



One of Ours Discussion Questions

1. Cather scholar Blanche Gelfant writes, “*One of Ours* has always troubled Willa Cather’s critics, who have either dismissed the novel, disparaged it, or discussed its ‘deficiencies within a generic framework...Described variously as a war novel, a naturalistic novel, a social satire, or an Arthurian legend, it is either extraordinarily complex, conflating and transcending literary genres, or else inchoate--a troubled text seeking a form for its completion.” What do you take from this novel? What is it actually about?
2. Many people talk about Cather’s “Prairie Trilogy,” which they consider to be her Nebraska novels--*O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *The Song of the Lark*. How do you see this novel? Is it a Nebraska novel? Can it be a Nebraska novel if much of it is set elsewhere? Similarly, does Cather’s life on the East Coast for most of her adult life change how we view her “Nebraska novels?”
3. Enid is a character that many readers respond to--in various ways. What struck you most about Cather’s portrayal of Enid? How does Enid compare to some of Cather’s other female characters? What about Mahailey--how is her character meant to function in the novel? What does she give a reader or tell a reader that they do not get elsewhere in the novel?
4. When we think back on the historical context of this novel (both the time during which it was set and the time during which it was written), what surprised you about this novel? For a novel set during World War I, did your expectations differ from what Cather delivered? How does Cather’s novel reflect the average American’s experience of the war?
5. American identity is a common theme in many of Cather’s writings, including essays such as “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle” and “Roll Call on the Prairies,” as well as the opening of *A Lost Lady*, “The Hired Girls” in *My Ántonia*, and the entirety of *O Pioneers!*. What does Cather feel about what it means to be an American? What it means to be an immigrant? The value of American culture?
6. What role does environment play in *One of Ours*? Cather’s attention to Nebraska land and landscape in novels such as *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* arguably leans toward reverence, but what is its importance in this book, when in many instances Claude is antagonistic toward Nebraska (and the farm, etc.)?
7. *One of Ours* also gives us an important opportunity to talk about the similarities and differences between autobiographical matter and Cather’s fictional characterizations. How much weight do you as a reader give to an author’s autobiography and how it impacts a story? Do you read purely for the story?