



SUTTER'S CROSS – DISCUSSION GUIDE *by Dale Cramer*

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1. Sutter's Cross, the town, though beautiful, is built on a legacy of suffering and pain. Think on how the natural beauty acts as a facade for some of the problems in the town. Also discuss how others in the book (a family, a church, a business) mask their problems with a good front. Keep in mind the town is named for a cross as a monument erected in honor of the founder's son, whom he had lost.
2. Jake Mahaffey serves an interesting role in the book, partly as protagonist, but more frequently as an observer. Discuss Jake's life and what he learns through his interactions with his wife, with Web, and particularly with Harley.
3. Web Holcombe's motto for life comes from his time soaring in a glider. He defines it as, "Understand your environment and the laws of its movement, know your limitations and your strengths, command your ship and yourself, and you can soar higher, faster, farther than the next man." Explain why it's so disconcerting for Web to lose control like he does with his glider.
4. "Land," "nature," and "home" are three very important concepts in the book. Web Holcombe stands on one extreme of the spectrum, while the people he is trying to buy out, including Agnes Dewberry, stand on the other. Harley accuses Web of being "wrong" in trying to buy Agnes's land. Is he? What is the "right" way to be in connection to the earth?
5. Web's story is one, particularly, of fathers and sons. Discuss his relationship with Will Holcombe as a son and his relationship with Eddy as a father. How is he making some of the same mistakes his father did? Why would a son with a moral father turn out so antagonistic both to religion and morality?

6. Discuss Harley, his conversion experience and his faith. Contrast this with the faith exhibited by Orde Wingo, for example, or others in the story. What are the similarities and differences?
7. Benny T, the ponytailed "enforcer," has a theory that if you find a person's name, you can find a person's past. And if you find a man's past, you can own that man. What in each of the characters' pasts could be used to own them? How can you not let the past own you?
8. Discuss the various signs used by the church in their marketing. Why is there such bitter humor in its message? Discuss the role the sign plays in the novel's climax and why the church bears such a burden for how it presents itself to the world. How does the sign work as a symbol in terms of motive, appearances, and the idea of communicating an accurate representation of Christ? How would you describe the link here between motive and appearance?
9. How do Marcus and Eddy differ as children? What does Marcus teach Eddy? What does Eddy teach Marcus?
10. The storm that hammers Sutter's Cross becomes a turning point for most of the characters. What is it that the storms of life often cause so many life changes?
11. What do you think "*We are the arms of God*" means to each of the main characters in the book?



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