

Frontier justice-

Romanticism-

Miracles-

Heroism-

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## **Chapter Study**

### **Ch 1 Clay p1**

Why this title?

#### **Allusions:**

Lazarus-

Creation and Adam-

Clay boy-

What types of connotations do these allusions have?

What do these allusions add to the story? Why does Enger include them?

#### **Great quotes:**

"Here is what I saw. Here is how it went. Make of it what you will."

"We and the world, my children, will always be at war. Retreat is impossible. Arm yourselves."

Both of these quotes introduce motifs. What might they be?

### **Ch 2 His Separate Shadow p5**

Why this title?

#### **Vocabulary:**

Mottled p9

Jaundiced p9

Desperado p11

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Heretic p18

**Allusions:**

Natty Bumppo/Mr. Fennimore p8

Cagney p11

Dust Bowl p15

**Miracles:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Reuben's dreams:**

- 1.
- 2.

**Great quote:**

"Not confidence – I understand confidence. What Davy had was knowledge."

What does this quote tell us about Davy?

**Two study questions:**

- 1.
- 2.

**Ch 3 Beauteous Are My Cakes Indeed p19**

Why this title?

**Vocabulary:**

Bellows p20

Escalation p22

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Benevolence p23

Incandescent p24

Melancholy p24

Exorbitant p26

Atrophied p28

Abatement p30

Egregious p30

Congenital p30

**Allusions:**

Helen of Troy p22

Zane Grey p26

Gabriel p29

Kipling's jungle beasts p31

Armageddon p31

What is the subject of Swede's poem? Who are the characters? What is the setting? What is the conflict?

How is her poem connected to the Land's situation?

**Great quotes:**

"What those fellows don't realize is, we've already won. The victory is ours."

"So thoughtlessly we sling on our destinies."

Consider their respective contexts. Why do you think these are important quotes?

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Two study questions for chapter 3:

- 1.
- 2.

#### **Ch 4 Your Toughened Heart p34**

Why this title?

#### **Vocabulary:**

Innocuous p35

Admonition p36

Feigned p37

Quixotically p39

Aggrieved p40

Indulgent p42

Bellicose p43

Proficient p45

#### **Allusions:**

Milton p35

John Calvin p40

"Let them eat cake" p42

Airstream trailer p42

What are Swede's 3 birthday presents? Who gives each one?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How are the 3 gifts connected?

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Miracles:

4.

5.

**Great quotes:**

“Be careful whom you choose to hate.”

To whom is he referring? Why does Reuben say this?

“How many times does a dog have to bite before you put him down?”

“You think God looks out for us?”

“Well, yeah,” I said.

And Davy asked, “You want Him to?”

Consider the last two excerpts. What insight do they lend towards Davy’s attitude?

How are they foreshadowing the events at the end of the chapter?

**Point of View:**

The story is told as a first-person narrative but from two different perspectives. One is Reuben as an adult and the other is Reuben as an eleven-year-old. Why the two different perspectives?

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## **Ch 5 Peeking at Eternity p51**

Why this title?

### **Vocabulary:**

Redemptive p51

Narcosis p51

Vindictiveness p59

Intractable p69

### **Allusions:**

John Donne p52

Melville p52

Robert Louis Stevenson p52

Homeric p55 (Homer)

Job p59 (Old Testament)

Zorro p68

Swede is having difficulty with her poem. What is she trying to do? Why can't she do it? What is the connection to the Land's situation at present?

Why does Reuben's mom abandon them?

### **Great Quotes:**

"...they just reasoned Dad was due some grief. That a man like him couldn't be exactly what he seemed. Perhaps it relieved their anxious souls that the clock ran against Jeremiah Land as it ran against them all."

Why does Reuben think the townspeople are relieved to see something bad happen to Jeremiah?

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“They wrote letters as if compelled by nature; as if Davy embodied whatever it was they’d thought long-lost and wanted back.”

What do these writers feel is long-lost? What does Davy embody?

Two study questions:

1.

2.

### **Ch 6 When Sorrows Like Sea Billows Roll p70**

Why this title?

#### **Vocabulary:**

Hackneyed p70

Maudlin p70

Asinine p70

Mawkishness p71

Privation p75

Aghast p76

#### **Allusions:**

Battle of Hastings p73

Mr. Hyde p79

How does the “A Victim’s Story” change the perception of Davy and the murders?

Why does Mr. Holgren fire Jeremiah? Go deeper than what Holgren says.

Why is Reuben so troubled by his father’s kind miracle concerning Mr. Holgren? What is the injustice as far as Reuben is concerned?



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Two study questions:

- 1.
- 2.

## **Ch 7 Late in the Night When the Fires are Out p81**

Why this title?

### **Vocabulary:**

Redaction p83

Salient p84

Austerity p85

Maligned p85

Extant p85

Ague p85

Hauteur p89

Belligerence p92

### **Allusions:**

War at Sea (game) p82

Daniel Webster, the Devil, and Jabez Stone p83

Why does Reuben agree to break Davy out of jail?

Great quotes:

“Pride is the rope God allows us all.”

Why does Reuben say this? How has pride gotten then better of him?

