



BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

Crazy Horse (Second Edition)

The Strange Man of the Oglalas

By Mari Sandoz

With an introduction by Vine Deloria Jr.

The following questions are provided to help prompt discussion and further thinking about *Crazy Horse*.

—Choose one or two of the defining events in Crazy Horse’s life, and explain their importance. Similarly, select one or more of his significant relationships, and explain their influence on him or his life.

—The term “medicine” seems to connote a wide range of meanings. We are often told that Crazy Horse has “strong medicine.” Others also are described as having strong or weak medicine. Furthermore, medicine men may confer medicine, as the Cheyenne medicine man does on the warriors before their battle with the cavalry. From the various ways in which it is used, what do you think “medicine” means?

—What were Crazy Horse’s visions, and how do they inspire or guide him?

—The Mormon cow incident occurs early in the book and seems to encapsulate many of the themes of Indian–white coexistence as well as the confrontations to come. How do its causes, attempts at resolution, misunderstandings, disagreements amongst the Indian chiefs and leaders, and/or eventual outcomes foretell the nature and outcomes of the many conflicts to come?

—The lack of consensus and unified leadership evidenced amongst the Lakotas reflects both the reality of political rivalries and Lakota cultural notions of leadership (the assent of the followers is voluntary and thus potentially temporary). In what respects do you feel the Lakota understanding of leadership is a benefit or a liability to them?

—From the beginning of *Crazy Horse*, some of the Indians favor peace with the whites, and the number increases as the book progresses. What are some of the different types of reasons given for peaceful coexistence, and what underlying motives, positive or negative, are they founded upon?

—Do the book’s depictions of other great, well-known Indian leaders, such as Red Cloud and Sitting Bull, confirm, contradict, or simply supplement your previous knowledge of them?

-- How do the final few chapters of the book illustrate both the great power and great vulnerability of Crazy Horse?

—There are many vivid depictions of the Indian camps during both good and bad times, conveying their way of life, customs and rituals, the impact of white goods and encroachment, and contrasts between old agrarian ways of life and the hunting lifestyle the Plains Indians had practiced for several generations by Crazy Horse's lifetime. What aspect(s) of this picture do you find particularly memorable or interesting?

—“The parfleches were full” or “the parfleches were empty” are statements repeated throughout the book, succinctly indicating prosperity or want in a Lakota village. How would you phrase a major indicator of economic or social well being in contemporary U.S. society at the national, state, local, neighborhood, or family level?

—How are the battles with enemy Indian groups, such as the Crows, different than the battles with the whites?

—Lakota women “keen,” sing “strong-heart songs,” and, after the “unshirting” of Crazy Horse, mock the decision in song. What are some of the different functions women's singing serves?

—How would you describe the cultural and domestic roles of, and relationships between, men and women in the Lakota groups? What differences in women's roles fascinate Crazy Horse during his visit to the Cheyennes?

—At the conclusion of her “Foreword” to *Crazy Horse*, Sandoz comments on the language of the book: “I have used the simplest words possible, hoping by idiom and figures and the underlying rhythm pattern to say some of the things of the Indian for which there are no white-man words, suggest something of his innate nature, something of his relationship to the earth and the sky and all that is between.” Do you feel Sandoz uses language effectively to paint a vivid picture of the Indians? What examples did you find particularly powerful in suggesting the mindset or depicting the way of life of the Indians?

—In the “Bibliography” at the back of the book, Sandoz lists the unpublished sources she consulted while writing the book. The top section consists of her own interviews with Oglalas that knew Crazy Horse, followed by the Ricker Collection interviews, which include a small number of Indian interviews conducted by various people. As you look through these lists, what other Indians mentioned in the book but missing here do you think would've been able to contribute valuable perspectives to the picture Sandoz has painted of Crazy Horse and the events of the book?