News of the World

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAULETTE JILES

Born in Salem, Missouri, Paulette Jiles grew up in the American Midwest and studied Romance languages at the University of Missouri. After graduating, she moved to Canada and worked as a journalist for eight years before making her first foray into poetry. Jiles first gained literary acclaim with her poetry collection *Celestial Navigation*, which won Canada's most prestigious literary prize in 1984. Jiles went on to publish works across a variety of genres, from memoir to fiction, mostly set in the Midwest. Her novel *Enemy Women* (2002) won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and *News of the World* (2016) was a finalist for the National Book Award. After getting married, Jiles moved to Texas where she has lived intermittently since 1991. She currently lives outside a ranch outside San Antonio, and has several grandchildren.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The mid-19th century was a tumultuous time in Texas. The territory was part of the Spanish Empire from 1690 to 1821, when it became part of the newly independent Mexico. Hoping to spur development, the Mexican government encouraged emigration from the United States, with the result that white settlers soon vastly outnumbered Mexicans. In the 1830s, Mexican and Anglo Texans united to rebel against Mexico and establish the Republic of Texas; but the United States soon annexed the fledgling state, fighting a war Mexico (the Mexican-American War) to establish its dominance. Slavery was permitted in Texas, and it joined other Southern states in voting to secede from America in 1861. After losing the war, Texas underwent the process of Reconstruction, in which the federal government appointed local officials to "rehabilitate" the state, dissolve slavery, and ensure national loyalty. For various reasons, including federal corruption, local intransigence, and widespread racism, Reconstruction was a national failure. By 1876, the Texas government had re-segregated Texas schools and imposed poll taxes on African American citizens. Although the world that Captain Kidd and Johanna inhabit in *News of the World* is extremely ethnically heterogeneous, it's also characterized by inequality and violence.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Civil War and its aftermath, especially as it unfolded in the Midwest, has proven fertile literary ground for American writers. *Cold Mountain*, winner of the 1997 National Book Award, traces one Confederate soldier's journey home through dangerous territory. In Wallace Stegner's *Angle of Repose*, which won the 1972 Pulitzer Prize, a young family struggles to build a new life in the tumultuous, developing western states. These novels both explore the western frontier and its influence on American culture and national consciousness in the 19th century. Bret Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," set in 1850, also provides a glimpse of life on the dangerous, rough-and-tumble western frontier. The seminal novel about the Reconstruction Era (the period immediately following the Civil War, from 1865-1877) is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Discussing the slavery's lasting repercussions for formerly enslaved people, Beloved provides a perspective missing from many books about this period (including News of the World). Readers looking for a nonfiction introduction to Reconstruction should consult *A Short History of Reconstruction* by Eric Foner, leading expert in this period.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *News of the World*
- **When Written:** 2016
- **Where Written:** Texas
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Rural Texas
- **Climax:** Captain Kidd delivers Johanna to her aunt and uncle, Wilhelm and Anna.
- **Antagonist:** Almay, Wilhelm, Anna
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Multilingual. During her time as a Canadian journalist, Paulette Jiles traveled to rural areas of the country to set up radio services in indigenous languages. She became conversant in Anishinaabe and Inuktitut.

Animals for Sale. On her Texas ranch, Jiles grows produce and raises livestock, which she's happy to share around. As she says in a biographical statement for Amazon, "If you want a free donkey, please let her know."

PLOT SUMMARY

Set in the Texas backcountry, the novel begins in 1870, five years after the end of the Civil War. Captain Kidd is working as

an itinerant news-reader—traveling between isolated towns and giving public readings of national newspapers—when he's given an important task. His friend Britt Johnson, an African American freighter, has recently helped the U.S. military retrieve a young girl, Johanna, from the Kiowa Native American tribe, among whom she's been captive for 10 years. He charges Captain Kidd to return the 10-year-old (who has already tried to escape her supposed rescuers twice) to her family outside San Antonio, several hundred miles away. Even though he considers himself too old for such an arduous journey, Captain Kidd agrees to go.

Johanna speaks no English and has no memory of her life before the Kiowa. She's hostile and defensive towards the men taking care of her. The Captain employs a group of local prostitutes to wrestle her out of her Kiowa garments, rid her of lice, and force her into a dress. When they set out, Johanna is mute and seemingly indifferent to their destination. Captain Kidd doesn't try to coax her into happiness, but he does succeed in teaching her a few words in English—including her own name, which she pronounces "Chohenna."

As they drive, Captain Kidd mulls over his own life story. After growing up in Georgia, he volunteered as a teenager to fight in the War of 1812. After several people in his company are killed, he's promoted to captain, earning the nickname that has followed him since. Eventually, he works as a runner, ferrying messages from camp to camp through dangerous territory. He loves this work and is good at it, calling it his "true calling." When the war ends he apprentices for a printer and eventually moves to San Antonio to start his own printing shop. The town is primarily populated by Spanish settlers, one of whom, Maria Luisa, the Captain marries. They raise two daughters, Elizabeth and Olympia, in San Antonio.

When the Mexican-American War breaks out in the 1840s, the Captain manages communications for the American generals. Although he's a noncombatant, he's on the scene for several important and bloody battles. Sometime after the war, Maria Luisa dies and his daughters marry and start their own households. When the Civil War breaks out, both of their husbands fight for the Confederacy. Olympia's husband, Mason, dies, while Elizabeth's husband Emory loses an arm. Now they live in Georgia, but Captain Kidd hopes to reunite his family in San Antonio and reclaim some land that his deceased wife owned through her family.

Captain Kidd faces many challenges as he tries to help Johanna assimilate to the Anglo-American society in which she must now live. She's frightened by the noise and motion in even small towns and doesn't want to sleep indoors. In one town, Captain Kidd asks his friend Simon to watch over Johanna while he does a news reading. However, when Simon falls asleep Johanna runs to the river, where she sees a party of Kiowa riding horses on the other side. She calls out to them, begging for rescue, but they don't respond and the Captain has to drag her away.

In Durand, Captain Kidd employs a local woman he knows, Mrs. Gannet, to help Johanna get used to sleeping in a hotel room. While Johanna is upset and scared by the transition, Mrs. Gannet soothes her with comforting songs. The Captain admires her affectionate and unflappable nature, and even considers pursuing her romantically. But his plans are interrupted when a sinister human trafficker named Almay offers to "buy" Johanna, presumably to force her into prostitution, and threatens to seize her on the road if the Captain doesn't agree. Captain Kidd flees town with Johanna by night, but Almay and his two Native American henchmen catch up with them the next day. Captain Kidd is afraid that the younger men will outmatch him in the ensuing gunfight, but Johanna turns out to be a fierce and ingenious fighter, tipping boulders over onto their attackers and loading the gun with small coins when they run out of ammunition. The Captain kills Almay—but he refuses to let Johanna scalp the man in the Kiowa tradition.

While Captain Kidd has kept Johanna safe, the rest of the journey is far from easy. Many towns are completely anarchic, because the federal government has removed all Confederate officials without replacing them. Once, a group of cowboys demands a bribe in exchange for entrance to the town—but one of them, John Calley, repents his actions and later befriends the Captain at his reading. When the Captain reads of controversial issues, fistfights break out at his readings.

Meanwhile, Johanna struggles to adapt to her new life: once, she strips down to bath naked in the river, not knowing that this is considered inappropriate. A passing young woman scolds her harshly, causing Johanna to break down in tears. Another time, she steals several chickens from a local farm to eat for breakfast, not knowing that this will damage Captain Kidd's reputation. However, she seems content to travel with him and doesn't try to escape. Indeed, one night they glimpse a party of Kiowa raiders just outside their hidden campsite. Rather than calling out to join her tribe, Johanna remains quiet and watches them run into the distance. She also takes on responsibility for collecting money at the Captain's reading, sternly ensuring that everyone pays their due.

As they draw nearer to San Antonio, Johanna grows more anxious. Whenever Captain Kidd tries to explain that she's going to live with her aunt and uncle, she cries and asks to return to North Texas. When they finally reach Castroville, the town outside San Antonio where her remaining relatives live, the Captain takes Johanna to her parents' graves. She remains unmoved, simply asking again if they can leave the town. The Captain doesn't want to give her up, but he feels obligated to deliver her to her relatives.

Finally, Captain Kidd and Johanna arrive at the house of Wilhelm and Anna Leonberger, Johanna's biological aunt and uncle. Rather than welcoming their long-lost niece, they scrutinize the oddly dressed and silent girl with suspicion and

scorn. Both Wilhelm and Anna still grieve the deaths of Johanna's parents and younger sister, who were killed brutally in a Kiowa raid. They can't understand how Johanna has forgotten her early life and assimilated so completely into Kiowa culture. Moreover, they have no empathy for the many traumas she's endured, harshly correcting her Kiowa behavior and telling Captain Kidd that she will have to quickly learn their ways. Captain Kidd sense that these people will not give Johanna the care she needs, but he doesn't know what to do, so he leaves her there.

For the next couple days Captain Kidd stays in San Antonio, visiting his old print shop and scouting out potential places for his daughters to live if they ever return. One afternoon, he drives to Castroville to check on Johanna. When he arrives at dusk, he finds her struggling across the fields carrying heavy equipment for the horses; her hands and arms are covered in whip marks. Furious, the Captain bundles her into the wagon and rides away quickly, promising that no one will take her away again. Crying happy tears, Johanna calls him "Grandfather" in Kiowa and English.

For the next three years, Johanna and the Captain travel North Texas together. She helps with his news readings and he teaches her to read. She loves this itinerant lifestyle, but eventually Elizabeth and Olympia (the Captain's daughters) return from Georgia and they all settle in San Antonio. Johanna seems subdued and a little depressed, yearning for her early life. But one day John Calley, the cowboy they met on their original journey, comes to visit the Captain. He's immediately struck by Johanna's beauty and begins courting her. Two years later, they get married and she joins him in his work as a cattle herder, a life of rough travel and time spent in the outdoors. Finally seeing his young charge settled into a life she can enjoy, the Captain spends his old age creating a Kiowa dictionary and dies comfortably in his home two years later.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Captain Kidd – The novel's protagonist, Captain Kidd is an elderly and unsentimental man who makes his living as an itinerant news-reader in backcountry Texas. Born in rural Georgia, Captain Kidd fought as a teenager in the War of 1812 before moving to San Antonio and establishing himself as a printer. There, he meets and marries Maria Luisa, the scion of a venerable Spanish colonial family, and raises two daughters, Elizabeth and Olympia. He goes on to fight in the Mexican-American War and lives through the Civil War as well. Now, as an old man, Captain Kidd agrees to deliver Johanna, a girl who spent four years in captivity with the Kiowa tribe, to her biological family. Captain Kidd is a man of many contradictions. He's lived his life in isolated towns and small cities but, because of his career as a printer, has a broad perspective on history and world events. He fought for a racist regime in a bloody war but is also the novel's most open-minded character, connecting with others across cultural boundaries. He has trouble expressing his emotions yet cares for Johanna with great sensitivity, and his greatest aspiration is to reunite his scattered family in a shared home. At the novel's outset, Captain Kidd feels alienated from those around him and disillusioned with his work as a news-reader. However, as he becomes more invested in Johanna's well-being, he begins to take pleasure in everyday life and to care more about his own future as well. Eventually, Captain Kidd chooses to adopt Johanna rather than leaving her with her relatives, who are cold-hearted and abusive. By doing so, he not only expresses the best aspects of his nature but gains the chance to live out the rest of his life with zest and warmth.

Johanna – Johanna is a young girl who is born into a German American family but is captured at a young age by the Kiowa Native American tribe. She spends four years living among the Kiowa, forgetting English and completely assimilating to their way of life. When she's finally "rescued" by the U.S. military, she's dismayed to be separated from her adopted family and confused by the norms of Anglo-American society, to which she's expected to instantly adapt. Johanna is tough and stoic, suspicious of strangers and unhesitant about using violence to protect herself. Her fierce, warrior-like demeanor causes many adults (including her own relatives) to conclude she's abnormal or permanently disturbed due to her time in captivity. But Captain Kidd, who accepts Johanna's behavior without judgment or reprimand, is able to witness her more childlike and vulnerable moods. Johanna's rare moments of carefree happiness show the universality of childhood experience: regardless of their origins, all children enjoy songs and games and rely on the presence of loving adults. However, the refusal of many adults to recognize that she has the needs and rights of any other child shows the extent to which prejudice dominates her society. Over the course of her journey, she becomes extremely attached to Captain Kidd, treating him like a grandfather figure. Once she leaves her aunt and uncle, Wilhelm and Anna, behind and goes to live with Captain Kidd, she enjoys a stable childhood and adolescence; but she always feels caught between two cultures, unable to completely assimilate into American society or return to her Kiowa tribe. Ultimately, Johanna marries cowboy John Calley and works alongside him as a cattle driver—the closest possible approximation of the itinerant lifestyle she loved as a girl.

Britt Johnson – An African American freight driver who brings Johanna to Captain Kidd at the beginning of the novel. Britt is famous in North Texas for singlehandedly retrieving his own wife and son from captivity among the Kiowa, and he assisted the army in bringing Johanna back. Yet because it's transgressive and potentially dangerous for black and white

people to travel together, he doesn't want to undertake the task of bringing her home. Presented early in the novel, Britt's backstory and dilemma foreground the various racial concerns and prejudices at play in the chaotic world of the American frontier.

Maria Luisa – Captain Kidd's wife, now deceased. Maria Luisa comes from a venerable Spanish family, the Betancourt y Reales, who were among the first to settle in Spanish Mexico. Her lineage is a reminder of the various overlapping colonial histories that influenced America's foundation. Appearing in Captain Kidd's memories as a beautiful and calm figure, she represents an era when his life felt more grounded and worthwhile. He's unable to fill the void created by her loss until he takes on responsibility for Johanna.

Simon Boudlin – An itinerant fiddler whom Captain Kidd knows from his travels across Texas. Captain Kidd appreciates Simon's introspective, thoughtful personality and asks him for help looking after Johanna. At the end of the novel, the Captain reports that Simon and his fiancée, Doris, are working as traveling musicians with their six children.

Almay – A sinister figure who dogs Captain Kidd at his readings, Almay turns out to be a criminal running a child prostitution ring. After Captain Kidd refuses to sell Johanna to him, Almay tries to seize the girl by force. In the ensuing shootout, Johanna and Captain Kidd work together to kill Almay and save each other, cementing what becomes a lifelong bond.

Mrs. Gannet – The kindly owner of a livery stable in the small town of Dallas, who helps Captain Kidd acclimate Johanna to Anglo-American society. Unlike most adults, she doesn't treat Johanna with judgment or scorn. Her attitude earns the Captain's affection and he considers pursuing her romantically, but by the time he and Johanna return to North Texas, she's found another husband.

John Calley – A young man Captain Kidd and Johanna meet outside Durand. He's part of a marauding cowboy game making mischief in the absence of any real government after the Civil War. He and his brothers make the Captain bribe them to enter the town, but a repentant John Calley later attends the Captain's reading and befriends him. Several years later, when visiting the captain to talk about his cattle farming work, he meets the teenage Johanna, falls in love, and marries her.

Wilhelm – Johanna's uncle, a German immigrant, whom Captain Kidd and Johanna meet after a long journey through Texas. Although he seems traumatized and outraged by the deaths of Johanna's parents, he's also cold and unwelcoming towards his orphan niece, showing no empathy for the trauma she's suffered or the challenge she faces in adapting to Anglo-American society. Like his wife, Anna, Wilhelm treats Johanna like a farmhand, not a child, until Captain Kidd returns and takes her away.

Anna – Johanna's aunt, a German immigrant, whom Captain Kidd and Johanna meet after a long journey through Texas. Quiet and deferential towards her husband, Wilhelm, Johanna is harsh in her few words to Johanna and insistent that she give up her Kiowa manners immediately. It's clear that she wants to adopt Johanna to have an extra hand in the house, not to care for as a daughter.

Elizabeth – Captain Kidd's older daughter, a determined and formidable woman. Captain Kidd entrusts Elizabeth with the thorny task of figuring out how to legally reclaim the land in San Antonio her mother, Maria Luisa, once owned. While he loves Elizabeth, the Captain also feels distant from her and hides his real feelings and anxieties in the letters he writes her.

Young Woman – A young resident of Durand who chastises Johanna for bathing naked in the river. Even though Captain Kidd explains that Johanna has just returned from captivity and has no understanding of Anglo-American norms, the woman accuses her of purposely being immodest. However, after listening to Captain Kidd's scolding, the woman repents her actions and gives Johanna a well-made dress and pair of shoes for her journey.

Davis – A Texas senator put in power by the federal government after the end of the Civil War. Some Texans support Davis fiercely, while others side with his bitter rival, Hamilton. However, Captain Kidd views both senators as equally corrupt and complicit in the failure of the Reconstruction government to rehabilitate the South.

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MINOR CHARACTERS

Doris Dillon – Simon Boudlin's fiancée, a young Irish immigrant. Doris helps Simon watch over Johanna during one of Captain Kidd's readings, but the young girl runs off when they fall asleep. Eventually, Doris and Simon have six children and work as a troop of traveling musicians.

Adolph – Anna and Wilhelm's neighbor. A kindhearted man, he warns Captain Kidd that Anna and Wilhelm will work Johanna too hard and are unlikely to take good care of her.

Olympia – Captain Kidd's younger daughter. Unlike Elizabeth, she's indecisive and unable to care for herself; the Captain calls her a "bore." In this sense, she's a foil to Johanna, who is notable for her stoicism and capability.

Mason – Olympia's husband, who was killed in the Civil War.

Emory – Elizabeth's husband, who lost an arm in the Civil War. When he and Elizabeth finally move to San Antonio, he starts a

printing press, taking up the same profession as Captain Kidd.

Mill Owner – A surly and impolite man who charges Captain Kidd an exorbitant sum to park his **wagon** in the mill yard.

Elderly Woman – An elderly woman who warns Captain Kidd and Johanna of "Indian raids" as they travel through the dangerous hill country.

