

TRUE GRIT Discussion Questions

1. **TRUE GRIT** is set only a few years after the end of the Civil War. How does **TRUE GRIT** depict the society and morals of postbellum America? How did Portis' portrayal of the 1870s South meet or defy your expectations for the period? Where do you see traces of the war in the characters' actions?
2. Many of the characters in **TRUE GRIT** share a love of action and a desire to be out on the unsettled plains, away from the confines of polite society. How does this wanderlust manifest itself in each character? Is Mattie more comfortable away from civilized society?
3. The role of women in society has changed considerably since the original publication of **TRUE GRIT**. To what extent is this foreshadowed in the role of Mattie? Or is it irrelevant that Mattie is a girl? Would the novel have been different if "Mattie" was a nickname for Matthew? If so, how?
4. Mattie has a direct and unflinching perspective, but her upbringing has also left her somewhat sheltered and naïve. What kind of girl is Mattie? How does Mattie's worldview influence the unfolding of events? What about her voice and actions convinces you that she is fourteen years old? Is this a coming-of-age novel?
5. Mattie has an absolute sense of right and wrong that is deeply influenced by her religious upbringing. Is Mattie's "eye for an eye" approach to her revenge on Chaney justified? Are her methods sound? Does **TRUE GRIT** treat Chaney's death as a victory?
6. Rooster first appears in the novel in the transcript of his witness testimony in the trial against Odus Wharton. Did this form of introduction influence your perceptions of him? How so? What are the benefits and drawbacks of presenting a character this way?
7. Rooster, Mattie, and Chaney are quite the unlikely team. Why does Mattie choose to trust Rooster, and vice versa? How does their dynamic help and/or hurt her quest to avenge her father's death?
8. In Mattie's world, what is the meaning of "true grit?" Does "grit" refer to courage, to dirt, to having a slightly rougher side? Who in the novel has this trait? Who lacks it? Is having "true grit" necessarily positive?
9. Money is a recurring element throughout **TRUE GRIT** and a motivating factor for almost all the characters. Mattie in particular has a fixation on money; she takes note of all her expenditures, even shipping costs. What role does money play in the novel? How do Mattie's allies and enemies agree and differ in their attitudes about money?
10. **TRUE GRIT** is, in many ways, a classic adventure story of outlaws, justice, and a quest for revenge. How does Portis portray the journey? Is it a romantic vision of a girl out for justice? How does Mattie resemble an archetypal adventure heroine? How does she differ? How do Rooster and LaBoeuf resemble adventure heroes, and how do they differ?
11. There is a great deal of fighting and bloodshed in **TRUE GRIT**. Did Mattie's reaction to the violence surprise you? How does the prevalence of violence in the book reflect the time period and attitudes of the characters?

12. Mattie is telling her story from a much older perspective. How does she feel about her younger self? Did Mattie's future turn out as you expected it would? How is she changed from her fourteen-year-old self? How is she the same?

13. **TRUE GRIT** has often been compared to Huckleberry Finn. Both books are set in a westward expanding America, and the protagonists of both represent the opposite of established and establishment thinking. Does this raise issues or provide a jumping-off point to discuss adolescents and a coming of age in America? How so?