Outlawed

By Anna North

1. Discuss how Ada’s faith impacts her journey. How does she balance her commitments to both faith and science? How does Ada use faith to survive?
2. Rejected from their communities, the members of the Hole in the Wall Gang create a world where conventional gender roles are obsolete. In your opinion, what can their community teach us about gender?
3. The Kid is full of contradictions: a leader and an outcast, a preacher and a dissenter, an asset and a liability. How do you understand the Kid’s place in the novel? What does the Kid represent?
4. As she deliberates being captured, Ada asks Sheriff Branch how he can participate in a system that punishes the innocent. In what ways does scapegoating still exist in our own systems of justice and punishment?
5. How does Ada’s search for medical answers mirror her journey towards self-acceptance? By the end of the novel, do you believe that Ada has conquered her fear of herself?
6. In the traditionally male canon of Westerns, Ada is an outlier. She is not a stereotypical wife nor is she a classic cowboy. In your opinion, what is the author attempting to teach readers by setting Ada in this time period?
7. Ada’s two marriages could not have been more different. Her first was voluntary and joyous, but contingent on her fertility. Her second was an excuse to escape captivity, and yet it was intimate and loving. What stood out to you?
8. Rejected by her community and severed from her family, Ada struggles to find purpose in her life. If Ada had been a mother, do you think she could have returned, knowing that her community had turned her away? Discuss how Ada comes to redefine her understanding of a meaningful life. Have you ever had to do the same?
9. What are the many ways in which women are persecuted throughout the novel, and how do they adapt to their circumstances? The sheriff of Fiddleback said, “When people came to cast their stones and shoes and whatnot at Caroline, the women were twice as savage as the men. If it weren’t for the women, she might have survived” (177). Does this surprise you?
10. Ada risks everything for the chance to meet Mrs. Schaeffer, and yet, when she arrives, the center is abandoned. Ada resurrects the laboratory and begins her new life as a physician and advocate. Discuss your reactions to the novel’s ending. Sitting in jail, she exclaims, “How can I not hate what I am, if this is what it’s brought me?” (184). In your opinion, does Ada finish the novel with a change of heart?