TERMS

Reconstruction – The period after the end of the Civil War, when the United States government sought to impose order on the former Confederacy, increase loyalty to the Union, and make provisions for freed slaves. **Captain Kidd** portrays Reconstruction officials, like **Davis** and **Hamilton**, as corrupt and inefficient, more interested with enriching themselves than rehabilitating war-torn Southern states. In reality, while some Reconstruction officials were self-serving, the process was also severely impeded by racism and Southern hostility towards the efforts of people they considered outsiders to change their minds. Significant advances in racial equality occurred during Reconstruction, such as the election of African Americans as Southern state legislators. But Northern politicians eventually agreed to halt the process in order to win a national election, making a backroom deal now known as the Hayes-Tilden Deal. State lawmakers then passed laws to disenfranchise African Americans, and the Jim Crow period began. Reconstruction is widely considered a national failure and a missed opportunity to make strides towards equality in the wake of slavery.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FATHERHOOD AND MASCULINITY

In *News of the World*, Captain Kidd, a tough solitary Texas wanderer, embarks on an arduous journey to return Johanna, a former captive of the Kiowa tribe, to her family. As the novel progresses, Captain Kidd becomes increasingly affectionate and invested in Johanna's emotional well-being, eventually viewing himself as a father figure to her. This role draws on the conventionally masculine skills he's honed over decades, but he must also develop skills that his society (like many others) associates with mothers, from mundane housekeeping tasks to managing the emotions of a traumatized young girl. By requiring him to set aside his assumptions about masculinity and develop stereotypically feminine skills, fatherhood helps Captain Kidd become a more complex and more satisfied person. By the time he adopts Johanna at the novel's end, his behavior has challenged conventional ideas of how men should act in order to achieve happiness.

At the beginning of the novel, Captain Kidd fulfills traditional ideals of American manhood, but he often feels unhappy and purposeless. Always on the move and owning few possessions, he's a model of self-sufficiency and stoicism. He's adept at physical tasks, respected by others as a source of wisdom, and able to regale younger men with tales of the three wars in which he's fought. Yet he's lonely and often frustrated. He dreams of reuniting with his daughters and grandchildren, who live in Georgia, but sees no way to bridge the emotional distance between them. Moreover, he says at the beginning of the novel that his itinerant life no longer brings the pleasure it once did: rather, "a slow dullness had seeped into him like coal gas."

Captain Kidd doesn't expect that returning Johanna to her family will alleviate that dullness or change his outlook. In fact, the task forces him to subvert his society's gendered expectations for mothers and fathers. Captain Kidd's society expects that fathers protect their children and provide for them economically; meanwhile, mores demand that mothers care for the household and attend to their children's emotional and moral well-being. As Johanna's sole guardian, Captain Kidd must take on both these roles. Seasoned by many years on the road and concerned for Johanna's safety, Captain Kidd always keeps his gun handy; the attack they face early in their journey from Almay, who wants to force Johanna into prostitution, shows the necessity of this caution. By physically protecting Johanna from violence, Captain Kidd fulfills a stereotypically masculine model of parenthood, which he expresses (somewhat melodramatically) as "the duty of men who aspired to the condition of humanity to protect children and kill for them if necessary." But he also learns to perform many duties that are more in line with emotional, nurturing stereotypes of female caretakers. Although he and Johanna don't speak the same language, he finds nonverbal ways to communicate so she won't be frightened or confused. Unlike most others in the novel, who dismiss Johanna as wild and unpredictable, Captain Kidd interprets her actions in the context of her life with the Kiowa and is able to anticipate her emotional reactions. And he takes charge of household tasks like keeping her fed, warm, and supplied with clean clothes. This sensitivity and attention to emotional and domestic labor is associated, in his era, with women more than men.

By the novel's end, Captain Kidd's new capabilities allow him to act decisively to regain his sense of purpose. When Captain Kidd reluctantly leaves Johanna with her unfriendly relatives, Wilhelm and Anna, he has to hurry away before anyone can see him crying. He feels shame over his emotions, even though they're a reaction to an important truth: that Johanna's aunt

and uncle will not take good care of her. This behavior reminiscent of his callous, studiously unsentimental attitude at the beginning of the novel, and causes both him and Johanna considerable anguish. However, just a few days later he returns to Wilhelm and Anna's farm, where he's outraged to see that "they had not even offered the girl a bath and a change of clothes" and is saddened to see Johanna rushing to feed his horse in order to "make herself welcome, wanted." The Captain's sharp eye for small but telling household details like Johanna's dirty clothes, and his astute interpretation of her actions, demonstrate the capabilities he's developed over the last months and allow him to take charge of the situation. Spiriting Johanna away from her relatives, he gives the young girl a much happier childhood and himself a sense of direction in his old age.

Over the course of the novel, Captain Kidd learns not just to protect Johanna in the way that his society expects of fathers, but also to care for her in the way it expects of mothers, embracing capabilities that are associated with both men and women. Through this transition, the novel argues that loosening gender norms doesn't just provide new opportunities for women; rather, it can help men deepen their own emotional lives and form closer connections to others.

AMERICAN MULTICULTURALISM AND RACIAL VIOLENCE

Just a few years after the Civil War ends, an itinerant news-reader, Captain Kidd, agrees to return Johanna, a young girl recently recaptured from the Kiowa tribe, to her family. Part of Mexico only decades before, Texas is now populated by people from a wide variety of backgrounds, from freed slaves to European immigrants to Native American tribes. The vibrant mixture of cultures that informs Texas's nascent society demonstrates the centrality of immigrants in America's formation and argues for the value of multiculturalism. But by chronicling the phenomenon of "Indian captives," who represent the struggle for land and power between indigenous people and white settlers, the novel grapples with the racial violence and oppression that accompany this meeting of cultures. Ultimately, the volatile frontier world Captain Kidd inhabits is a testament not just to America's essential ethnic heterogeneity but also to the cultural clash at the heart of the nation's history.

In the novel's first pages Captain Kidd, a white American whose family has lived in Georgia for decades, reads the news to a Texas crowd composed almost entirely of white men. This scene reflects ahistorical assumptions that most 19th-century Americans were white and native-born. However, the novel goes on to firmly reject these stereotypes of America's ethnic composition. One of the first characters introduced, Britt Johnson, is a free African American who makes his living as a freighter on the margins of white society. Doris Dillon, who helps Captain Kidd care for Johanna, is an Irish woman who compares Johanna's behavior to the actions of children traumatized in the Irish Potato Famine. Johanna's family are Germans who speak English with difficulty. The Captain's own wife, the late Maria Luisa, comes from a wealthy Mexican family, and the Captain speaks Spanish fluently. As these people build towns and societies on the Texas frontier, their various cultures determine the character of new America. Simon, a wandering fiddler, popularizes Irish jigs in the Texas backcountry, while German villages introduce sausage and sauerkraut. Spanish settlers build villages that combine European and indigenous Mexican architectural styles. The novel's vibrant cast of characters and their varied backgrounds argue that immigrants, and the diverse cultural practices they bring, are not incidental but integral to America's character and culture.

However, through stark portrayals of the racial violence of frontier life, the novel strongly rejects the fantasy of America as a happy melting pot. Britt Johnson can't take Johanna to her parents because he fears traveling to southern Texas, where racial hostility is high. Captain Kidd meets cowboys who brag about killing "a right smart of Mexicans" even though they're living on land captured from Mexico mere decades earlier. Most importantly, the novel is undergirded by the so-called "Indian Wars," in which the U.S. military pushes indigenous people out of their ancestral lands while European settlers seize the opportunity for expansion and fear bloody reprisals. This conflict emblematizes the violence and displacement which makes possible the American "melting pot."

The novel envisions a positive course for American society through culturally fluid characters like Captain Kidd, but it also represents the legacy of violent cultural conflict through child captives like Johanna. While most characters value only the norms of their own societies and dismiss those of others, Captain Kidd is eager to learn about different cultures. He speaks Spanish as well as snatches of Kiowa, German, and Native American sign language. His experience of many cultures makes him broadminded and tolerant and equips him for the difficult task of caring for Johanna. He's a testament to the good things that can arise from mixture between cultures. Meanwhile, child captives, stolen from their families in violent raids and later returned to Anglo-American society by force, show the violence of many cultural encounters in America's history. Captain Kidd notes that most captives experience mental illness or commit suicide after their ordeals. Having experienced the violence and trauma of cultural clash first hand, they're unable to thrive in either of the worlds they've experienced. Their unhappy fates argue that the violence of America's founding is never really over, but will instead play out in human lives and interactions through generations. By luck and Captain Kidd's intervention, Johanna avoids the fate of many (real-life) "Indian captives." However, even as she grows

up within a loving family, she's never at ease within Anglo-American society. Through the lasting dislocation she experiences, the novel illustrates the difficulty of fully grappling with the violence, injustice, and hardship that went into creating America.

NEWS AND STORYTELLING

News of the World chronicles the travels of Captain Kidd, an elderly man who roams the Texas backcountry and reads the news aloud in small towns. Captain Kidd's services are wildly popular with people who thirst for information about the world outside their isolated communities. Yet they are generally unwilling to engage with any news that is controversial or challenges their preconceptions. In order to keep everyone happy and scrape out a living, Captain Kidd focuses on distant and positive events, rather than challenging or political issues. The blurry line between entertaining stories and salient news in Captain Kidd's readings demonstrates both the importance of absorbing and understanding political events and the difficulty of doing so from an impartial perspective.

Captain Kidd portrays himself as a purveyor of impartial news, but in order to make money and stay safe he must often dip into storytelling. To make a living, he travels to remote towns with little access to newspapers and low literacy rates. At each stop, he selects articles from all the major papers and reads them aloud to a rapt audience. However, the captain's profession doesn't just entail reading the news. He must dress carefully and speak in a certain way in order to "present the appearance of authority and wisdom" at each reading. For him, the news is a performance rather than a straightforward transmission of information. Moreover, in order to remain popular (and make a living) he must cater to the townspeople's interests and avoid challenging their preconceptions. The captain usually chooses articles about foreign countries or far-off events, rather than focusing on issues that directly affect the towns he visits, like the end of slavery and the tumultuous process of Reconstruction. This isn't a personal failing on the Captain's part. The few times when he does speak about controversial local issues, hostility and even violence ensue: after reading about the 15th Amendment (which gave African Americans the right to vote) in Wichita Falls, the Captain must work to calm his audience. In Dallas, infighting between two corrupt congressmen surfaces at the reading and causes an outright fistfight. To avoid commotion, Captain Kidd must turn his readings into a form of entertainment, rather than a meaningful engagement with politics.

The well-intentioned but flawed nature of Captain Kidd's profession exemplifies the tension between being rooted in a community and being able to examine that community critically. The willingness of poor townspeople to pay for Captain Kidd's services shows their desire to engage with political events and feel part of a larger world. Yet their understandable investment in their own communities gives them a limited perspective and prevents them from seriously engaging with the news or absorbing any information that counters their existing ideas. On the other hand, Captain Kidd has a wide understanding of the world around him and is able to examine politics dispassionately. For example, when the fight between Congressmen Davis and Hamilton is consuming Dallas, it's only he who understands that both men are equally corrupt pawns in larger governmental mismanagement. At the same time, he lacks the sense of belonging in a community the way his audiences do, and often feels wistful for their sense of belonging within their particular communities. Through this contrast, the novel argues that it's difficult to reconcile community loyalty with a wider understanding of political events.

Captain Kidd's near-universal appeal in the towns he visits indicates the enduring human desire to feel part of a larger, outside world. Yet his readings, which by necessity pander to the beliefs—however wrongheaded—of his audience, show the difficulty of interacting with that larger world without being influenced by one's preconceptions.

CHILDHOOD AND INNOCENCE

In *News of the World*, Johanna, who was captured by the Kiowa tribe as a young child, must grapple with the challenges of reentering a home she barely remembers. Traumatized by repeated dislocations and totally immersed in Native American culture, Johanna often behaves with a maturity beyond her age yet is unable to navigate basic customs like wearing a dress or eating with silverware. Her inability to conform to social norms convinces many white Americans that she is fundamentally disturbed and unlike other children. Only Captain Kidd, by completely accepting Johanna's differences, is able to perceive the light-heartedness, vulnerability, and innocence that links her to all other children. In his eyes, Johanna's true loss of innocence (and, the novel suggests, that of all children) comes only when her new community compels her by force to adapt to their standards.

Johanna's mixture of adult capability and childlike incomprehension differentiates her from most children in the Anglo-American society to which she must return. She's extremely stoic, never resorting to tears or expressing fear even after the trauma of being separated from her Kiowa family and returned to a society that feels totally alien. In some ways she's mature and alert: she can cook dinner over a camp stove or identify a hunting party's approach by its footsteps. But she's overwhelmed by noisy town streets and uninterested in learning to eat with a fork. More strikingly, Johanna's capacity for violence disconcerts the adults around her. When the nefarious Almay and his men attack Captain Kidd, Johanna ingeniously topples a boulder onto Almay and kills him. While

this action is necessary to save herself from slavery or death, Captain Kidd is startled by her ferocious war cries, which express her comfort with killing. A few days later, Johanna "surprises" her guardian with two chickens she has stolen from a local farmer and slaughtered; the Captain reflects ruefully that unlike other little girls, she thinks of all animals as food, not pets.

Because Johanna lacks both the helplessness and the sweetness that Anglo-Americans consider natural and desirable in children, most white people see her as fundamentally abnormal or disturbed; it's only Captain Kidd who completely accepts her idiosyncrasies. For example, when Johanna decides to bathe naked in a river—a practice she's observed for years with her Kiowa family—a young woman accuses her of impropriety and even immorality. Calling Johanna a "hussy" and accusing her of intentionally "parading her charms" before the town's men, the woman projects onto Johanna a grown woman's sexuality. She's unable to interpret Johanna's actions in the context of her turbulent and traumatic life. Rather, she sees her oddities an excuse to withhold the protection and care normally afforded to children. In contrast, Captain Kidd retains his dry, grandfatherly manner whether Johanna is spilling her food or murdering her enemies. For example, when Johanna tries to scalp Almay after killing him, Captain Kidd simply says, "my dear, it's not done." Rather than shaming her or expressing disgust, he accepts that she's simply acting on the norms she's learned in her tribe.

As a result, Captain Kidd witnesses the light-hearted and childlike behavior Johanna hides from others. While Johanna screams curses at the woman in the river, she plays clapping games with the Captain, imitates the horse's whinny, and drives him crazy by repeating newly learned English words over and over. Where others are frightened by Johanna's preternaturally calm demeanor, Captain Kidd perceives and allays her fear at entering into an unknown world. Because Captain Kidd overlooks her inability to conform to Anglo-American norms, Johanna is able to relax and act like a child around him, showing that she does possess the same innocence as any other child.

Johanna only truly loses her innocence when she's forced to adapt to norms of a community she doesn't understand or like. Captain Kidd returns Johanna to her aunt and uncle, Wilhelm and Anna; but Johanna's relatives express no familial affection for her, and are appalled by her inability to act like an Anglo-American girl. The first words Anna addresses to her niece are a sharp admonition to get off the floor, where she is squatting like a Kiowa. Throughout their journey, Johanna has obeyed Captain Kidd like a parent and expressed little curiosity about their destination. Now, she begs him in broken English to take her away, losing her childlike trust and experiencing adult anxiety about the future. After leaving Johanna behind with her relatives, Captain Kidd is overwhelmed with regret and returns to the farm days later to offer to adopt her. When he arrives, he finds Johanna in the fields staggering under the weight of heavy buckets, her hands scarred from whipping. Johanna has probably endured more arduous work among the Kiowa, but while those experiences gave her strength, she looks helpless and broken now. Her changed demeanor shows that it's not hardship itself but rather the insistence she adopt a different set of norms that causes her to lose her childhood innocence.

Fortunately, Captain Kidd rescues Johanna from her abusive relatives. But even though she lives a comfortable life, as she enters adolescence Johanna seems depressed and constrained by the norms of white American society. Her discomfort with social niceties points out the arbitrary nature of all social norms; even when observed among a loving family, they are inherently arbitrary. Moreover, her unhappiness—which continues until she marries a cattle herder and returns to a wandering lifestyle—suggests that the end of childhood comes only when one finally accepts these arbitrary norms as meaningful aspects of one's life.

WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

In *News of the World*, Captain Kidd travels through Reconstruction-era Texas while reflecting on a lifetime in service to the American military. In various wars since his youth, the elderly man has served as a runner and a manager of communications, tasks that play on his physical and professional skills and have given him a sense of purpose. However, in the aftermath of the Civil War, Captain Kidd sees that although the Union army has prevailed in battle, it's unable to solve the complex issues that caused the war, from slavery to discord among the states. This disillusioning experience forces the captain to reconcile the sense of purpose that war has given him personally with the ambiguous success of Reconstruction in Texas. Ultimately, Captain Kidd concludes that war is not an effective tool to address the social issues that are deeply embedded in his society.

Born at the turn of the 19th century, Captain Kidd has fought in three wars by the time he reaches old age, and his experiences in battle have given him a sense of purpose. As a teenager, Captain Kidd was a messenger with the U.S. Army in the War of 1812, fighting British-allied Native Americans in Alabama. This work built on his capacity for running long distances and his ability to manage danger and hardship; the captain reflects that his time in the army brought him a "lifting, running joy." When the Mexican War breaks out, Captain Kidd is a successful printer in San Antonio. The army asks him to manage communications, a prestigious job that allows him to express his cunning, common sense, and professional capabilities. Later, he lives through the Civil War, seeing one of his sons-in-law die and the other lose an arm. In his old age Captain Kidd isn't very talkative, but he does enjoy regaling younger men with tales of his wartime experience. This shows that his time in the military has shaped Captain Kidd personally and allowed him to believe

that his life has direction and meaning.

However, the personal satisfaction Captain Kidd derives from military service clashes with his dawning realization that war is an ineffective method of solving social problems. Captain Kidd has fought against the Native Americans and Mexicans, but he's also married a Mexican woman (the late Maria Luisa) and taken tender care of Johanna, a young girl completely immersed Kiowa culture. His own cultural fluidity contrasts with the ethnic and racial divisions that have both caused and been perpetuated by the wars of his youth, and his personal life makes him doubt the meaning of these endeavors.

