

STUDY QUESTIONS

"IF THE CREEK DON'T RISE," BY RITA WILLIAMS

1. How does the relationship between personality and history play itself out in the character of Rita? -- In the character of Daisy?
2. How does setting shape character and vice versa? Which seems to have the upper hand?
3. How does Daisy's marriage to the Civil War soldier, and the subsequent loss of his hard-won ranch, play itself out in the lives of Rita and Daisy?
4. How is Strawberry Park itself a major character in *If the Creek Don't Rise*?
5. How is Perry Mansfield a major character?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Rita's narration? Is she able to maintain clarity and candor throughout her chronicling of events? What gets in the way? Is she as forthcoming in portraying herself as she is in discussing others? Why or why not? How would the novel differ if told from the perspective of Daisy, the Grandmother, the townspeople, the ranchers, America – the African American cook who comes to Perry Mansfield?
7. What remains a mystery despite the author's scrutiny?
8. What are the most tragic elements of *If the Creek Don't Rise*? Which of these elements are rooted in the exercise of an individual's will, and which seem attributable to something beyond the scope of human volition? Where does the memoir ultimately situate itself in the enduring fate v. free will debate?
9. Which of the issues explored in *If the Creek Don't Rise* are unique to rural life in America? Which resonate regardless of geography? What does the memoir reveal about variations and consistencies in the so-called American character?
10. In what ways are the absence of Rita's mother and father a constant presence in this memoir? How does Rita fill that loss?
11. What is the impact of race on the life of Rita? Her aunt? Her family? The community?