



Discussion Questions

Crossing to Safety by Wallace Stegner

Source: Madison Public Library

1. How has Madison changed since the 1930s? Was Stegner's Madison recognizable to you? If not, do you attribute that to the passage of time or the role of the city in the characters' lives? If so, did you find yourself focused on our town's streets and landmarks to the detriment of plot and character, or was it an enhancement?
2. Have you ever had friends as generous as Sid and Charity Lang? How did Stegner write the pairs of characters so that we would believe Larry and Sally could accept the Langs repeated gifts without inducing shame and guilt?
3. Discuss the role of wives in the book. Have wives, especially faculty wives, changed since the 1930s?
4. Larry ruminates on the basis of their friendship with the Langs when they flatter him on his writing, asking on page 18: "Do we respond only to people who seem to find us interesting?" and "Can I think of anyone in my whole life whom I have liked without his first showing signs of liking me?" How do you respond to Larry's questions?
5. How did you react to Charity's personality? Did you see her as controlling? Did you like her?
6. Stegner is a known environmentalist. Did his descriptions of Battell Pond and its environs show that? What feelings were evoked by his descriptions of their summers there?
7. Compare the ways each of the women dealt with their illness. Did either Charity or Sally change their personal style as a result of their illness? Is that as you would've expected?

8. Larry explains his idea of novelists on page 194: "They invent only plots they can resolve. They ask the questions they can answer." How does this inform the richness of these characters and their plights? Do you believe Larry? Is that really Stegner talking? Why or why not?