In the present, Captain Kidd travels through Reconstruction-era Texas, witnessing the social repercussions that linger long after wars are over. Union forces have dissolved all Confederate local governments and are attempting to replace them with more loyal administrators. But the Reconstruction governments are wildly corrupt and insensitive to the needs of local people, as the fight between senators Davis and Hamilton shows. Meanwhile, hostility towards the 15th Amendment and the racism faced by Britt Johnson and his men show that the Union's victory by no means assures good conditions for former slaves or a cultural transformation in the defeated Southern states.

As a young man, Captain Kidd took great satisfaction from serving as a soldier; his wartime experiences are among the most fulfilling of his life until he takes on responsibility for Johanna. However, the unglamorous aftermath of the Civil War requires Captain Kidd to reevaluate the validity of war, despite its personal meaning to him, and conclude that it's not an effective means of solving larger social problems like national loyalty or systematic racism.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE WAGON

When he agrees to deliver Johanna to her relatives hundreds of miles away, Captain Kidd buys a wagon for the journey. He surmises from the large inscription on the side—"Curative Waters Mineral Springs East Texas"—that the wagon once belonged to some sort of health spa. It's ironic that the wagon's lettering seems to offer health and healing to sick people, when Johanna is undergoing a journey of loss and sorrow, leaving the only life she knows and traveling towards an unknown, frightening future. The wagon also contrasts with the duo's precarious safety: the jaunty lettering is soon riddled with bullet holes from their gunfight with the human trafficker Almay, an episode in which they both nearly die.

At the same time, for Johanna the wagon becomes a marker of stability in an intimidating new world. While it's an Anglo-American device, it's also used to travel long distances and sleep in the open—activities which Johanna enjoys from her time with the Kiowa. When she's frightened by strangers or the clamor of Texas towns, she can retreat into the back and hide until she feels safe. She much prefers sleeping in the wagon to staying in a hotel, and when she reaches the house of her stern aunt and uncle, she insists on spending the first night bunkered down in the back. Finally, when the Captain rescues Johanna from her abusive relatives, he carries her to safety in the wagon. Ultimately, the wagon represents the atmosphere of stability the Captain creates by recognizing Johanna's complex cultural identity, and the enduring emotional bond that forms between them as a result. Before her wedding, Johanna tearfully tells the Captain, "You are my curative waters," cementing the connection between the odd little wagon and the unconventional family that forms within it.

THE DOLL

During the long journey, Captain Kidd's friend Doris gives Johanna a small doll. Later that night, Johanna runs away from the wagon to the river, where she sees a party of Kiowa riding on the other side. She calls out to them, clearly hoping to be rescued, but they can't hear what she's saying; instead, they seem to think she's threatening them, and they fire warning shots at her across the water. Before she leaves, Johanna places the doll against a rock, facing the familiar territory she's leaving behind.

In some ways, the doll emphasizes the cultural gap between Johanna and many Anglo-American children. What for most children is a simple toy is for Johanna much like the objects her tribe uses it religious rituals. She believes that the doll houses a spirit, and by leaving it on the rock she ensures that someone is "watching over" her old life. At the same time, Johanna uses the doll to act out and respond to the traumas she's experienced, a coping mechanism common among children from many cultures. While Johanna's complex past makes her seem fundamentally different from other girls in her society, the doll symbolizes the traits and anxieties she shares with all children.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *News of the World* published in 2016.

Chapter 1 Quotes

He had become impatient of trouble and other people's emotions. His life seemed to him tin and sour, a bit spoiled, and it was something that had only come upon him lately. A slow dullness had seeped into him like coal gas and he did not know what to do about it except seek out quiet and solitude.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

While giving a newspaper reading in a remote Texas town prior to meeting Johanna, Captain Kidd ponders his growing disillusionment with life. His depression stems in part from the fact that his profession, which he once hoped would bring knowledge and peace to small communities, is seeming more and more ineffectual. It's hard to take pleasure in reading the news when no one else appreciates it. Moreover, it seems pretty clear that the Captain feels lonely without his wife and daughters around him; however, he's not capable of confronting those feelings and instead, by pursuing "quiet and solitude," pushes people away further. Interestingly, both Johanna and Captain Kidd feel very alienated the world in which they live, albeit for different reasons: Captain Kidd feels that the society in which he's placed his faith has proved deeply flawed, while Johanna doesn't want to enter that society at all. Ultimately, by helping Johanna adapt to a new and sometimes unwelcoming culture, Captain Kidd will make his own peace with it as well.

My name is Cicada. My father's name is Turning Water. My mother's name is Three Spotted. I want to go home.

Related Characters: Johanna (speaker), Captain Kidd

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

While the novel rarely reveals exactly what Johanna is thinking, occasionally it dips into her perspective and relays her exact thoughts. Here, as she meets Captain Kidd for the first time in Britt Johnson's wagon, Johanna inwardly mourns her family. While the two men are preoccupied with the details of Johanna's life in Anglo-American society, discussing her parents and the raid that killed her family, Johanna situates herself firmly in the Native American world. Unable to even remember a previous life, she acknowledges only her Kiowa parents and Kiowa name. Johanna's conception of her identity contrasts starkly with the way other people see her. These competing narratives suggest that facts aren't enough to define human character: rather, the way Johanna chooses to frame the events of her life tells the reader who she is. While Johanna's cultural hybridity makes her a compelling character, her inability to communicate with others—and the widespread belief among adults around her that Native American culture is not worth understanding or preserving—foreshadows the difficulty she'll have adapting to her new life.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Then at last he was doing what he loved: carrying information by hand through the Southern wilderness; messages, orders, maps, reports [...] Captain Kidd was already over six feet tall and he had a runner's muscles. He had good lungs and he knew the country.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

As Captain Kidd and Johanna set off together, he reflects on the long life that has brought him to this point. As a teenager in the army, Captain Kidd enlists in the army during the War of 1812, eventually working as a "runner" and transporting messages on foot between camps. While the work is often dangerous, it's also extremely fulfilling for the Captain. Working as a runner exercises both his physical fortitude and his mental capacities. In part because of the personal satisfaction this experience brings him, at the beginning of the novel Captain Kidd seems to valorize war as a means of effecting social change. However, as he travels through the blighted lands of the former Confederacy and observes postwar government inefficiency, he will conclude that war is both incredibly costly and ineffective in changing people's minds about issues like racism. It's likely that the Captain's growing disillusionment with the soldiering work that has dominated so much of his life contributes to his apathy and depression at the beginning of the novel.

If people had true knowledge of the world perhaps they would not take up arms and so perhaps he could be an aggregator of information from distant places and then the world would be a more peaceful place [...] And then he had come to think that what people needed, at bottom, was not only information but tales of the remote, the mysterious, dressed up as hard information.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Captain Kidd meditates on his military service during the Mexican War. Although he's too old to fight as a soldier, he serves as the generals' communications director, essentially organizing the operations that he carried out as a younger man. During this period, the Captain dreams that he can use his skills not to win wars, but to foster peace by bringing useful and unbiased information to remote communities. In fact, that is exactly what he tries to do as a news-reader. However, he finds that people don't want to engage with or even listen to "hard information," which often challenges their existing prejudices. Instead, he's forced to read about "remote" and "mysterious" events that are uncontroversial because they have no bearing on local communities. Because of the desires of his audience, the Captain's readings blur the line between news and entertainment. In a way, the Captain's inability to translate his wartime skills into the peacetime world, or to recapture the sense of joy and efficacy he felt as a soldier, is at the root of the depression he feels before taking charge of Johanna.

Chapter 4 Quotes

More than ever knowing in his fragile bones that it was the duty of men who aspired to the condition of humanity to protect children and kill for them if necessary. It comes to a person most clearly when he has daughters.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

On their first night traveling together, Captain Kidd shows Johanna how he cooks dinner on his portable stove and then opens his newspapers to read. He's unsure how to communicate his good intentions to Johanna, who seems to expect violence at any time. The Captain's perception of Johanna's vulnerability reminds him of his own masculinity. The Captain defines manhood in a somewhat traditional way, contrasting masculine power with feminine helplessness. But it's worth noting that he sees manhood as conferring not privilege but obligation. This conception of his own social position prevents him from being domineering towards Johanna. In this passage, the Captain sees himself as responsible only for Johanna's physical safety. However, over time he will take on tasks associated with women in his era, like managing her emotional health, ultimately developing more complex views on gender roles than he holds now.

He turned the page. He said, This is writing. This is printing. This tells us of all the things we ought to know in the world. And also that we ought to want to know.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Captain tries to make Johanna feel at ease by speaking comfortingly to her, even though she can't understand what he's saying. He shows her the newspapers and tries to explain what they are. Newspapers are so ubiquitous in the Captain's society that there are few occasions to really examine their meaning. However, Johanna's total ignorance of news media gives the Captain—and, by extension, the novel as a whole—an opportunity to question the meaning of the news, and thus the Captain's profession as a news-reader. In the Captain's view, newspapers both inform people about the world and convince people that they "ought" to be informed, that knowing what's happening in other places is a civic virtue. However, neither of these principles plays out in reality. Many of the Texan newspapers are simply propaganda machines operated by opportunistic politicians, and people are more likely to use the newspapers for entertainment than education. Here, the Captain must confront the gap between his reverence for the printed word and its ambiguous role in his community.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The doll is like herself, not real and not not-real. I make myself understood I hope. You can put her in any clothing and she remains as strange as she was before because she has been through two creations.

Related Characters: Doris Dillon (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

When they arrive in the town of Spanish Fort, Captain Kidd asks his friends Simon and Doris to watch over Johanna while he gives a reading. Doris brings the young girl a china doll as a present. An immigrant who has lived through the Irish Potato Famine, Doris is intimately versed in childhood trauma, and compares Johanna to the children of her homeland who have been formed by disaster, enduring not one but "two creations." Doris recognizes what most adults don't: that Johanna cannot assimilate to Anglo-American society by simply wearing new clothes and learning new manners. Her Kiowa demeanor isn't just a response to captivity; it's a fundamental part of her identity. There's nothing inherently "strange" or disastrous about being formed by two cultures. However, because Anglo-American society has completely marginalized Native American tribes, it's impossible for someone like Johanna to fit into either culture. Rather, like the doll, she's fundamentally set apart from other humans. In this sense, the doll represents both Johanna's cultural alienation and the long history of violence and dispossession that causes it.

❝ And the newspapers, they say nothing about this at all or about the poor at all, Doris said. There are great holes in your newspapers. Nobody sees them. God sees them.

Related Characters: Doris Dillon (speaker), Captain Kidd

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

For Doris, Johanna's suffering is a reminder of the Irish Potato Famine, which she endured before immigrating to America. Doris points out bitterly that while catastrophes like these affect entire societies, newspapers rarely report on them meaningfully. Her prescient remarks add to the Captain's doubts about his profession as a news-reader. He often reflects that people's prejudices make them unreceptive to the information he's bringing. But it's also probable that the information they need to hear doesn't make it into news media at all. For example, newspapers of the time glossed over stories of Native American dispossession or encouraged this trend by othering and demonizing indigenous people in their pages. Although Doris is not drawing attention to this phenomenon specifically, her words are a reminder that simply reading the newspapers isn't enough to create a just society. Rather, people must interrogate the institutions providing them with news and information and discern what their motivations are.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The girl still called out, she had not moved. Then she bent to place the doll to sit against the rock, facing Indian Territory.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Doris and Simon are supposed to watch and guard Johanna while Captain Kidd is giving his news reading. However, when they doze off the young girl escapes and to the river, where she spots a Kiowa riding party across the river. Johanna calls to the Native Americans for rescue, but they don't understand what she's saying; instead, they think she's an enemy and shoot at her. Before the Captain whisks her away, Johanna places the doll as a sort of sentinel watching over "Indian Territory," where she used to live.

Until now, the narrative has focused on Johanna's inability to gain acceptance within Anglo-American society. However, the novel emphasizes that she's not quite Kiowa, either. While she felt at home in her tribe, she was eventually used as a pawn in its long struggle with the U.S. government. Now, it's clear that these Kiowa don't recognize her as one of them and won't treat her as such. It's important that the doll is present as Johanna's uneasy suspension between two cultures becomes clear. While it represents her predicament, by leaving it to watch over her

former life, Johanna reimagines it as a friendly guide and turns it into a symbol of her determination to honor her past, rather than forget it.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ *Who cares for your fashions and your wars and your causes? I will shortly be gone and I have seen many fashions come and go and many causes so passionately defended only to be forgotten.* But now it was different and he was drawn back into the stream of being because there was once again a life in his hands. Things mattered.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Captain Kidd reevaluates his outlook on life now that his emotional attachment to Johanna is growing. It's important to note that the Captain's new responsibilities don't make him feel kindlier towards his society. His indifference to everything from "fashions" to "causes" shows that his alienation remains. If anything, seeing people's scorn and hostility towards Johanna makes his society's flaws even clearer in his eyes. Rather, he's gained a new sense of his own purpose within this flawed society. Likewise, he will help Johanna find a way to live comfortably in Anglo-American society without embracing all its values. Passages like this show that by becoming a father (or grandfather) figure to Johanna, the Captain isn't just displaying his own exceptional character. Rather, the experience is of psychological benefit to him as well.

❝ He was suddenly almost overwhelmed with pity for her. Torn from her parents, adopted by a strange culture, given new parents, then sold for a few blankets and some old silverware, not sent to stranger after stranger, crushed into peculiar clothing […] and now she could not even eat her food without having to use outlandish instruments.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Just prior to this passage, Captain Kidd has tried to teach Johanna to eat with a fork. After struggling diligently for a few minutes, she becomes frustrated and tosses it aside. Most of the adults Johanna encounters believe she should be grateful to return to Anglo-American society, and view her lack of table manners as a fundamental defect. However, Captain Kidd's vivid imagination of her mental state shows that he contextualizes her behavior within her traumatic childhood. His use of the word "outlandish" is especially important: while many people consider Johanna's behavior abnormal because it's different from their own, the Captain understands that ideas of what's "normal" depend on cultural context. For Johanna, table utensils are entirely foreign, and in the Captain's eyes that's a reaction. Captain Kidd's reaction here differentiates him from most of the adults Johanna encounters on her journey and establishes him as the most suitable person to care for Johanna.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ There was no method by which he could explain anything to her but she did not need explanations. Her family and her tribe had fought with the Utes, their ancient enemies, and the Caddos […] She didn't need to be told anything except that there were enemies in pursuit and she had already figured that out.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

After Captain Kidd gives a reading in the small town of Dallas, a man named Almay offers to "buy" Johanna from him (presumably in order to traffic her into prostitution) and makes it clear that he could easily kidnap her if the Captain refuses. The Captain hurries back to the hotel, rouses Johanna, and flees in the middle of the night. While this kind of episode would frighten many children, Johanna remains totally calm; she's accustomed to facing danger and flight alongside her Kiowa family. Her stoic behavior differentiates her from many children in the Captain's society, but rather than feeling suspicion or concluding that she lacks emotional capacity, the Captain understands her attitude based on what he knows of her previous experiences. It's also important to note that while he appreciates her composure here, he's attentive when she does show fear, for example when driving into noisy towns.

By exerting himself to interpret Johanna's behavior, the Captain demonstrates his cultural understanding. Moreover, he's carrying out a task usually assigned to mothers in his time and place: managing and soothing children's emotions. At this point in the novel, he's taking on the parenting roles that his society associates with both women and men.

Chapter 12 Quotes

No. Absolutely not. No. No scalping. He lifted her up and swung her up over the ledges of stone and then followed. He said, It is considered very impolite.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Almay, Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

After a long and dangerous firefight, Captain Kidd and Johanna kill Almay and frighten away his two Native American henchmen. While the Captain initially saw himself as Johanna's sole protector, she has proved invaluable in the fight, showing no fear and ingeniously stuffing his gun with heavy coins to make it more deadly. Now that the battle is over, she runs towards Almay's body and tries to scalp him, imitating the custom of her Kiowa family. Scalping is a practice that Captain Kidd's society considers barbaric; later on, Johanna's uncle Wilhelm will reference this while arguing that the Kiowa are essentially savage (an argument that ignores equally uncivilized Anglo-American behavior towards indigenous people). In contrast, although Captain Kidd prevents Johanna from scalping Almay, he doesn't judge or shame her impulse to follow the traditions she's grown up with for the last several years.

It's also important that in this moment, he speaks to Johanna lightly and lifts her in his arms, treating her like a child. Facility in battle and willingness to kill aren't considered normal qualities for children in his society, and other people are often disturbed by Johanna's unusual capabilities. However, the Captain understands that for Johanna, innocence can coexist with ferocity and even violence.

Chapter 13 Quotes

Maybe life is just carrying news. Surviving to carry the news. Maybe we have just one message, and it is delivered to us when we are born and we are never sure what it says; it may have nothing to do with us personally but it must be carried by hand through a life, all the way, and at the end handed over, sealed.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

After defeating Almay in a near-death struggle, Captain Kidd and Johanna wearily resume their journey. As they travel, the Captain wonders about the meaning of his life, which has lately become more and more confusing. His musings here connect his life as a soldier and his current profession as a news-reader. As a young man, he carried information between different military camps: even though he handed over the messages "sealed" and never made decisions based on their contents, he took great pride in doing his job competently and efficiently. As a news-reader now, he sees his job as presenting people with impartial information, which they can use to form their own beliefs about the world. It's touching that he conceives of his own role in the world in such a humble way, seeking to help others rather than influence or control them. At the same time, over the course of the novel Captain Kidd loses faith in both the validity of armed conflict and the usefulness of his work as a news-reader. Given his current mental state, this passage not only represents his ideals but highlights the gap between those ideals and his actual life.

As long as they were traveling she was content and happy and the world held great interest for her but Captain Kidd wondered what would happen when she found she was never to wander the face of the earth again, when she was to be confined forever to her Leonberger relatives in a square house that could not be broken down and packed on a travois.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

When Captain Kidd and Johanna first set out on their journey, the young girl was withdrawn and suspicious. Now that the Captain has gained her trust by protecting her and treating her with kindness, she's carefree and interested in the world around her. It's notable that when other adults treat her with distrust and suspicion, Johanna acts out; but because the Captain ignores her idiosyncrasies and treats her with care and affection she reveals the bubbly, childlike side of her character.