“Humility came to me too late. I’m a living proverb; learn from me.”

How does Reuben learn humility?

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Two study questions:

- 1.
- 2.

### **Ch 8 A Boy on a Horse p94**

Why this title?

#### **Vocabulary:**

Onus p94

Repugnant p95

Fortuitous p100

Preposterous p101

Indignant p105

#### **Allusions:**

Mickey Spillane p97

Jesse James p102

Billy the Kid p102

Ninety-first psalm p103

Swede has added a twist to her poem. What is the subject of her poem in chapter 8? Why? What is happening with Valdez?

How has public opinion changed, again, toward Davy? What is the tone of Aaron Groap's article?

Two study questions:

- 1.
- 2.

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## **Ch 9 By the Grace of Lurvy p108**

Why this title?

### **Vocabulary:**

Edifice

Ravenous

Exsiccated

### **Allusions:**

Spartacus (p109)

Ludwig Beethoven (p111)

Davy Crockett (117)

Little Women (p123)

Two study questions:

1.

2.

## **Ch 10 The Substance of Things Hoped For p129**

Why this title?

### **Vocabulary:**

Procure p130

Putrescent p130

Perilous p132

Torpid p134

### **Allusion:**

Allis Chalmers p134

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**Great Quote:**

“Was it possible that real loss had occurred at the death of Israel Finch? That real grief had been felt?”

Why is it that Reuben had never really contemplated this idea before?

Two study questions:

- 1.
- 2.

**Ch 11 The Last Thing He Would Do p135**

Why this title?

**Vocabulary:**

Indulgently p137

Tenuous p143

Prodigious p147

**Allusions:**

Hawkeye and Uncas p138

Huckleberry Finn p138

What might be implied by Davy laughing twice in his sleep?

**Great quote:**

“And this, Swede said, brought a great smile to Davy’s face, and in that smile the Shultzes saw the truth, that turning himself in would be the very last thing Davy would do in his life, however long it lasted.”

What is it about “offering himself up to justice” that Davy finds distasteful? How do we know this?

Two study questions:

- 1.
- 2.

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## **Ch 12 At War with This Whole World p149**

Why this title?

### **Vocabulary:**

Maudlin p149

Fastidious p154

Disdain p154

Glean p158

Describe the Badlands –

Why do you think Enger chose this setting?

Swede asks Reuben, “Do you still want him to come home if he has to be in jail?” Reuben thinks that he doesn’t want to answer for fear of the outcome of honest speech. What do you think Reuben wants?

## **Ch 13 Something Warm p167**

Why this title?

### **Allusions: Explain fully why each one is included in this chapter.**

Moses p 167

Jonah p 168

Daniel p 169

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**Great Quotes:**

“But we’re fearful people, the best of us. We see a newborn moth unwrapping itself and announce, Look children, a miracle! But let an irreversible wound be knit back to seamless? We won’t even see it, though we look at it every day.”

What does this quote say about human nature? About Swede and Reuben?

**Ch 14 The Skin Bag p180**

**Why this title?**

**Vocabulary:**

1. Callous
2. Providence
4. Auspicious

**Great Quote:**

“Though she hadn’t seemed so[beautiful] to me a week before, when she turned and faced us I was confused by her beauty and could only scratch and look down at my shoetops, as the dumbfounded have done through the centuries.”

What is happening to Reuben here? And to Swede? Why the change?

**Ch 15 Under the Gibbon Moon p197**

**Why this title?**

**Vocabulary:**

1. Flummoxed
2. Spookism

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### 3. Forthrightness

#### **Great Quotes:**

“Were Dad’s heart my tablet I’d have taken it up and erased Davy’s name, so terribly did I wish to stay...”

Why does Reuben want to stay at Roxanna’s?

“For I found that I didn’t hate Andreeson anymore; I feared him, not knowing why, and can testify to you that this was worse.”

Why is this worse? What has changed in Reuben’s understanding of Mr. Andreeson?

### **Ch 16 The Throbbing Heart of News p205**

Why this title?

#### **Vocabulary:**

1. Spontaneous
2. Stupendous
3. Sulferish
4. Grievance

#### **Great Quotes:**

“This man is in some trouble. Real trouble.”

What is Davy implying about his own situation from this quote?

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“Well – wouldn’t you agree exclusivity is the throbbing heart of news? Who else in the world knew the real ending to that story?”

How does this connect to Reuben? Yes, he is speaking of Jonas, but there is another connection here!

*“Make me willing if you can, Dad cried, a challenge it still shakes me to think of.”*

To whom is Jeremiah speaking? Why? Willing to do what?

These hills aren’t for wandering on foot. Come look at these prints...notice, boy, he didn’t even eat. He kills for sport. ... Probably’s watching us, even now.”

What might the stupendous wolf represent? Any other wolf images you can recall from earlier???



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Ch 17 The Little Man's Country p223

Ch 18 Winning Her Hand p239

Ch 19 Boy Ready p256

Ch 20 The Ledger of Our Decisions p275

Ch 21 The Red Farm p288

Ch 22 Be Jubilant, My Feet p300

Ch 23 The Curious Music That I Hear p305