



STUDY GUIDE

Marshal Sweeney Delaney was just a rookie in his small Iowa town when Congress ratified the

18th Amendment. Prohibition threw the whole nation into a tailspin. Even teetotaling Christians jumped on the bandwagon and began making panther piss in a still behind the barn. Then—a Chicago gangster came to town. His name: Louie La Cava. Sweeney followed the adage: Keep your friends close; your enemies closer. Two old friends are part of his inner circle: Walter Bierkoff, a farmer and man of keen curiosity, and the perspicacious Father John Halpin, priest at the I. C. Catholic Church.

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(EXAMPLE OF ON-LINE BOOK REVIEW)



Trude

★★★★★ You don't want to miss this...trust me!

September 2, 2018

Format: Hardcover | [Verified Purchase](#)

Wow...just wow! What a fantastic book, I've been a fan of Hank Phillippi Ryan since I read Prime Time, and love her Jane Ryland books. This is her first stand-alone and she knocks it out of the park! The subject matter is timely and the writing fast paced with twists and turns around every corner...just when you think you know what is happening Hank changes things up. Who do you trust...what do you trust?

Mercer is trying to pull herself out of the darkness after the deaths of her husband and daughter in a tragic car accident when her friend and editor talks her into writing a book about the trial of a young woman...Ashlyn...accused of killing her daughter. Trust me...she's guilty...until she's not and the jury frees her. Now the book Mercer is writing has to change focus...she needs to get Ashlyn's story about what happened. Just when you think you know what happened...you don't. Ashlyn is a master manipulator and Hank masterfully leads us through the maze until the final twist at the end. Trust me...this book is one of the best books of the summer!

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WRITING AN ON-LINE BOOK REVIEW

Thank you for choosing to read Gangster in our Midst (2017).

It is my fondest wish that this STUDY GUIDE will help maximize your enjoyment of this historical mystery crime novel.

When you finish reading the book, I encourage you to write and post a review on-line. As you probably know, on-line book reviews encourage others to read the book. Below are a few questions to spur ideas about what you might say:

- 1) How did you feel when reading the book?
- 2) What themes or thoughts did you get while reading the book?
- 3) What did this book remind you of?

Here are 2 places for you to post your review:

Amazon.com: <https://www.amazon.com/Gangster-our-Midst-Bookkeeper-lieutenant/product-reviews/0999263536>

Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/44103840-gangster-in-our-midst?ac=1&from_search=true

Your comments will also be valuable as I write the sequel to Gangster in our Midst.

I hope you enjoy Gangster in our Midst, and I look forward to your review!

Betty Brandt Passick

bbpassickauthor@comcast.net

www.bettybrandtpassick.com

CHAPTER ONE

Three Fingers

Chapter summary. The gangster, Louie La Cava, has been holed up in Oxbow for an extended period, much longer than his normal stay of a few days.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Why is the gangster, Louie La Cava holed in Oxbow? Where is he staying? Where is his wife, Josephine/Jess?

- 2) Why does Emmett pay a visit to the O'Malley home? What is La Cava's relationship with Emmett's dad, Francis?

- 3) Why does Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik ("Mr. G") call the O'Malley home? Describe La Cava's relationship with Guzik. Who is Frank Nitti?

- 4) Who killed Frankie Yale, and why?

- 5) Which name is Al Capone currently using as his alias?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

6) Describe La Cava's personal history with Capone. What is La Cava's current role in the Capone Outfit? How does La Cava justify the work he does for Capone?

7) Who is Lawrence O'Malley, and how does La Cava want to help him? Describe Joe Levendusky's bootlegging "business." Where does he likely get his booze?

8) From which physical ailment does La Cava suffer?

9) Why does La Cava visit Hotel Wiltse? Describe La Cava's opinion of Jacob and Lucy Minton.

10) Who is the first to greet La Cava inside the hotel?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

11) Describe La Cava's impression of Hotel Wiltse. For what does Lucy apologize? What is her impression of La Cava?

12) Which hotel in the area is competition to Hotel Wiltse? Which was built first?

13) Who has been teaching Bogart to say: "Stool-pigeon"? Why does Lucy encourage the parrot to repeat the phrase in front of La Cava?

14) Why has La Cava likely garnered the nickname "three fingers"?

15) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.).

C H A P T E R T W O

Mystery Man

Chapter summary. Walter Bierkoff delivers his son, Leonard, to the Immaculate Conception school to begin his first day of fourth grade.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe the farmer, Walter Bierkoff. What is he best known for?

- 2) Describe the roles God and religion currently play in Walter’s life. What does Walter likely mean by “messy” people?

- 3) Describe Leonard Bierkoff’s relationship with his father (Walter).

- 4) Who is Maggie? What is unique about the car?

- 5) Who is Ed Schumer? Why does Walter plan to stop by his farm later?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

- 6) What instruction does Walter give Leonard in the car on the way to school? (Would this have been commonplace in the Roman Catholic church in the 1920s?) Which adage does Walter frequently quote to his sons about “keeping an open mind”?