In his forebodings about Johanna's future, the Captain reverses his society's prejudices about Native American culture. Most people assume that Johanna must be happy to be "rescued"; but the Captain lyrically evokes the advantages of life among the Kiowa and understands that for Johanna, returning home is a traumatic event. And by worrying not just about Johanna's safety but her emotional well-being in the future, Captain Kidd shows that he's taking on roles associated with both men and women in his society.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Captain Kidd said, She was a captive. An Indian captive.

We can't have this, said the young woman. She held on to the rope bucket handle with both hands. I don't care if she's a Hottentot. I don't care if she's Lola Montez. She was parading her charms out there in the river like a Dallas huzzy.

Related Characters: Young Woman, Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

When Captain Kidd and Johanna arrive in Durand, he leaves her to tidy the wagon while he goes in search of food. Returning, he finds a local woman scolding Johanna harshly for bathing naked in a river, a practice common among the Kiowa but considered improper in Anglo-American society. It's important and appalling that the young woman refers to Johanna as a "Dallas huzzy," or prostitute. Because Johanna does not conform to Anglo-American norms for children, the woman treats her like an adult who is both sexually available and liable to be punished for her actions. By repeating the sentence, "she was a captive," Captain Kidd insists that the woman take Johanna's background into account and pushes back against her one-sided view of cultural norms. This passage, the novel points to the way that non-white Americans are often othered and penalized for observing the practices of their own cultures.

❝ He would have liked to kiss her on the cheek but he had no idea if the Kiowas kissed one another or if so, did grandfathers kiss granddaughters. You never knew. Cultures were mine fields.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

After settling Johanna in a hotel room, Captain Kidd prepares to leave for his reading. With the scolding she's endured for bathing naked in the river, Johanna has had a tough afternoon, and the Captain wants to comfort her. But he doesn't know if kissing her forehead—a standard paternal gesture in his own society—will upset or frighten Johanna, so he reels in his own impulse. Here, the Captain demonstrates his understanding that Johanna's cultural norms are different from his own—a fairly basic idea, but one that many other characters fail to grasp. He's also demonstrating deep concern with Johanna's emotions, a parenting role normally associated with women in his society. Ultimately, it's this cultural sensitivity that allows Captain Kidd to form such a close bond with Johanna and differentiates him from other potential caretakers.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Captain Kidd said, It has been said by authorities that the law should apply the same to the king and to the peasant both, it should be written out and placed in the city square for all to see, it should be written simply and in the language of the common people, lest the people grow weary of their burdens.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), John Calley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

As Captain Kidd and Johanna approach Durand, a group of cowboys stop them in the road, declaring that in the

absence of any official town government they're controlling the roads and preventing supporters of a senator they don't like from entering. Captain Kidd has to bribe them to pass. But later, one of the young men, John Calley, comes to the Captain's reading and engages him in a philosophical discussion about the role of law in society. Even though Calley is living on the edge of the law himself, he actually longs to live under a more just and organized society. The longing he expresses evokes the failure of Reconstruction governments to repair Confederate society. On the other hand, the principles Captain Kidd describes here were first articulated by Hammurabi, an ancient Babylonian king. He reframes the problem, focusing not on the Reconstruction government but the inability of many societies over thousands of years to implement just laws. In his brief speech here, he both expresses pessimism about American society and communicates that even when there's no end in sight, the struggle for justice is something that unites people across cultures and eras.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Here had been people whose dearest memories were the sound of a dipper dropped in the water bucket after taking a drink and the click of it as it hit bottom. The quiet of evening [...] the familiar path to the barn walked for years by one's father, grandfather, uncles, the way they called out, *Horses, horses*.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

As Captain Kidd and Johanna drive into the hill country of Southern Texas, they risk being caught in the Native American raids that are becoming more and more common. Many settlers have fled to safer areas, so the Captain and Johanna often sleep in abandoned farms. At one such easy campsite, Captain Kidd imagines the people who might have lived there before. He dwells on the routines and patterns they've established in years, sometimes generations of occupying the land, and evokes the suffering of both home and livelihood at once.

At the same time, Native Americans are facing loss and dispossession on a larger scale. In fact, their raids are a direct retaliation to the army's efforts to push them west and free up space for settlers. It's unclear if the Captain fully comprehends their plight. He certainly doesn't acknowledge their claim on the land here. However, he does refuse to explicitly condemn their violent raids, even when Wilhelm later discusses how the Kiowa murdered Johanna's family. While the Captain's cultural understanding is certainly not perfect, he takes a much more nuanced approach than most characters.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ She never learned to value those things that white people valued. The greatest pride of the Kiowa was to do without, to make use of anything at hand; they were almost vain of their ability to go without water, food, and shelter. Life was not safe and nothing could make it so, neither fashionable dresses nor bank accounts.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Captain Kidd reflects on the ways Johanna preserves her Kiowa heritage even as she assimilates into Anglo-American culture. Even though she learns to read and dress like other white Americans, Johanna retains the attitudes she learned among the Kiowa. Many white Americans denigrate the Kiowa for their transient lifestyles and the simplicity of their dwellings. However, the Captain sees these customs as a point of pride, evidence of the tribe's dignity. In doing so, he rejects cultural binaries and refuses to declare that Anglo-American culture is superior, a radical stance in his era. Like Johanna, the Captain is largely indifferent to material goods or worldly success. At the beginning of the novel, his rejection of conventional values made him lonely and skeptical of others. But now, his beliefs actually cement his bond with Johanna and give him a sense of purpose.

❝ She sat stiffly in her riding habit and her smart little topper and watched them and rode home and then tried to appear cheerful at dinner, carefully managing her fork and the minute coffee spoon. The Captain sighed heavily, his hands in his lap, staring at his flan. The worst had happened. He did not know what to do.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd (speaker), Johanna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

By this point, Captain Kidd has rescued Johanna from her neglectful aunt and uncle. The Captain and Johanna have spent several years on the road but have now settled with his daughters in San Antonio. Johanna comes of age in a loving family, but she still doesn't fit in to Anglo-American society. She often watches longingly as Mexican women do laundry at the river, and silverware feels alien to her.

With her mixed cultural identity, Johanna is represented of the fraught cultural dynamics of American society. Her apathy now communicates that tolerance alone isn't enough to repair generations of cultural conflict—especially, as in Johanna's case, when it's couple with a gentle insistence that she adopt Anglo-American norms. It's also interesting and touching that the Captain believes that demure acquiescence to her situation is the "worst" thing that could happen to Johanna. This shows that he values her unique character more than her ability to fit in—in fact, he loves her specifically because she contravenes social norms. For him, Johanna loses her innocence not when she's exposed to violence or displays violent tendencies herself, but when she loses the will to preserve her own character and culture.

> We will come to visit often, she said. You are my cuuative watah. Then she began to sob.

Yes, he said. He shut his eyes and prayed he would not start crying himself. And you are my dearest little warrior.

Related Characters: Captain Kidd, Johanna (speaker), John Calley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final chapter, Johanna prepares to marry John Calley, now a successful cattle rancher. Her married life will be simple and itinerant as she joins her husband in his work; it's a perfect life for Johanna, who has never liked living in one place. This last emotional moment with Captain Kidd demonstrates the poignancy of leaving childhood behind and becoming an adult. However, it also shows that she's moving into adulthood on her own terms, preserving her Kiowa identity. She's achieved a different kind of maturity than that envisioned by her aunt and uncle, who wanted to Johanna to "grow up" by completely abandoning her complex heritage.

This moment emphasizes Captain Kidd's close paternal relationship with Johanna, so it's telling that she mentions the wagon by quoting its slogan ("curative waters") in her accented English. For Johanna, the tiny and transient wagon has become a symbol of the emotional security she derives from life with her adopted father.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Standing at his lectern, Captain Kidd begins to read aloud a newspaper article about the 15th Amendment (a recent Constitutional provision giving African Americans the right to vote). Captain Kidd has fought three wars in his life and hopes never to see another. In between conflicts, he's worked as a printer. But his business collapsed with the recent fall of the Confederacy, so he makes a living "drifting from one town to another" in North Texas and reading the news to the local people.

This passage situates the novel in the tumultuous period after the Civil War, which is marked by some advances in rights for African Americans but also intense backlash against such progress. It also shows that Captain Kidd's news readings are one of the few ways people in small towns can stay in touch with national events, thus casting his profession as a vital tool for civic engagement.

When Captain Kidd announces the news of the amendment, people in the crowd mutter in displeasure. He reprimands them, saying he doesn't want to hear any "vaporings or girlish shrieks." He changes the subject to less controversial news, reporting a failed polar expedition. The Captain's clean, elderly appearance command respect; even though he has no assistant to collect money, audience members at the readings rarely try to evade payment. Still, he always carries his gun.

Captain Kidd's admonition establishes him as more open-minded than his audience, making a connection between understanding the news and developing a tolerant worldview. At the same time, his quick change of subject shows that the tone of his readings depends on the prejudices of his audience.

The crowd tonight is mostly white, but at the back of the room he can make out Britt Johnson, an African American freighter he knows. Britt makes a small sign, and the Captain nods to show he will meet with him afterwards. He closes the reading with a long, boring article about science that will make people happy to leave quietly. The Captain used to enjoy readings and the emotions they inspire, but lately he's "impatient of trouble and other people's emotions." As he leaves the pulpit, he notices a pale-haired man sitting with two Caddos (a Native American tribe).

The Captain chooses his articles based not on importance but what will satisfy the needs of his audience—in this case, the desire to go home sleepy and happy rather than riled up about politics. The Captain's growing sense of purposelessness and apathy is also notable here. Over the course of his journey, his attitude towards life will change significantly.

After the reading, Britt Johnson takes Captain Kidd to his **wagon**, where a young white girl, dressed in Native American attire, is sitting in perfect composure despite the cold air. Regarding the child, the Captain remarks that she looks "artificial as well as malign." Britt says that her name is Johanna Leonberger; she was captured during a Kiowa raid four years ago and has just been rescued by the U.S. military, who have charged Britt with bringing her home. She's already tried to escape twice.

Britt's language indicates the typical Anglo-American attitude towards Johanna's story, one of tragic captivity and miraculous rescue. However, Johanna's obvious desire to return to the Kiowa complicates this narrative and will ultimately refute the idea (widely espoused by the people Captain Kidd meets) that white society is better and more civilized than Native American culture.

Captain Kidd asks about Johanna's parents, and Britt Johnson says that they, along with her little sister, were killed in the initial raid. Her remaining relatives, an aunt and uncle, have sent 50 dollars to pay for her transport home. The Captain remembers that Britt had once rescued his own wife and two children from captivity, a feat no one can truly understand. Still, he seems reluctant to take on responsibility for the young girl. He tells Captain Kidd that the trip is too far away from his freight routes; anyway, he doesn't want to be caught caring for a white girl in South Texas, where racism is even more prevalent than here.

While Britt is understated and brusque in relaying this story, it's apparent that Johanna's short life has been marked by two traumas: losing her biological family in the Kiowa raid and now being separated from her adoptive one. Throughout the novel, Captain Kidd will be one of the only people to recognize that she suffers from both these losses, not just the first one.

Captain Kidd understands the wisdom of Britt's caution. After all, he'd once been married to a San Antonio woman and he understands their mores. He suggests that Britt Johnson hand off Johanna to another family or the army, but Britt says these options have already failed. Captain Kidd muses that it might be better for Johanna to stay with the Kiowa, but Britt shakes his head. The Kiowa have realized that possessing white captives incurs repercussions from the increasingly powerful military, and they themselves traded her for blankets and silver. At the parting, Johanna's Kiowa mother cut her arms in despair and cried for hours.

Britt's caution about traveling with Johanna reveals the racism entrenched in American society, even after it has fought a war to end slavery. This moment hints that war isn't a good way of addressing pervasive social problems. It also demonstrates the various ethnicities and cultural contexts at play even within a single state, pushing back against ideas of the United States as an ethnic and ideological monolith.

Britt Johnson continues that Johanna remembers nothing of her life before the Kiowa raid; she doesn't speak English, but his own son speaks Kiowa and has talked with her. Britt remarks that his son has changed much since captivity. After only a year of captivity, he had assimilated to the Kiowa way of life and was reluctant to come home at first. Now, he's skittish and sometimes acts out.

Britt's troubles with his own son hint at the challenges Captain Kidd will face in caring for Johanna, who was with the Kiowa for even longer. The children's rapid assimilation to Native American culture suggest that cultural identity isn't something inherited, but rather developed through environmental stimuli.

Seeing that Captain Kidd is persuaded, Britt Johnson takes out a 50-dollar gold piece and gives it to him. He warns her to be careful with Johanna, and the young girl slides down in the **wagon** and pulls her blanket over her head, as if tired of being watched.

Throughout this exchange, Johanna has remained silent and passive. But her gesture now shows her determination to keep her distance and desire not to seem helpless or dependent.

CHAPTER 2

The local women give Johanna a dress and some underclothes, but Johanna refuses to change her attire. Eventually, Captain Kidd takes her to the town brothel, where the women bathe her and remove her lice by force, throwing her old clothes out the window and wrangling her into the dress. By the end of the ordeal, the tub has toppled over and everyone is soaking wet. Johanna does not know how to pick up her skirts in the street, and they are soon covered in red mud. Captain Kidd can see she's trying not to cry.

Even though the women are trying to help Johanna by cleaning her up, they're actually effecting a forced cultural transition. By destroying her old clothes, they also destroy one of her remaining links to the Kiowa. Although Captain Kidd has organized this, for the rest of the novel he'll be more careful about allowing Johanna to preserve her cultural heritage.

In the meantime, Captain Kidd has bought a run-down **wagon** with the words "Curative Waters Mineral Springs East Texas" emblazoned on the side. The canopy and curtains will provide protection for Johanna on the long journey and keep her in his sight. But he can't even describe his plans to her, because he doesn't even know her name in Kiowa.

Once belonging to a health spa, the wagon promises healing and well-being. Yet Captain Kidd will become aware that by taking Johanna away from the only home she knows, he's actually inflicting a trauma upon her.

Captain Kidd changes into a neat traveling outfit; he's always careful about his clothes in order to project "authority and wisdom" at his readings. Then he packs up his few possessions and some essential supplies for the journey. Motioning for Johanna to stay put, the Captain seeks out Britt to ask which roads are open and which have been flooded. Britt advises him to travel along the river to Spanish Fort. Then he examines the Captain's old, rusty hand gun and replaces it with his own new pistol. Captain Kidd smiles at the gesture and watches Britt and his men ride away.

Even though Captain Kidd's readings aim to simply relay facts about current events, the necessity of dressing in a particular way shows that they're actually a kind of careful performance. Meanwhile, the dismal state of Captain Kidd's guns indicates his own peaceful nature, despite the fact—upon which he'll later elaborate—that's he's actually fought in multiple wars.

Returning to the **wagon**, Captain Kidd hitches up his horse, Fancy. People stand in the doorway, shaking their heads at the old man and dirty, frightened girl; farther away, the Captain can see the pale-haired man and the two Caddos looking on with interest. Drifting in and out of the tribal lands, they have "gathered trouble and a great deal of peculiar knowledge about human beings" which they are eager to put to use.

To the people in the town, Captain Kidd and Johanna make an odd, almost abnormal picture. However, they'll soon form a relationship that is more satisfying than many conventionally familial bonds. The presence of the pale-haired man is an ominous warning of the dangerous future ahead.

CHAPTER 3

In a flashback, Captain Kidd recalls the various wars of his youth. He first joined the military as a teenager in the War of 1812. Everyone in his company is inexperienced and confused, and they hold their own elections for officers. In his first battle, fought against Creek and Choctaw Native Americans, the man elected captain is fatally wounded. The young Captain Kidd risks his life retrieving the officer's body and is wounded in his own leg. When new officers are appointed, he becomes a sergeant.

While Captain Kidd's eagerness to enlist shows the satisfaction he derives from life as a soldier, he's clear-eyed about the messiness of war, the bumbling confusion of forming a company with totally inexperienced men, and the lack of definitive purpose—the Captain knows he's fighting Native Americans, but not why.

Soon, Captain Kidd's militia heads for Alabama (at that point, a territory, not a state). Captain Kidd works transporting prisoners, but he hates this grim job and soon asks to be a runner, one of the soldiers tasked with carrying messages between different camps. Captain Kidd is an excellent runner with a good memory for maps and reports. Nothing makes him happier than running through the woods "free and unencumbered," and now thinks of this period as a time when he was able to fulfill his true calling.

It's important that Captain Kidd enjoys being a soldier because it draws out his physical and mental capabilities, rather than because he enjoys conflict or brutality. In a way, his occupation as a runner mirrors his itinerant and solitary profession as a news-reader.

After the war Captain Kidd returns to Georgia and apprentices with a printer, but after his mother dies and his sisters marry, he moves to San Antonio to set up his own shop, learning Spanish in the process. One day in San Antonio, he catches sight of a beautiful Spanish girl running after the milkman in the street. She's from an old, aristocratic family and it's not easy to be formally introduced to her, but eventually Captain Kidd and Maria Luisa are married and have two daughters.

Captain Kidd's willingness and ability to learn Spanish show that he's eager to engage with other cultures, rather than trying to suppress or dominate them. His cultural fluidity presents a positive and hopeful vision of America's future and the multifaceted society that could develop if prejudice is eradicated.

When the Mexican War breaks out in 1846 Captain Kidd is too old to fight, but he works organizing the communications of the American army and is promoted to captain. Through his work, he's present at many of the war's major battles, where the fierce young Texas Rangers ask for stories about his experience in the War of 1812. He appreciates them for listening to an old man's rambles.

Just as being a runner allowed the Captain to display his fortitude, now he can use his professional capabilities in the war. This shows that war provides personal, if not always ideological, meaning for him.

During his second stint in the army, it occurs to Captain Kidd that he should set himself to publicizing the information from intelligence reports and local newspapers. It seems to him that if people really knew what was going on at the front lines they would not be so eager to fight wars. By being "an aggregator of information from distant places" he can make the world "a more peaceful place." This illusion is shattered years later when the Civil War breaks out. Now, the Captain believes that people want and need not news but stories "dressed up as hard information."

Here, Captain Kidd articulates the most hopeful and idealistic vision of his profession. However, while it seems noble and mind-opening to bring news to remote communities, Captain Kidd will find that he's not always able to communicate the ideas he wants to spread. Rather, in many cases people don't even want to hear the information he's trying to share.

CHAPTER 4

Johanna walks alongside the **wagon**, singing a Kiowa song about preparing for hard times. For all she knows, she's heading into a land of draught and starvation, wearing an unfamiliar and impractical dress and separated from her family. She only sings because it's "better than weeping." Once she figures out where she's going, she will either escape or starve herself to death.

Johanna's stoicism, and her calm contemplation of suicide, differentiate her from many children in the Captain's Anglo-American society and align her with Kiowa adults.

The Captain sits on the driver's seat of the **wagon**, staying out of the drizzle. He motions to Johanna to come closer and shows her the gun, telling her that it will protect them in case of trouble. She doesn't react, and he knows better than to smile at her. She seems incredibly strange, but he can't quite say why. Perhaps she lacks the "mobile and open" expressions of people raised in white societies. Even though she's a young girl, she has the demeanor and carriage of an adult Native American.

The Captain's inability to communicate his intentions or even his goodwill shows the vast gaps in cultural understanding between Anglo and Native Americans, caused by centuries of war and conflict. It also suggests the future difficulty of cultural reconciliation.

Trying to teach Johanna some basic words, Captain Kidd points at her and says her name. She dodges, frightened because Kiowa people only point directly at their enemies. Captain Kidd says her name and his own over and over while Johanna looks at him quizzically. Eventually, she decides it's unlikely he's trying to curse her and responds, saying "Chohenna."

Even though the Captain is trying to establish a connection, he actually frightens Johanna by violating a cultural taboo. He has more cultural understanding than many characters, but still isn't fluent in Kiowa norms.

Captain Kidd and Johanna have to cross the river, since there is no bridge. It's a chaotic process, but Johanna remains calm the entire time. At night, the Captain shows Johanna his portable stove, which mystifies her. But suddenly, she makes the sign for fire in Plains Indian sign language; the Captain, who can sign a few words himself, realizes they have a means of basic communication. As the Captain cooks dinner, Johanna watches him carefully and strokes the horse's sore leg.

While Johanna behaves oddly and unlike many children, her calm demeanor and ease around horses display her many capabilities and strength of character. It's also important that Captain Kidd's demonstrable interest in other cultures—he's previously taken time to learn some Native American sign language—helps him forge a meaningful connection now.

While Johanna prays in a singsong voice over her food, Captain Kidd considers the possibility that she might try to run in the night. She might even try to kill him with the gun. After dinner he lies down in the **wagon** with his newspaper, commenting on the articles as if Johanna can understand. She watches him warily and he smiles to put her at ease. He knows he must now protect her at all costs, as it's the duty of all "men who aspired to condition of humanity to protect children and kill for them if necessary." But he wishes the task had fallen to someone else.

While many adults in the novel see Johanna as fundamentally different—and even less deserving of affection—than other children, Captain Kidd emphasizes her essential rights by putting her in the category of vulnerable whom all men have the duty to protect. Although he feels that he's unable or unsuited to taking on the task himself, his actions will show that he's essentially the only person capable of giving Johanna the care she needs.

Aloud, Captain Kidd explains that writing tells us the things "we ought to know" and things that "we ought to want to know." He puts away the newspaper, prays for everyone he knows, and falls asleep.

Here, Captain Kidd makes the distinction between reading the news and actually absorbing and acting upon it.

CHAPTER 5

The next day, Captain Kidd and Johanna continue towards Spanish Fort. Johanna always walks by the **wagon**, looking over the river as if hoping to see her tribe. Suddenly she stops and holds up her hands. In a minute, Captain Kidd hears the noises of horses and sees a group of infantrymen ride into view. He makes the sign for "good" to calm Johanna, who is trembling and probably thinks he's going to trade her to the army.

By insisting on walking, Johanna maintains her cultural identity and refuses to adopt Captain Kidd's. Her ability to perceive approaching strangers before the older man shows the capabilities she's developed during her time among the Kiowa.

Captain Kidd greets the lieutenant in charge of the group, who is very suspicious of Johanna's odd demeanor. When the Captain explains her story, he demands to look over her official papers. He's surprised that Johanna isn't "happy to be going home."

The soldier is one of many people whose prejudice against Native American culture prevents them from understanding Johanna's bonds with her adopted family or the suffering she experiences on leaving them.

The lieutenant recognizes Captain Kidd as the traveling news-reader and asks if he's carrying his loyalty oath (a paper in which former Confederates swear allegiance to the Union). The Captain says he doesn't have it, but that neither he nor any of his children have aided the Confederacy. The lieutenant examines Captain Kidd's old gun, but Kidd keeps the new one from Britt hidden under the seat. Captain Kidd knows it's pointless to ask the lieutenant about the "gaudy and corrupt Reconstruction government" currently wreaking havoc in Texas.

Captain Kidd is skirting the truth, since his sons-in-law both fought in the war. This encounter highlights the tension between a federal government trying to reestablish control and loyalty in rebellious states, and Southerners who dislike having their movements and rights questioned.

After looking over all the other items in the **wagon**, the infantrymen finally ride away and Johanna emerges from the back of the wagon, holding the pistol. She says his name, "Kep-dun," in a relieved tone and makes several signs. The Kiowa have no word for "thank you," but the Captain knows she's grateful that he stood between her and the soldiers. Smiling for the first time, she begins to speak rapidly in Kiowa. Captain Kidd surveys her warily. He's sure that if the soldier had threatened her, she would have shot him in the head without hesitation.

The Captain's protective and sympathetic nature inspire trust in Johanna. While she remains stoic and hostile to the soldier, she allows the Captain to glimpse her childlike side. Captain Kidd is one of the only characters who can reconcile her alternating sweetness and hardness as parts of the same complex nature.

In the afternoon they arrive at Spanish Fort, a small trading town that derives its name from long-gone defensive battlements. The sounds and sights of the town intimidate Johanna, who clutches a blanket around her. Captain Kidd feels a bit overwhelmed himself, and he can hardly imagine how hard it must be for her to adapt. Arriving at a large barn where travelers park their vehicles, he puts up the **wagon**'s curtain and gestures for Johanna to gather firewood and set up the stove.

Rather than assuming she must be happy to return to Anglo-American society, Captain Kidd puts himself in Johanna's shoes, realizing how strange and frightening everything must seem to her and guessing at her longing for the Native American world she knows.

CHAPTER 6

Leaving Johanna with the stove, Captain Kidd walks into town and arranges to rent the Masonic Lodge for the night and walks around placing advertisements for his reading. He runs into Simon, a fiddler he knows from his travelers. Ascertaining that Simon isn't playing a concert tonight, Captain Kidd explains his situation and asks if Simon will watch over Johanna while he's away. Simon and the woman he's courting, Doris, can keep the girl company and makes sure she doesn't run off. Simon agrees and mentions that he once saw a man returned from captivity who no longer spoke a word of English. Captain Kidd agrees that "it is chilling, how their minds change so completely."

By leaving Johanna alone, Captain Kidd shows his trust in her—something that will eventually endear him to the young girl. By describing Johanna's transformation as "chilling," Captain Kidd seems to see it as a bad thing. However, he'll ultimately come to appreciate Johanna's mixed cultural identity and strive to allow her to preserve it.

Simon finds Doris and along with Captain Kidd they return to the **wagon**, where Johanna has prepared corn bread and bacon. Doris greets the young girl brightly and presents her with a china **doll**, which Johanna examines solemnly before addressing it in Kiowa. Doris, an Irish immigrant, remarks that Johanna is like an elf in that she is "twice captured, carried away on the flood of the world." No matter what clothing she wears, she'll always be as strange as she is now. Doris has experience with traumatized children because, during the Irish Potato Famine, so many that she knew endured the deaths of their whole families.

Even though the three adults inhabit the same society, Doris's immigrant background—and her interpretation of Johanna's character through her own cultural identity—show the various cultures that influence the creation of American society. In the novel's view, "American" identity is not superior to but fundamentally informed by the cultures of immigrants, enslaved, and indigenous people.

Captain Kidd remarks pragmatically that he can't do anything about Johanna's situation. He thumbs through his newspapers, picking out articles for the reading; after all, he has to make a living. Doris remarks that the newspapers say "nothing about this" or "about the poor at all." Instead, "only God sees them."

Doris's bitter remark about the content of the newspapers complicates Captain Kidd's profession even further. Even if people want to accept the information in the newspapers, it's also possible that media aren't representing the most pressing issues facing ordinary people.

Doris questions Captain Kidd about Johanna's family. Impetuously, she offers to take charge of Johanna herself. Simon looks at her in alarm, remarking that they're engaged to be married and are already expecting a child. Captain Kidd suspects that Doris wants Johanna not as a child to raise but as an extra hand around the house. He politely declines the offer.

Throughout the novel, even well-intentioned people will see Johanna as a means to fulfill their own desires—in this case, to help care for a growing family—rather than as a child with her own needs and concerns.

CHAPTER 7

In the Masonic Lodge, Captain Kidd puts on his reading clothes. Then he greets the crowd, listening to their coins falling into his tin can. He starts off with the *London Daily News*, giving people the chance to escape their daily lives with news that has no bearing on them. Everyone is amazed to listen to information that has made its way to their tiny town from such exotic locales. He reads from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* about excavations in Turkey and from the *Calcutta Times* about telegraphs in India. When he looks up briefly, he notices the pale-haired man in the crowd.

While it's certainly good to be informed on events in other countries, it's also clear that Captain Kidd is steering away from coverage closer to home because it's more controversial. Meanwhile, his sighting of the pale-haired man again suggests that he's being followed.

Just as the reading ends, Simon hurries into the auditorium and announces that Johanna is gone. He and Doris had dozed off and Johanna has left the **wagon** with her **doll**. Tracking her muddy footprints, he and Simon set off along the river in the pouring rain. As Simon apologizes profusely, the Captain grimly reflects that this is a task for a much younger man.

Captain Kidd frequently presents himself as incapable of caring for Johanna. In fact, his new responsibility prevents him from sinking into misanthropic old age and makes him take an interest in life that he's long been lacking.

Soon, Captain Kidd see Johanna standing near the water, clutching the **doll** to her chest. On the other side of the river, a party of Native Americans are riding along the water. She's calling to them in Kiowa, but they can't hear. The Captain calls to her, but she continues shouting "for her mother, for her father and her sisters and brothers."

The raiding party shows the extreme proximity of Native American culture to the Captain's own society; but the roaring river between them represents the vast gaps between the two cultures and the suffering that results for Johanna, who belongs completely to neither one.

One of the Native Americans calls out, seemingly in response, but then he lifts a gun and aims it at Johanna, firing a warning shot. Captain Kidd ducks but Johanna simply bends down and places the **doll** on a rock, facing the opposite side of the river; she sees it as a kind of totem, which will watch over her homeland for her. The Captain grabs her by the dress and runs with her back to the **wagon**, dragging her "back to her fate." Back at the wagon Johanna falls asleep, but Captain Kidd stays up late into the night.

Johanna hopes to be rescued and reunited with her Kiowa family, but the young man doesn't even recognize her as the Native American she thinks she is. Neither Anglo nor Native Americans perceive her as fully belonging to her own culture. Her "fate," as the Captain describes it, is not to assimilate but to be stuck between the two.

In the morning, Captain Kidd and Johanna continue south. Seemingly forgetting the night's anguish, Johanna sits on the bench and sings to herself. Captain Kidd experiments with speaking a few words in German, the language that Johanna would have spoken with her biological family. Seeming to surprise herself, Johanna understands and responds, saying in broken German that her parents are "*todt*," dead. Captain Kidd feels guilty for bringing up such terrible memories. To distract her he teaches her the words for "hand" and "horse."

Johanna's understanding of multiple languages indicates her complex cultural identity. By experimenting with different forms of communication, rather than forcing her to adapt to English right away, Captain Kidd demonstrates his willingness to accept these conflicting identities.

That afternoon, they arrive in the small town of Dallas, which frightens Johanna even more than Spanish Fort. She looks into each shop with "deep apprehension." Finally, Captain Kidd arrives at a livery stable he knows and hands his horses over to an obviously drunk stable boy. Mrs. Gannet, the stable's middle-aged but very pretty owner, comes out to greet the Captain. She's shocked to hear that he's traveling alone to San Antonio; after all, her own husband was hacked to pieces on a road outside this town. He asks her to watch Johanna for a few hours while he buys newspapers and rents a hall for the night.

Although the novel includes few actual instances of violence, moments like this remind readers of the bloody conflict lurking outside these towns. While white pioneers fall victim to Kiowa raids, Native American tribes lose land and stability to increasing waves of settlers. As much as mixed cultural identities, this persistent violence informs America's emerging society.

Mrs. Gannet laughs at Captain Kidd's weary state and offers to have his laundry sent out and find some new clothes for Johanna. Still in the **wagon**, Johanna clearly thinks that Captain Kidd is giving her away to this stranger. He puts a hand on her forehead to soothe her and tells her to stay.

Johanna's frequent fears that she's about to be traded or sold reflect the instability of her childhood. It's important that the Captain tries to soothe these fears, rather than dismissing them.

CHAPTER 8

Captain Kidd books two rooms in a small, shabby hotel then rents the local playhouse for the night. Proceeding to the printer's, he's "seduced" by the familiar sounds and smells of the printing press. A sign on the wall announces that the office is a "crossroads of civilization" and "armory of fearless truth." The Captain tamps down regret for his own lost press and buys the newest editions of all the papers. Then he walks to the *Dallas Weekly Courier* office in order to write down the latest news from the AP wire. Finally, he tacks up his posters all over the town.

This sudden attack of nostalgia is a reminder of the Captain's own losses, which he usually tries hard not to acknowledge, and the cost of the Civil War in his own life. The printing press's signage demonstrates both the highest aspirations of people who distribute the written word, and the gaps between their ideals and what they're actually able to accomplish.

As he distributes the posters, Captain Kidd worries about the long journey and his dubious ability to protect Johanna. He has already raised two daughters, and he resents taking on the responsibility of a child a third time. At his age, it's easy to view the world "with the indifference of a condemned man," but he's also intensely aware that the future matters for Johanna.

Captain Kidd rarely mentions his own daughters, who live far away. In a way, caring for Johanna is a way to revive the intimate paternal relationship he no longer enjoys with his own offspring.

When Captain Kidd returns to the stable bearing barbecue for dinner, Johanna cries out in happiness to see him. She's been attending to the horses alongside the kindly Mrs. Gannet. Johanna eagerly opens her dinner pail and begins eating the meat with her hands, spreading sauce all over her sleeves. Captain Kidd tries to make her use the fork, but after trying a couple times she becomes frustrated and throws it into the horse's stall.

Many people see Johanna's indifference to norms, like table manners, as evidence of her fundamental difference from them. However, her childish frustration her actually likens her to children of all kinds who struggle to fulfill the expectations of adults around them.

Captain Kidd feels overwhelmed with pity for the young girl, torn from her parents and now expected to master the manners of an entirely strange culture. He sees that tears are running down her cheeks, but he announces firmly that she must now go to the hotel and stay there while he gives his reading.

For Captain Kidd, Johanna's lack of table manners aren't a sign of poor character. Rather, they're a reflection of the trauma and loss which she's unable to express in words, inspiring not judgment but affection.

CHAPTER 9

After settling Johanna in the hotel room, Captain Kidd locks the door, listening to her sing a Kiowa chant inside. He pauses downstairs to explain the noise to the concierge. When he mentions that Johanna was a Kiowa captive, the concierge is astonished that she's not happy to be returning home. The concierge suggests that the Captain bring Mrs. Gannet to stay with Johanna and keep her from chanting all night.

Like the soldier Captain Kidd met before, this man can't conceive of anyone valuing Native American over Anglo-American society. His blatant prejudice contrasts with Captain Kidd's more nuanced sense of cultural understanding.

Captain Kidd returns to Mrs. Gannet's stable, admiring her lush brown braids. She's gently reprimanding her indigent stable boy but instantly agrees to help the Captain. It's the first time in the last week that he feels truly confident in Johanna's safety.

Before meeting Johanna, Captain Kidd feels disengaged from those around him. Now, reinvigorated by responsibility, he begins to consider the prospect of romantic attachment again.

A few hours later, Mrs. Gannet arrives at the hotel with her nightgown and some divinity, a complicated candy which she must have spent hours making for Johanna. The girl is initially suspicious but after Mrs. Gannet nibbles the delicacy, Johanna is soon enjoying it too. Captain Kidd retreats to the other room to choose his articles. He hears Johanna sobbing and calling for him when she realizes she must sleep in this strange building.

Besides Captain Kidd, Mrs. Gannet is the only character who approaches Johanna on her own terms, rather than simply expressing dismay about her inability to conform to Anglo-American society. Still, Johanna's visceral reaction to simply sleeping inside hints what challenges lie ahead of her.

After knocking on the wall to assure Johanna he's close by, Captain Kidd begins a letter to his daughters, Olympia and Elizabeth, assuring them that he's healthy and making a good living. Olympia, whose husband, Mason, was killed in the Civil War, is now living with Elizabeth and her husband, Emory, who lost an arm in battle. Olympia has always been a helpless and dramatic woman, and the Captain is sure she's not making her sister's life easier.

Olympia emerges as an implicit foil to Johanna here. While Johanna is characterized by unusual capabilities, Olympia is manifestly unable to fend for herself. Still, it's uncharacteristically insensitive of Captain Kidd to fault his daughter for conforming to social expectations of women in her era.

Captain Kidd hears Mrs. Gannet speaking to Johanna in a low, soothing voice. He continues the letter, remarking that although they have suffered losses they are still lucky compared to other families in the South. He starts to write to them about the Comanche and Kiowa raids currently affecting Texas, but then decides against it; after all, his dearest wish is for his daughters and their children to join him in Texas. It will be a difficult journey, since most Southern infrastructure was destroyed in the war, there is little money to rebuild, and resources are scarce.

Captain Kidd feels the need to hide the danger of his life and the reality of life in Texas from his daughters. In contrast, he knows that Johanna relishes these hardships and doesn't mind sharing them with him. In this sense, her background allows their relationship to transcend gendered behavioral expectations which limit his interaction with his biological daughters.

Striving for a light tone, Captain Kidd assures his daughters that although the Union has forbidden civilians to carry firearms, he still has a gun to shoot birds for supper. He urges them to return to Texas, where they can try to reclaim the land which his deceased wife, Maria Luisa, owned through her family. He instructs Elizabeth, who enjoys thorny problems, to write to the priest and archivist in San Antonio and begin finding all the relevant records to prove their title.

It's interesting that even though Captain Kidd has fought in the Mexican-American War, the ascendance of America over Spanish Mexicans has caused him to lose claim to his wife's land. Captain Kidd has been on both sides of many cultural divides in his country.

Captain Kidd hears Johanna sobbing. Since crying is rare in Native American culture, he knows she must be in severe distress, and the thought "[tears] his heart." He closes his eyes, reflecting that because the war has eliminated a generation of young men, the elderly like him must "arrange for his family to be together again, […] enter into litigation, [and] make a living with readings."

Captain Kidd interprets Johanna's behavior not in light of his own society's standards (by which children are expected to cry) but by those of the Kiowa (among whom crying is a sign of deep distress). This allows him to truly appreciate and allay Johanna's emotions.

Captain Kidd hears loud objections as Mrs. Gannet coaxes Johanna to the hallway bathroom. When they return, she sings to the girl in her light, firm voice, and Johanna gradually quiets down. Captain Kidd wonders why he has never "offered his attentions" to the kindly woman, but he knows his daughters, who want him to be loyal to their dead mother, would have "a galvanized tin hissy" if he did anything of the sort.

Captain Kidd is implicitly blaming his daughters for his inability to find love after Maria Luisa's death. But given how far removed they are from his daily life, it seems like he's project his own feelings of loss and isolation onto others, rather than grappling with them himself.

CHAPTER 10

Captain Kidd is happy that there's good seating in the theater, which means people will want to stay longer. At the door there are two soldiers, since Texas is still under military rule. But in a few months, if the federal government recognizes Texas as a rehabilitated state, that might change. Currently, there's a governor's race between two Union-loyal Republicans, Davis and Hamilton, both of whom have been "robbing the state blind" during their time as senators.

Captain Kidd criticizes members of the Reconstruction government for enriching themselves rather than serving the population. While Reconstruction is supposed to increase loyalty in the former Confederate states, it actually causes distrust of the federal government.

Captain Kidd theatrically shakes out the London Times, encouraging people to "enter another realm of mind." He reads about a failed census in India, storms in London, and Irish immigrants in New York. Someone in the crowd calls out to ask why he's not reading from the newspaper that Davis owns. The Captain responds sternly that if he commented on Texas politics, there would be fist fighting and violence. He brings news from distant places, and if they want to hear of Texas events they can find out for themselves.

The fact that a corrupt senator actually owns the newspaper, and presumably uses it to advance his own agenda, corroborates Doris's earlier distrust of the newspapers and suggests that media can be instruments of propaganda as well as illuminators of truth. This adds another barrier for remote communities hoping to gain meaningful understandings of national politics.

When Captain Kidd steps down from the stage, he's dismayed to see the pale-haired man, who must have been following him from Spanish Fort. The Captain shakes hands with everyone in the crowd, even men wearing Union war medals; he feels that anyone who survived the war should be "congratulated." As the crowd thins, the pale-haired man stands up, introduces himself as Almay, and bluntly asks the Captain to sell Johanna to him. He continues that since army presence here is minimal, he could easily take the girl on the road. But he wants to offer a fair trade.

While soldiers are present at public events and even stop Captain Kidd on the road, their actual enforcement of public security is so minimal that human traffickers can operate openly. This incident highlights the anarchic nature of 19th-century Texas and shows that criticism of the Reconstruction government's efficacy (if not its aims) is merited.


Feeling ice cold, Captain Kidd stalls for time, saying he hasn't "settled on a price" and he wants to know that Johanna will be treated well. Almay gives a sinister smile and says she'll be "paid" for her work and that "blond girls are premium." Trying to think ahead, the Captain tells Almay to meet him at a roadhouse early the next morning where they'll make the trade. He hurries away.

Captain Kidd knows he can't rely on the government to keep him and Johanna safe, so he has to trick Almay in order to save Johanna. The man's sinister comments hint at the life of sex slavery she'd face at his hands, making clear that whether of not the Captain is suited to the task, it's up to him to protect the young girl.

Captain Kidd hurries back to the livery stable, harnesses the horses, and quickly changes his clothes. Then he runs back to the hotel, where Mrs. Gannet answers the door in her nightgown, and announces that they must leave immediately. Mrs. Gannet is furious when he tells her about Almay and helps Johanna pack up her things. Before leaving, the Captain asks permission to "call on" her when he returns to Dallas, and kisses her on the cheek.

By taking immediate action and not hesitating to put himself in danger, Captain Kidd establishes himself as not just a temporary caretaker but a father figure to Johanna. His heightened sense of responsibility allows him to feel invested in his own life again, a feeling he expresses by making romantic overtures to Mrs. Gannet.

Captain Kidd and Johanna set off on a minor road, hoping to evade detection for a few hours and then turn onto the larger Meridian Road. He wants to reach the river, where he can pull off the road and keep watch for their pursuers. The Captain doesn't mind a fight, but he's too old and poorly armed to win; he doesn't even have a holster for his gun.

When Captain Kidd argues that he's unsuited to care for a young girl, he's usually underestimating his own capabilities. However, it is true that he's not well-equipped to protect her against younger men. His own limitations mean that Johanna will have to hold her own, too.

After some hours, Captain Kidd is able to turn onto the main road. Johanna sits calmly beside him, wrapped in her thick blanket. He's unable to explain anything; but, seasoned by her tribe's battles with Texas settlers and other Native Americans, she clearly knows that there are "enemies in pursuit." The land around them is clear and empty, with just an occasional farmhouse in sight. Suddenly, Johanna sees a great horned owl, a symbol of death among the Kiowa, and cries out. The Captain grimly tells her to pretend it was a hawk.

Even though she doesn't know exactly what's going on, Johanna's background allows her to sense the high stakes of the situation. By facing danger together, the old man and young girl will develop an emotional intimacy that persists despite their inability to communicate verbally.


CHAPTER 11

By morning, Captain Kidd and Johanna arrive at a ravine fed by a small spring. With great effort, he coaxes the horses up the hill, hoping to take cover on high ground. But Johanna seems surprisingly cheerful, taking out the stove to cook and handing the Captain a piece of divinity, telling him in broken English to eat it. While she gathers wood, the Captain reflects that for all his hopes of bettering the world by reading news, he still has to carry a gun and protect a child from villains.

Captain Kidd hoped to improve the world and prevent conflict by bringing the news to different places. However, his current situation reveals the naiveté in believing wholeheartedly that mere exposure to global news can change the world. Rather, it's by actually experiencing different cultures (as Captain Kidd does in his travels) that people can abandon prejudice and develop new understanding.



Preparing for a confrontation, the Captain puts on his best boots and loads his guns. He wishes he could return to the road and see if the **wagon** is visible, but he doesn't dare. Instead, he lies down on his stomach and looks down at the faraway road. Just as he begins to see a horse's swishing tail, a gunshot hits the stove and sends it flying away. Johanna and the Captain quickly scramble under the wagon, and he knows the men are running up the ravine with rifles.

The sudden explosion of gunshots contrasts with the mundane chores Johanna was performing just a few minutes before. This juxtaposition hints at the violence lurking beneath seemingly peaceful aspects of American frontier life.

Captain Kidd retrieves his revolver, but he knows it's no match for a rifle; his shotgun is even worse, only working at close range. Johanna hands him a box of ammunition, which she's retrieved from inside the flour keg, but he motions her back under the **wagon**. While the Captain is startled and fearful—he had thought the men would threaten and offer money before turning to violence—the young girl simply braids her hair for battle in perfect calm. Holding the guns, they both wait for further action.

Captain Kidd feels that he alone is responsible for protecting Johanna; she should hide in the wagon, rather than taking part in the battle. However, while he's scrambling for ideas, it's she who seems perfectly prepared to do battle with their enemies.

Suddenly, another rifle shot from below hits the **wagon**, luckily missing the people and horses. From the direction of the shots, the Captain realizes that all three men have come up one side of the ravine, an overconfident gesture. When he sees one of the Caddos run into the open, crossing the ravine, he fires several times, managing to knock the rifle out of his hands. While the man tries to retrieve the gun, Johanna, who has tucked up her dress to form pantaloons, edges along the cliff. Finding a suitable rock, she begins levering the stove lid beneath it.

Captain Kidd and Johanna are united both by their apparent vulnerability and their actual ingenuity in facing battle. The Captain leverages his quick thinking to understand the men's positions, while Johanna's familiarity with battle allows her to proceed without fear.

Captain Kidd fires again; from the shouts he hears he knows he's wounded one of the Caddos. Using her improvised lever, Johanna tips the stone up and rolls it over the cliff, where it hits the other Caddo in his hiding place. Laughing, the Captain fires at the man, but he manages to scramble away.

Johanna's military ingenuity—as well as her eagerness to harm her enemies—makes her more like a Kiowa warrior than most of the children the Captain knows.

CHAPTER 12

Reloading the gun, Captain Kidd praises Johanna for her ingenuity; but soon, rifle shots explode in front of them and the Captain is hit with shrapnel above the eye. He's disoriented and can barely remember how many men there are and which are wounded. Johanna brings him the water bottle, and he wonders whether they should make a run for it on the horses. Showing Johanna his slim supply of ammunition, he motions for her to mount the horse and ride away; he will stay and provide cover. But she refuses to go, and he puts his head in his hands.

Captain Kidd isn't just protecting Johanna—they're working together as a team. In this sense, The Captain has assumed that in situations like this, men must aid women and children who can't help themselves. But Johanna's unusual capabilities encourage him to reevaluate his own role and his ideas about who can fight for themselves.

Johanna pushes the useless shotgun into Captain Kidd's hands. He doesn't understand what she's doing until she shows him a shell, which is loaded with dimes from the Captain's readings. It's very heavy, and he knows it will turn the gun into a small cannon. Suddenly the Captain feels invigorated. To lull Almay into complacency, he fires into the ravine with the real ammunition, causing the man to laugh. The Captain urges him to come closer and fight, while Johanna loads more shells. But Almay is stalling for time, clearly waiting for Caddos to crawl up the ravine.

It's important that Johanna could easily have run away, leaving the Captain to die but potentially returning to her own tribe. That she stays is a gesture of her developing attachment to Captain Kidd—as well an implicit acknowledgment that it's impossible to return to the tribe that has given her away.

Almay slowly walks into the open. As soon as he's close enough, Captain Kidd shoots; the dimes lodge in his face and he falls backward down the ravine. He spins around and turns the gun on the Caddos, who are running away. Laughing, Johanna hands him another shell, but he reminds her they still need money to buy supplies.

Many children might be horrified or afraid in the thick of violence, but Johanna takes the fighting in stride. Her comfort with violence makes many adults dislike her, but it doesn't distract Captain Kidd from her underlying good qualities.

As Captain Kidd breathes heavily, Johanna jumps to her feet and begins a Kiowa chant of triumph. Hearing the fierce song, the wounded Caddos hasten to retreat. Then she climbs down the cliff. She's almost reached Almay's body when the Captain realizes she intends to scalp him. Catching up with her, he restrains her gently and tells her that scalping is "considered very impolite."

It's important that even though the Captain disapproves of what Johanna is trying to do—scalp her enemy—he doesn't harshly chastise her for it. Rather, he encourages her to change her behavior without making her ashamed of it. His tact her differentiates himself from most of the adults who interact with Johanna.

CHAPTER 13

Covered in dirt, Captain Kidd gathers his scattered possessions and leads the horses down the hill. He's anxious and alert now, but he must rest soon or collapse. He knows that the Caddos will bury Almay and slip back into Indian Territory; their "child prostitution ring" will be no more. When they stop for the night, the Captain immediately falls asleep. He wakes up to a neat camp and the sound of Johanna commanding the horses to eat in English. She returns to him with a plate of food while he gingerly assesses the cut over his eye.

Although he doesn't dwell on it, Captain Kidd protected not just himself and Johanna but other women and children on whom Almay can no longer prey. In this sense, he's fulfilled what he considers to be the duty of all men. But he's also learned a valuable lesson about women's ability to fight for themselves—especially here as he acknowledges his own physical weakness compared to the young girl's strength.

Captain Kidd gets up and rubs the horses down, checking for injuries. Meanwhile, Johanna plays in the stream, as carefree as a "six-year-old." She reminds him of his previous life with his wife and daughters, and he things that perhaps the meaning of life is simply "surviving" and carrying "just one message" that is "delivered to us when we were born."

It's important that although Captain Kidd has just seen Johanna act like an Kiowa warrior, he doesn't lose sight of the fact that she's a child. In his eyes, her willingness to combat or kill an attacker can coexist with the innocent "six-year-old" behavior she displays now.

The next day, Captain Kidd and Johanna come to a ferry crossing, but the ferry itself is long gone. They make the crossing by themselves and set off on the road towards Durand. Johanna looks up in wonder and the large oaks; the scenery is much different than the land where she grew up. Captain Kidd points out the different species to her. Then, demonstrating the actions himself, he teaches her the words for "sit down" and "stand up." She calls him *Kontah* and *Opa*, which mean "grandfather" in Kiowa and German, respectively. Eager to show off her learning, she repeats all the words and numbers she knows.

While Johanna used to be suspicious and apathetic about the journey, now she expresses wonder and eagerness to learn. Fighting together against Almay has increased her trust in the Captain; by calling him "grandfather," she shows that she now considers them to be a kind of family. While this is an endearing moment, it also poignantly reminds the reader that this arrangement is temporary, scheduled to end all too soon.

Captain Kidd is glad Johanna is content on the journey, but he wonders what will happen when they arrive in San Antonio and she realizes she's expected to live in a stationary house for the rest of her life. Captain Kidd knows of two other "Indian captives" who starved themselves to death upon returning, and others have become "alcoholics, solitaries, strange people" as a result of being "abandoned by two cultures." Moreover, now that they have both saved each other's lives, he's reluctant to hand her over to live with strangers.

By providing background on other "Indian captives" (many of whom existed in real life) the Captain points out the steep challenges facing Johanna. He also argues that their predicament is caused by the inability to reconcile their dual cultural heritage, implicitly suggesting that these troubled young people represent the cultural conflict that is occurring across the nation.

Captain Kidd turns his thoughts to Durand, where he will give another reading to make up for the money they've shot away as ammunition. Although he once had savings and property, they all vanished during the Civil War; even if he didn't have Johanna to take care of, his livelihood would be very precarious.

Although Captain Kidd found meaning in war as a young man, the most recent one has robbed his life of security and stability, with no discernable benefits.

Johanna brings Captain Kidd's attention back to the present by making him explain the different words for shoe and foot. She tells him to stand up, sit down, and clap his hands until he's weary and stops the game. He wants her to sit quietly, but she continues to shout and make up strange, broken sentences until they come close to Durand.

Johanna is revealing her playful, childlike side—behavior that no one but Captain Kidd witnesses. Because he accepts the things that makes her different from most children, he's also able to see the ways in which she's just like any other girl.

Suddenly Johanna quiets as a group of well-armed men ride up to the **wagon**. Captain Kidd wonders if they've heard about the shooting or are simply opportunists taking advantage of the chaotic political climate in Texas. A bearded man surveys the bullet-ridden wagon and dirty young girl inside. He asks where Captain Kidd is headed; swallowing his annoyance, he explains that he's returning a former Kiowa captive to her home in Castroville. The man shakes his head at "the savages" and wonders aloud why they go around stealing children. He offers Johanna a piece of taffy, but she instantly strikes his hand away.

This episode is one of many moments when strangers detain and question Captain Kidd. In this case, the men don't even seem to work for the government. The lack of freedom and security on public roads indicates the inability of Reconstruction officials to adequately serve the people and highlights the anarchic atmosphere that has arisen the absence of strong government.

In a sterner manner, the bearded man asks Captain Kidd if he supports Davis or Hamilton. From his tone, the Captain surmises that the atmosphere in Durand must be combative. Drawing himself up, he declares he's offended that anyone would ask whom he voted for, and informs the men that he's a veteran of two wars and fought for "the rights of freeborn Englishmen." The men look confused but accept this explanation.

Captain Kidd is spouting platitudes that have nothing to do with the situation at hand, but it's enough to placate these strangers. By parodying the histrionic, self-righteous language of politicians like Davis and Hamilton, Captain Kidd highlights the fundamentally nonsensical nature of contemporary politics.

Captain Kidd asks why the men have stopped him at all, and the men say that they're not allowing any Davis supporters into the county. The Captain asks if this is an "official" suggestion, but the men say there are no officials in the town. All the local administration supported the Confederacy, so the army has thrown them out and sent no one to replace them. The men demand a half dollar to let the **wagon** pass.

Officials like Davis and Hamilton are sent by the federal government to promote loyalty and reconciliation in the Confederate states. But instead of meaningfully addressing pervasive issues like racism, they're allowing mobs to control local towns, thus inciting distrust and resentment.

CHAPTER 14

Captain Kidd pulls into the loading yard of a big broom mill on the edge of town. The mill owner is sitting nearby, binding brooms. Explaining that he can't afford a hotel and doesn't want Johanna to sleep in a **wagon** yard, the Captain asks to spend the night. The owner charges fifty cents, an exorbitant price.

While the Captain often encounters acquaintances and even strangers who are willing to help him, this man's behavior shows the more mercenary and opportunistic side of frontier culture.

At the pump, Captain Kidd washes his cut as thoroughly as possible. He gives Johanna his watch, trying to show her the time when he will be back, and sets off into the town, where he rents a hall to read and puts up his posters. A well-dressed man asks him about the politics in Dallas, but the Captain refuses to comment, merely saying that local news is "pure propaganda" and he only reads papers from the East. He says that his reading will cover events so far away that "they have a fairy-tale quality about them." Offended, the man huffs that he considers the local newspaper "a valuable contribution to the current debates." The Captain walks away.

Captain Kidd's speech here is a little convoluted. He accuses the local press of being unrealistic and useless to the townspeople, but then states that he will read about events that do not resemble reality and have no effect on Texans. This moment reflects both the Captain's disillusionment with the media and his doubts about the moral worth of his own profession.

Back at the **wagon**, the mill owner watches suspiciously as Johanna cleans the wagon and harnesses. As Captain Kidd sets out his newspapers, the mill owner complains that there's "something wrong" with the girl. The Captain looks for "soothing," uncontroversial articles to read. For Johanna's sake, he needs to get out of Durand safely and carrying a good deal more money. As he underlines an article about ice-skating in Philadelphia, the owner asks defiantly why Johanna looks white but doesn't speak English. The Captain tells him to "shut the hell up."

The mill owner's blunt comments reflect the view of many adults who encounter Johanna: that because she doesn't act like most children he knows, there is something fundamentally "wrong" with her. It's important that he marshals as evidence her inability to speak English: he's explicitly liking his conception of "normal" behavior to whiteness and Anglo-American culture.

After a few minutes of reading the paper in peace, Captain Kidd hears Johanna shrieking from the river. Running to the water, he sees Johanna bathing in her underclothes while a young woman with a bucket chases her. Johanna screams curses while the woman cries that in frustration that "we cannot have naked bathing here." The Captain tries to calm the young woman, covering Johanna with a blanket and explaining that she doesn't know any better. Undeterred, the woman accuses Johanna of "parading her charms [...] like a Dallas huzzy."

At 10 years old, Johanna is obviously a child; but by calling her a "Dallas huzzy," or prostitute, the woman attributes to her the sexuality and personal responsibility of an adult. Because she does not conform to Anglo-American norms, Johanna is excluded from the social protections afforded to other children. Instead, she is presumed to be both sexually available and liable to adult punishment.

Captain Kidd pulls Johanna out of the water. She clutches him and sobs. Sharply, he tells the young woman that Johanna has seen her own mother brained to death and endured sufferings "beyond description." The woman responds that the importance of bathing modestly must be "forcefully impressed upon her."

Here, Captain Kidd exhorts the young woman to feel the empathy that comes so naturally to him. That she is incapable of doing so (at least initially) highlights the exceptional nature of the Captain's own character.

Meanwhile, Johanna thinks of her Kiowa mother, with whom she had bathed naked alongside the other girls of the tribe, while the young men drummed on the mountainside. She feels "all her terrible losses" acutely and continues to weep. Looking chastened, young woman leans down and tells Johanna and says she's sorry for her sufferings. Sternly, the Captain responds that if she wants to call herself a Christian, she should find Johanna some new shoes and clothing.

By momentarily stepping into Johanna's mind, the novel allows the reader to witness the suffering that Captain Kidd can only imagine. Her flashback also highlights the artificial nature of all social norms: while naked bathing is a sign of depravity to the young woman, for Johanna it represents innocent fun and familial bonding.

By eight o'clock Johanna is calm and settled in the back of the **wagon**. As Captain Kidd heads out for his reading, she reminds him that they have no bacon left, and he promises to bring some home, telling her that the next day they will even have eggs. He looks at her with concern, reflecting on how easily the moods of children shift. He would like to kiss her on the cheek, but he doesn't know if this is acceptable among the Kiowa; after all, "cultures were mine fields." Instead, he pats her gently.

Rather than focusing on the way Johanna's tendency to flout norms sets her apart from other children, Captain Kidd focuses on her changeable moods as one of the universal hallmarks of children across cultures. It's also notable that, rather than assuming Johanna can or should adopt his own cultural norms, he explicitly takes responsibility for understanding and acknowledging hers.

CHAPTER 15

Outside the hall, a soldier is supposed to check audience members for handguns, but he never confiscates any. Captain Kidd sees that people are standing in different, hostile groups. Outside, a storm is gathering. He begins by commenting on road conditions, always a popular topic. But when he pauses, a man stands up and cries that Davis will build paved roads for all his "cronies in the legislature." Captain Kidd reprimands him sharply and everyone quiets down. But soon, someone asks why he's not reading from the local papers and people start arguing over which ones are trustworthy.

The stormy weather outside mirrors the volatile climate within the hall. In a way, this meeting represents the flip side of the cultural diversity that Captain Kidd notices and appreciates in his journey. While many kinds of people are mixing together in frontier America, many interests groups are also scrambling for power, trying to assert dominance in violent and unjust ways.

Calling everyone to order, the Captain reads through his stories quickly. As he's describing tulips in Turkey someone starts screaming about Davis again, and other men come to his defense. Women hurry out of the building, some of them quietly taking away their menfolk's handguns. The soldier surveys the scene without doing anything. Someone throws a chair into a glass case along the wall and Captain Kidd's coin can is overturned. Eventually, the fight moves out into the street.

Captain Kidd once daydreamed that by bringing accurate news to people, he could promote peace. Instead, when he refuses to bow to propaganda he inadvertently incites violence. The Captain has always delighted in the simplicity of transmitting information, but it's clear that this alone isn't enough to effect social change.

Captain Kidd stands at the lectern, reflecting that it's better to stay in North Texas, where one only has to handle Comanche raids. It's humiliating to crawl around on the floor collecting the coins, but he does it for Johanna's sake. Suddenly, the bearded man from the road outside Durand appears, politely drawing up a chair for the Captain and gathering the dimes himself. He introduces himself as John Calley and apologizes for taking the Captain's money earlier.

Captain Kidd has previously described fatherhood in more heroic terms, like the duty of men to protect children physically. Now, he learns that being a parent entails many less glamorous tasks, like scrambling for money on the floor.

Captain Kidd asks John if he fought in the war, and John says he did, as a 17-year-old. The Captain suggests he break off ties with the other marauding men, but John says he can't: they're his brothers and cousins. Anyway, it's hard to tell what's illegal when the situation changes every week. The Captain realizes that the young man has come to the reading in clean clothes in order to show that he's a "serious man."

In the last chapter, John Calley appeared to be an unscrupulous cowboy. Now, he's presenting himself as a well-bred and intellectual young man. Just as the Captain wants other people to refrain from judging Johanna by her initial appearance, he must learn to reevaluate a man he's dismissed as an ignorant outlaw.

Captain Kidd asks if John is planning to read law, but the young man responds in the negative, saying he's looking for "honest work." He finds it hard to believe he could ever find "solid ground" in the changeable law. Captain Kidd says that he's heard the law should apply to leaders and citizens equally, and that it should be written clearly and placed in public squares for everyone to see. With a look of longing and hope, John asks whose idea that is. The Captain responds that these are the principles of Hammurabi.

John's quip reflects widespread disillusionment with the government, which Captain Kidd is starting to share. It's notable that even though broad ideas of transparency and justice were articulated thousands of years ago (Hammurabi was a Babylonian king reigning from c. 1792 BCE to c. 1750 BCE), no society has figured out how to implement them. This exchange contextualizes the frontier climate within larger historical trends.

Captain Kidd decides to leave Durand in the night, in case the situation escalates. He returns to the mill, where Johanna excitedly shows him a new dress and stockings that the young woman, whom she calls the "bad water lady," gave her. The Captain is touched by the clothes, which are all of good quality and which will enable Johanna to meet her relatives clean and well-dressed. He tells her to get ready to leave.

While the Captain felt stagnant and misanthropic at the beginning of the novel, he's now learning to notice and accept personal transformation in himself and others.

The sky clears as Captain Kidd harnesses the horses. Johanna brings a small bundle into the **wagon** and they set off into the night. When they've traveled some miles, Johanna opens her bundle; it contains two chickens from the mill she's stolen, slaughtered, and gutted. She's clearly proud of herself for providing "blek-fass." Captain Kidd is dejected, knowing that it's wrong to take chickens and that the whole town will see him as thief. But he composes himself and speaks evenly to Johanna, praising her for providing food.

Again, Captain Kidd imagines Johanna's intent rather than focusing on his own perspective. While it's relatively easy for the Captain to accept Johanna's idiosyncrasies when they don't have any real consequences, that he continues to evince such understanding even when her behavior affects him negatively shows his true commitment to acting as a father figure and practicing cultural understanding.

Staring ahead, the Captain realizes that tears are falling down his cheeks. He dreads the future that lies ahead for Johanna, who doesn't have the faintest understanding of private property or theft. Johanna strokes his face with her bloody fingers and says decisively that he's hungry. Anxiously, she asks if she's "all lite," and he assures her that everything is fine.

Initially, Captain Kidd believed he wasn't suited to care for Johanna. Now, his anguish at the thought of parting shows that he's realized he may be the only person who can guide her through this difficult transition.

CHAPTER 16

That day Captain Kidd and Johanna travel down a long, exposed road, eventually stopping at an empty campsite to eat roast chicken. The Captain dreams that a terrible man is rising out of the river to follow him. He's familiar with these dreams, which come after any conflict that reminds him of his time in battle. He wonders if it's these kinds of recurring memories that traumatize the captive children forever.

In articulating his thoughts on war, Captain Kidd always stresses the satisfaction he's derived from serving in the military. However, his dreams (which seem to be recurring) suggest that his time in the army has actually had profound psychological effects.

The next day they drive for 20 miles. Johanna learns to count to 100, tie her shoes, and sing some folk songs. Full of energy, she runs alongside the **wagon** dancing Kiowa children's dances. Along the way, they pass an army company who warn them about raiders in the hills. Captain Kidd asks sharply why the army doesn't do anything about the raiders.

The Captain's sharp retort emphasizes the army's inability to carry out its primary task: keeping civilians safe. Coming on the heels of his nightmare, this suggests his dwindling faith in military presence as a means of getting things done.

By the time they reach the outskirts of Lampasas, Captain Kidd feels recovered and in good spirits. He once traveled up this road to North Texas after Maria Luisa's death. He remembers the houses of San Antonio with their ornate balconies, modeled after traditional Spanish dwellings just as the owners kept careful records of their descent from original settlers. He remembers rowing on the river with his wife and two daughters. But the beautiful town is meaningless to him without his wife's presence. Johanna begins singing "Hard Times" in her strange accent.

The juxtaposition of European architecture and the Texas frontier landscape is a reminder of the many cultural influences integral to the formation of American culture. It's interesting that Captain Kidd is reflecting more frankly on his wife and the grief he feels about her death. Perhaps the work of interpreting Johanna's emotions helps him address his own.

After some time, they meet an elderly lady traveling the opposite direction in a small gig. She informs them that she's going to Durand, despite the danger, in order to file a lawsuit. Captain Kidd gives her some coins to compensate the broom mill owner for his chickens. The old woman says he's "an animal" and deserves to be robbed, but the Captain insists. Before leaving, she asks if Johanna is "disturbed in the mind."

The friendly woman's comment seems blunt but well-intentioned. However, her immediate ability to perceive that something about Johanna is different foreshadows the difficulty with which Johanna will eventually have to assimilate into Anglo-American society.

Wary of Native American raids, Captain Kidd rides his horse rather than sitting in the **wagon**. He's also concerned about entering Lampasas, which is dominated by a decades-long feud between two families. But he sees many others heading into town, presumably for a market, and in the lovely spring weather the countryside looks surprisingly beautiful.

The juxtaposition of tranquil small-town life and dangerous raids is a reminder that indigenous people have been dispossessed of their lands in order for settlers on the Texas frontier to thrive.

As they near the town, Captain Kidd and Johanna meet a group of four men riding horses. The Captain pulls up the horses and Johanna disappears into the bag of the **wagon**. Then men ask where the Captain is coming from and going; he coolly informs them and asks by what authority they're blocking his road. They don't seem to know themselves. One of the men recognizes him as a news-reader and advises him to stay away from the tavern frequented by the Horrell brothers, who fancy themselves cowboys and are convinced that the Eastern newspapers should write about them. If Captain Kidd does a reading, the brothers will demand he discuss them.

Once again, access to a town is controlled by unsanctioned bands of young men. Even worse, it appears that a feud is flourishing in the absence of government intervention. It's ironic that while Captain Kidd once saw himself as a bearer of peace through news, now the very fact that he's a newsreader makes him vulnerable and in need of protection.

In fact, the men say that they ran into the elderly lady in her gig, who told them that a news-reader was riding into town, and they've come specifically to warn Captain Kidd. The Captain asks if the Horrell brothers will mind if he reads about England, and one of them responds that "the Horrells don't know there *is* an England." The Captain realizes he can't do a reading at all, and says that after he and Johanna get some rest they will leave Lampasas immediately. He's astonished that he's survived the War of 1812 simply to ride through these godforsaken places—and even more so to find himself so happy about it.

The young man's comment on the Horrell brothers' intelligence (or lack thereof) makes an explicit connection between ignorance and violent, intolerant behavior. Captain Kidd's rueful remark on his army service reminds the reader that the successive wars he's lived through have done little to democratize or enlighten his society.

CHAPTER 17

Although Captain Kidd is determined to get out of town without trouble, the Horrell brothers track him down as he's unharnessing the horses near a spring. They pull up on beautiful horses, wearing mismatched military uniforms, and ask the Captain why they aren't in the news. The Captain tries to placate them by saying it's quite possible they've appeared in Eastern newspapers that aren't available here. One of the brothers insists that they deserve to be written about, given that they've "killed a right smart of Mexicans." Captain Kidd dryly asks if anyone objects to this bloodshed, but the men say that Davis has fired all the officials aligned with the Confederacy and never replaced them.

By wearing mismatched uniforms, the Horrell brothers function as a parody of the actual army—which, like them, is confused and ineffectual in carrying out its goals. The brothers' blatant racism shows that while ethnic diversity has influenced America positively, racial violence is a strong force underpinning the country's history. Additionally, the brothers' assertion that they are able to persecute Mexicans because of the fall of the Confederacy highlights the failure of Reconstruction government.

The Horrell brothers loftily command Captain Kidd to come to the saloon that night and read the news. Captain Kidd politely says that he'll come later in the evening; he knows that by then, they'll be too drunk to remember him. By ten o'clock, he can hear them carousing in the saloon. On the other side of the spring, he can see horses, and he knows that the first set of brothers are guarding him and Johanna for the night. Instead of sleeping, he sits up with his revolver all night.

Even though the first set of brothers, whom Captain Kidd and Johanna met outside the town, seem like vigilantes, their watchful presence shows their redeeming qualities. The long journey is teaching Captain Kidd to subtle kindnesses that he previously ignored.

CHAPTER 18

As he rides south into the hill country, Captain Kidd is intensely conscious of the possibility of raids. He rides the horse, thinking that if raiders come he will drag Johanna onto the saddle and make a run for it. He listens carefully for any noise of a raiding party. Johanna is also alert, wearing her uncomfortable shoes and holding the shotgun. But neither one hears anything as they pass by abandoned farms, some of which have been burned down.

The eerie presence of abandoned and destroyed farms is a reminder of the violence permeating American society. They also emphasize Johanna's predicament as a member of two cultures that are intensely pitted against each other.

The valley they drive through is beautiful, populated with wildflowers and new grass for the horses to eat. When they make camp, a ringtail cat sits by the fire and surveys them, delighting Johanna with its enormous ears. They have made camp in a destroyed cabin, where broken cups and a doll's headless body lie eerily on the floor. Captain Kidd feels he can envision the former owners' exact habits and desires, which must have been similar to those of his own family in Georgia. These people had probably stewarded the same land for generations, but had now left forever.

The natural beauty and abundance of wildlife evokes the land's bounty and potential. This lyrical passage makes the empty cottage and abandoned possessions even more poignant, encouraging the readers to feel the losses of both the settlers and the Native Americans who have been living here for thousands of years.

One night, they reach a clear spring and make camp at a springhouse (a structure build to store milk and other perishables at cool temperatures). Captain Kidd unharnesses the horses and sits with his back to the spring while Johanna bathes. At night, while they sit in the springhouse before bed, they see a young man drop soundlessly from an oak tree into the spring. He's blond, but his hair is styled in the manner of the Kiowa. Captain Kidd holds his weapon, wondering if Johanna will call out to the young man and his comrades, who must be nearby. This is her chance to return to her familiar life. But Johanna just puts her hand on his arm and shakes her head as three more men drop into the spring and swim away.

Captain Kidd and Johanna glimpse a man who probably came to the Kiowa as a captive but has now thoroughly assimilated into Native American society. Johanna is witnessing the life she looked forward to living, so it's especially bittersweet that she remains composed and does not call out. She's showing both her loyalty to Captain Kidd and her knowledge that, now that the Kiowa have given her up it's impossible to return to her tribe.


As Captain Kidd and Johanna get closer to Castroville, where her relatives live, they reach Fredericksburg, an almost entirely German-speaking town. The Captain books two rooms in a hotel, where Johanna causes a mild sensation, since people have heard rumors about both her captivity and "rescue." Townspeople give the Captain unsolicited advice on managing her "strange" behavior. They comment that all captives dislike white people, probably because they had "partaken of some secret potion" among the Native Americans.

Like the Spanish character of San Antonio, the presence of entirely German enclaves challenges stereotypes of frontier America as ethnically homogenous. Paradoxically, even though they're a testament to America's diversity, the townspeople completely reject the idea that captives could be content in non-European cultures without supernatural influence.

Captain Kidd decides to do a reading, mainly so Johanna can learn to hold his can and collect dimes. First, they have a traditional German supper, during which Johanna carefully uses her napkin and fork to eat. But when she slurps a noodle so hard it hits her nose, both she and the Captain burst out laughing. He shows her how to tell the time until the reading on his watch.

Last time Johanna tried to use silverware, she threw the fork away in frustration. Her comparative ease now shows that she's assimilating to Anglo-American society. At the same time, the Captain's amusement at her faux-pas shows that he's not pressuring her to assimilate faster than she wants to.

At the town church, Captain Kidd shows Johanna how to collect money for the reading. She takes to the role instantly, becoming a firm gatekeeper and even recalling a few words of her long-unused German. She laughs with the crowd, even though she doesn't understand what's happening.

At the beginning of the novel, Captain Kidd remarked that he had no one to collect coins for him. By taking up this task, Johanna shows that she's filling not just a logistical but an emotional void in his life.

That night, Captain Kidd puts Johanna to sleep in her own room—a milestone for her. As he tiptoes out, he reflects that Johanna is "being filed down and her sharp edges ground away." He tries to read the newspapers in preparation for future readings, but he can't concentrate so he cleans his gun and makes a shopping list of supplies.

It's touching that even though Captain Kidd believes it's in Johanna's best interests to assimilate to Anglo-American culture, he's also sad to see her fierce character soften. His attachment for her doesn't depend on her ability to fulfill social expectations.

CHAPTER 19

The next town they reach, Bandera, is almost entirely populated by Polish immigrants working in the local saw mill. Captain Kidd rents a large hall and gives a successful reading. He has lots of interesting news to deliver, from Texas's readmission to the Union to the first female law student. Johanna sits in the back, sternly collecting the coins which she still seems to see as ammunition: if anyone tries to slip by without paying she cries out, "Chohenna choot!"

Johanna isn't exactly behaving like an Anglo-American child; but she's tolerated and accepted by those around her. This scene envisions a way for Johanna to retain her unique character while also living peacefully in her new world.

Soon, they reach the end of the hill country. The soft breezes at night remind Captain Kidd of the battles he fought in the Mexican War and the mornings in San Antonio when he awoke next to his wife. Looking across the plain, Johanna suddenly asks about her **doll**. The Captain reminds her that she left it on the Red River, and she nods. She asks if he's going to read in Castroville. Shakily, he says he won't and tries to explain that she's going to live with her *onkle* and *tante* (the German words for "aunt" and "uncle").

Just as Johanna becomes contented and comfortable with the Captain, she start to realize that their comradeship is only temporary. It's interesting that she discusses her fears through the doll. The toy symbolizes her dual cultural identity, which the Captain accommodates but which will shock and upset her aunt and uncle. Like many children, she articulates big problems with the aid of small, familiar objects.


Captain Kidd knows that Johanna must think she's done something wrong, and must be frightened at the prospect of separation from the only person in the world she now knows. Suddenly, Johanna commands him to laugh; when he looks over at her, he sees she's crying. Firmly, he says that she'll adjust to her new life. Johanna orders him to clap his hands, but he refuses. She bows her head, understanding "the stiffness of his arm" if not his exact words. She continues to cry as they drive.

By demanding that the Captain play their familiar game, Johanna is trying to reclaim their previous carefree happiness; but her tears show her awareness that this period is over. For Captain Kidd, this acknowledgment of the end of her childhood is a bigger loss of innocence than her other adult-like qualities or her capacity for violence in battle.

When they reach Castroville, the houses' slanted roofs remind Captain Kidd of engravings he's seen of European villages. Emulating their lives in Germany, people live clustered together here, rather than in homesteads. They pass the inn and a Catholic church, and when the Captain asks for directions he learns that Wilhelm and Anna Leonberger live fifteen miles outside the town. He doesn't tell anyone he's delivering their captive niece, knowing that publicizing this fact would cause crowds to gather and intimidate Johanna.

Again, the village's architecture is a testament to the various cultures influencing American society—as well as the complete erasure of any Native American presence on the land. By keeping quiet about Johanna's identity, the Captain displays a sensitivity for her feelings that his society associates with maternal, not paternal, figures.

On the way to the homestead, Captain Kidd takes Johanna to the graveyard where her parents are buried. He takes off his hat while Johanna looks at the stones in "indifference." She says she doesn't like it here and asks to go back to Dallas, but the Captain tells her they "just cannot." Braiding her hair, Johanna becomes stiff and composed. Among the Kiowa, she's been taught always to show courage and never to beg or plead.

Johanna's "indifferent" attitude towards her parents' graves contrasts with her clear attachment to Captain Kidd. While it's distressing that Johanna never got the chance to really know her birth family, this contrast shows that family doesn't need to be biological to be meaningful. The Captain thinks that Wilhelm and Anna are entitled to care for their niece, but it's clear he's the best person for the job.

When they meet a young man on horseback, Captain Kidd asks him to ride ahead of him to Wilhelm and Anna's farm, and inform them that he's bringing Johanna home. The man is startled and overjoyed to see the young girl, and rides off immediately. When they reach the farm, dogs circle the **wagon** and bark as the Captain helps Johanna down from the wagon.

The young man's response to Johanna's arrival is endearing. However, it will soon form a stark contrast to Wilhelm and Anna's chilly reception.

Wilhelm comes out of the farmhouse to scold the dogs in German; Johanna seems to understand his words. Captain Kidd introduces himself and hands over Johanna's official papers, given to him by the military. Anna comes to stand silently beside her husband as he carefully reads the papers. When Captain Kidd remarks how far they've traveled, they both seem uninterested.

Wilhelm is clearly more interested in the bureaucratic details of Johanna's rescue and return than his niece's actual well-being. This bodes poorly for any future relationship with Johanna.

Wilhelm asks what has happened to the 50 dollars they sent to pay for Johanna's return. Captain Kidd responds that he used it to buy the **wagon**. Wilhelm asks if he has a receipt, which he does not. Wilhelm scrutinizes Johanna, who is barefoot and clutching the horse. He remarks that Johanna's parents were "done murder by the Indians" and grudgingly invites them into the house.

It's pretty appalling that in this time of family reunion, Wilhelm can only focus on the whereabouts of his money. It seems more likely that he and Anna have sent for Johanna as a matter of social propriety, rather than genuine love for their long-lost niece.

CHAPTER 20

Captain Kidd tries to explain to Wilhelm that Johanna needs peace, quiet, and a good deal of time to adjust to life in an Anglo-American household. But he knows that Wilhelm will soon invite all the neighbors to scrutinize her. As the Captain sits in a chair and drinks coffee, Johanna squats warily in a corner, examining all the strange objects in the house. Anna tells her sharply to get up, but Johanna just looks away.

While Anna thinks Johanna's behavior is strange and unacceptable, the young girl sees the house as foreign and frightening. Each is having trouble adjusting to another culture. However, only Anna sees her culture as essentially superior.

Wilhelm brusquely tells Captain Kidd about the raid that killed Johanna's parents. The Kiowa raped Johanna's mother and spilled her brains all over the farmyard. Captain Kidd acknowledges that it was a horrible episode. They also cut Johanna's little sister's throat and hanged her in a tree. Anna looks at Johanna sternly and asks if she is glad to return "from the savages."

Johanna's mother was scalped, but Johanna herself tried to scalp Almay just a few weeks ago. Wilhelm has unwittingly summed up Johanna's divided loyalties and suspension between two cultures. But while Captain Kidd wishes to honor her complex identity, Wilhelm wants to suppress all her Native American behavior.

Everyone looks at Johanna, who is singing to herself quietly. Wilhelm says that she must learn to work and adopt their ways. They have no children, only a nephew working far away, and Anna needs a lot of help in the house. Captain Kidd explains that Johanna believes she is a Native American, and will need time to adjust. Anna says she "must be corrected strong," and is certainly not too small to work in the house. Wilhelm asks again if the Captain has a receipt for the **wagon**.

Wilhelm explicitly states that he sees Johanna as more of a servant than a relative, establishing himself as a much less fit parent than Captain Kidd. It's also noteworthy that Wilhelm seems to think Johanna is lazy or unwilling to work because of her Native American upbringing. In fact, she's capable and industrious, and his statements simply reveal how far-fetched his prejudices are.

While Captain Kidd sleeps in the house, Johanna remains in the **wagon**. The next day the entire town comes to celebrate but Johanna runs into the barn loft and hides, throwing objects at people who try to coax her down. In the end, everyone shares a celebratory German meal without her. The messenger from the day before, whose name is Adolph, sits beside Captain Kidd and remarks neutrally that Wilhelm and Anna work very hard. In fact, the nephew who once lived with them left home because they worked him too hard.

While Johanna initially distrusted the wagon that carried her away from "Indian Territory," now it's a site of stability in an increasingly frightening world. The wagon symbolizes both her lack of a fixed place in society and the security she derives from her relationship with the Captain. Meanwhile, Adolph's comments undermine Wilhelm and Anna's claim to Johanna even further.

The Captain asks what can be done to help Johanna, but Adolph simply shrugs. No one from the town will intervene in what is seen as Anna and Wilhelm's private business. The Captain acknowledges that things are similar among the English and stands to go, saying he's helpless here. Adolph continues that Wilhelm and Anna have no adoption papers. They probably won't adopt Johanna legally, because in that case they would have to provide her with a dowry. With sudden intensity, Adolph begs the Captain not to leave Johanna here. The Captain stiffly bids him farewell and leaves the party before he starts crying.

It's interesting that Captain Kidd is so unwilling to take action. Perhaps because he's always seen himself as a bearer of messages, he's unaccustomed to making decisions about the information—or children—he delivers. Hiding his tears here, Captain Kidd is reverting to rigid standards of masculinity that he has largely abandoned over the course of his journey with Johanna.

CHAPTER 21

Captain Kidd stays the night at an inn in Castroville before continuing on to San Antonio. He's happy to see the Mexican women doing laundry in the river, and responds to their greetings in Spanish. A man in the street recognizes him and invites him to visit later. He drives by the large, old-fashioned houses until he reaches the main plaza, where he can stable the **wagon** and horses. His old print shop is there as well, and the next day he peers through the windows; it seems like it's now a storage space.

For Captain Kidd, the print shop was a hallmark of success and prosperity; now, it drives home the loss of his profession and family. In contrast, the shabby wagon establishes him as a poor wanderer, but since Johanna's arrival it has become a sheltering home.

That morning, Captain Kidd visits a young lawyer to discuss the "legal status of returned captives" and the Printing Bill, which has shut down southern printers since the end of the Civil War. The lawyer says he might be able to start a business in a few years, when the law is repealed; as for captives, they belong to their "parents or guardians." After leaving the lawyer's office, he rides to the ruined old mission. Somewhere inside are the records that prove his daughters' ownership of their mother's land. He will let Elizabeth, who likes long quests, figure it out.

Captain Kidd has lost his press in part because the Reconstruction government has shut down printers that might distribute disloyal material. This cynical view on the purpose of news contrasts with Captain Kidd's initial idealism about the profession; but it does seem somewhat warranted given that most of the local newspapers are vehicles for propaganda.

At the post office, Captain Kidd finds a letter from Elizabeth, saying that she and Olympia will make the journey in two years, when they are more prepared. She asks if he has any money to help with the journey, but Captain Kidd knows his newspaper readings will not be possible here, where newspapers are distributed daily and telegraphs bring regular updates. It's strange to think that just a few hours away, raiding and kidnapping is a serious threat. That evening the Captain buys many newspapers and tries to read, but he ends up drinking whisky in his hotel.

In a way, the threat of Native American raids is easier for the Captain to address than the difficult process of rebuilding his life in San Antonio and reuniting with his daughters. He has to confront the reminders of his past while acknowledging that he's no longer the prosperous patriarch he once was.

The next day Captain Kidd drives back to Castroville, telling himself he's only visiting to help Anna and Wilhelm understand "what it was like for a child taken captive and then redeemed and then adopted by virtual strangers." It's dusk by the time he reaches the farm, and he sees Johanna trudging through the field, carrying several harnesses and a heavy bucket. He realizes they've sent her out into an unfamiliar landscape, with a load of equipment she can hardly carry, to feed the horses.

The Captain has seen Johanna face situations more arduous than this with complete composure. Now, she seems defeated not because she has to take on difficult tasks, but because she's doing so in such an unwelcoming, oppressive atmosphere.

Captain Kidd stands up in the **wagon** and calls to Johanna, who turns to look at him in surprise. Calling his name, she runs over and offers food to the horse. The Captain realizes she is trying to be useful in order to "make herself welcome, wanted." He's furious to see welts across her arms, where her aunt and uncle have whipped her. Calmly, he tells her to drop the bucket and get into the wagon. Johanna vaults over the fence and jumps up beside him, crying and calling him "Grandfather" in Kiowa and English. The Captain puts his arm around her and says that if anyone objects to him taking her away, he will "shoot them full of ten-cent pieces."

For the first time, Johanna is purposely trying to win the Captain's affection, behaving like a canny adult rather than a trusting child. This wrenching loss of innocence is unprecedented in the novel; even in the midst of the tense battle with Almay, Johanna didn't display this adult consciousness of her precarious place in the world. She's compelled to grow up not by facing danger but by forcibly adopting unfamiliar new norms.

CHAPTER 22

Captain Kidd and Johanna drive slowly north through Texas, stopping to give readings on the way. People recognize her as the former captive, repeating rumors that she had beaten an attacker named Almay to death with a bag of quarters. Still, everyone agrees she has "cleaned up quite nicely," collecting fees for the Captain and learning to read.

While Johanna's status as a captive had once been a stigma, now it's a point of interest and even pride. She's finding a way to live in Anglo-American society without hiding her roots.


By the time they reach Dallas, Mrs. Gannet has taken up with another, younger man. The "Indian Wars" are coming to an end as the U.S. military drives the Kiowa and Comanche farther West. In remote towns, the Captain reads of "the new world that had come about" while Texas was busy with the Civil War, full of new inventions and machines. When they reach the Spanish-speaking territories, the Captain reads his articles in Spanish. Later, they drive down to the gulf where "the former slave population was at last turning to their own lives."

While a "new world" is forming in America, it's important to remember that this period of growth coincides with—and, in fact, depends on—the forcible removal of Native Americans from their ancestral lands. This passage juxtaposes American heterogeneity and potential with the violence and racism that underpins American society.

Johanna gradually becomes fluent in English, although she always retains a slight Kiowa accent. She loves their itinerant life, and never learns to care about the material goods so important to Anglo-Americans; like the Kiowa, she prides herself on being able to do without almost everything. She understands that "neither fashionable dresses nor bank accounts" can ever make life truly safe. Only courage is truly useful.

Johanna's disdain for "fashionable dresses" mirrors that Captain's earlier assertion that everything—from fashions to wars—is transient. Acknowledging life's fundamental instability is difficult for the Captain, but it also gives him strength and the motivation to live simply.


With Johanna's influence, Captain Kidd feels immune to the anxieties that drive those around him. He orders newspapers from faraway countries and reads to his audiences about Eskimos and Australian Aborigines, as well as new discoveries in Africa. Still, with all his reading he never understands how Johanna could have assimilated so completely into Kiowa life in just four years of captivity.

Rather than having a patriarchal relationship based on power and control, Johanna and the Captain influence each other equally. It's important that he learns from her Kiowa culture even as she adopts his Anglo-American customs.

After three years, Olympia, Elizabeth, her husband Emory, and two children move to San Antonio, where they take possession of their mother's family home and begin the process of claiming her farmland. Emory starts up a printing press of his own and Olympia eventually remarries. Captain Kidd stops wandering and settles down for good in San Antonio, where he advises Emory in his work. Johanna pretends "to be a white girl," but she always seems envious about the Mexican women who wade and play in the creek. As she becomes a teenager, she eats dinner carefully and without relish. The Captain doesn't know what to do to help her.

It's interesting—and somewhat predictable, given his distant relationship with his daughters—that reuniting his family isn't as blissful as Captain Kidd thought it would be. For both him and Johanna, the wandering lifestyle is satisfying in a way that relationships with their biological families—however positive—just aren't.

One day John Calley, whom Captain Kidd had met in Durand, comes to pay a visit. When he rings the doorbell, he's surprised to see a beautiful blond teenager answer. Stammering, he announces his intention to see the Captain and asks if she remembers him; but Johanna says stiffly she does not. After he talks to the Captain, John sits down at the piano to play some folk songs; soon, Johanna joins him to learn the tunes as the Captain stands by the window, looking out at the milkman. When John gets up to leave, Johanna invites him back for dinner.

It's interesting that John Calley, heretofore a minor character, becomes Johanna's romantic interest. He first appears as a rough character, familiar with frontier dangers and comfortable living outside the law. But he also has a deep curiosity about law and the structure of society, which make him an apt partner for a woman who doesn't fit perfectly into her own.

John decides to stay in South Texas and gather cattle in the area, a dangerous but profitable business. After two trips he has made a good deal of money and asks Johanna to marry him. On the day of the wedding, Johanna sits nervously in her bedroom next to Captain Kidd. Addressing him as "Kontah," she asks what "the best rules for being married" are. He lightly warns her not to scalp anyone or steal chickens, but says she will figure everything else out herself. Before going downstairs, she hugs the Captain tearfully and says he is her "curative waters." Trying not to cry himself, he gives her his long-treasured pocket watch.

Even though the Captain is ostensibly warning Johanna away from her childhood behaviors, he's also honoring their shared past. Johanna's vulnerability before her adopted father is a testament to his emotional sensitivity, an attribute not usually associated with men in his era. By referencing the wagon's "curative waters" slogan, Johanna emphasizes its importance as a site of stability and familial warmth.

After her wedding, Johanna joins John on his long cattle rides, returning to the wandering life she's always yearned for. It's years before they finally settle down. Meanwhile, the Captain spends his old age working on a Kiowa dictionary.

By marrying John, Johanna approximates her former life as much as possible within the confines of Anglo-American society.

Britt Johnson and his men are killed in a Comanche raid during one of their freighting trips. However, Simon and Doris raise six children, all musicians. The family travels around Texas bringing Irish dancing from town to town. The Horrells continue to wreak havoc in remote central Texas until they die in a shootout so legendary it's written up in all the newspapers.

Brusquely relating the happy and unfortunate futures of many minor characters, the novel shows how opportunity, tragedy, and pure farce mingle closely together on the American frontier.

The church in San Antonio, called San Fernando, is renovated, but the bones of Maria Luisa's ancestors still lie beneath the floor. The Kiowa are not buried in the ground but "in the stories of their lives, told and retold—their bravery and daring." When he finally dies, Captain Kidd is buried with his runner's badge from the War of 1812, because he has "a message to deliver, contents unknown."

Captain Kidd's burial with his badge emphasizes his conception of himself as a transmitter of information. Meanwhile, the novel's lyrical evocation of different resting places demonstrates the poetic beauty of coexisting customs, even as cultural mixing in America often explodes into violence and tragedy.

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