- 7) Describe the Roman Catholic v. Protestant relationship at the turn of the twentieth century.

- 8) What is the “curse” Leonard believe he inherited from his father?

- 9) Which wish does Leonard see dissipating as he begins fourth grade? Why does he idolize Sweeney Delaney?

- 10) Which promise was made to the I.C. church long ago regarding Leonard (and Samuel)?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

11) Describe Walter's family's history with the I.C. church.

12) Why does Walter feel guilty about the Great War?

13) What event turned Walter's world upside down?

14) When does Walter begin to keep a journal about the raging number of killings in Chicago? Who is Billy McSwiggin? When does Walter suspect the town's "mystery man," Louie La Cava, of being a gangster?

15) Why is Leonard switching from attending country school to the I.C. school? What has been his relationship with the I.C. school and church?

16) Describe the difference between attending country school and the I.C. school.

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

17) Which practice at the I.C. school has Leonard defied to date?

18) Describe Sister Mary Margaret. Why is Victor seated at the back of the room?

19) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):



CHAPTER THREE

Oxbow Village — 1928

Chapter summary. Walter delivers his milk to the Oxbow Creamery, then makes a pass down Main Street where he strains to see who is inside Fats' Barber Shop, before driving on to visit his farming neighbors, the Schumers.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) What event has transpired in Oxbow in recent days?

- 2) Who is Charles Slutter? Describe Slutter's opinion of the town's "mystery man." What information about La Cava does he discuss with Walter?

- 3) Who is Tuffy Adams? Why does Walter do business with him?

- 4) Describe how the Amish colony has likely impacted the people of Oxbow and the surrounding area.

BETTY BRANDT PASSICK

5) Why does Walter drive to “Indian Town”?

6) How do you imagine a “flagpole” got placed in the middle of Main Street?

7) Why does Walter hope to speak to Marshal Sweeney Delaney?

8) What is Oxbow’s unique “claim to fame” in the area?

9) Describe Walter’s relationship with the Schumers--Ed and Noritta and their son Victor. What may be Victor’s affliction? What treatment would have been commonplace during this era?

10) Describe Emma’s health/symptoms.

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

11) Who is Herbert Clark Hoover? How does Walter judge one's character?

12) Describe what was likely the Bierkoffs and Schumers general knowledge of current national and world events.

13) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):



CHAPTER FOUR

Marshal Sweeney Delaney

Chapter summary. Marshal Delaney calls Chicago's Police Commissioner Captain Michael Hughes to inquire about why the town's "mystery man," Louie La Cava, has been in Oxbow for an extended period of time.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe Marshal Sweeney Delaney. What are his main job responsibilities?

- 2) How does Sweeney try to stay abreast of La Cava's ongoing gangster activities and the threat he poses to members of the community?

- 3) What does Sweeney learn from Captain Hughes about the reason for La Cava's extended stay in Oxbow? Who does Hughes say as risen to the #1 spot on the Federal Public Enemy list?

- 4) Describe Sweeney's activities as marshal regarding the bootlegging activities in and around Oxbow.

GANGSTER in our MIDST

5) For what is Hymie Weiss known?

6) Who is Special Agent Frank Wilson?

7) What does Hughes say Wilson has uncovered about La Cava, previously overlooked by Cicero police?

8) What is Sweeney's reaction to the new information about La Cava's confirmed role in Capone's Outfit?

9) Describe Sweeney's family/homelife.

10) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):

CHAPTER FIVE

Coffin Cafe

Chapter summary. Olivia Delaney, a local girl married to Marshal Sweeney Delaney, works at her Aunt Gert's restaurant, the Coffin Café, where the gangster frequents whenever he's in town.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe Olivia Delaney and her role in the Oxbow community.

- 2) Describe Olivia and Sweeney's (husband) relationship.

- 3) How did Oliva first learn about the town's "mystery man"?

- 4) What invitation did La Cava initiate that provoked Oliva to get to know him better? How does she justify letting Vanessa accompany a gangster to the Opera House?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

5) What is the town's initial reaction to La Cava? And, later?

6) Who are Sweeney's poker buddies?

7) Why is La Cava interested in the dances held by Oran?

8) How did the amateur boxing in the area evolve? Who are La Cava's favorite boxers?

9) What is Olivia unspoken wish as a waitress?

10) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):



CHAPTER SIX

Dirt Roads

Chapter summary. Louie La Cava drives to a farm by Independence, owned by his brother- and sister-in-law, Rose and Joe Levendusky, where his wife, Jess has spent the day.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe Josephine’s (Jess) upbringing. Why did she and her sister, Mary, run away from home?

- 2) How did Louie and Jess meet? Describe their relationship.

- 3) What was the reason the O’Malleys relocated to Oxbow?

- 4) Describe Louie’s relationship with Jess’s family.

- 5) Why does Louie excuse Jess and himself from having dinner with the family?.

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

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- 6) What might be a reason Jess makes reference to the saying. “Sailors take warning”?

- 7) What event transpired over dinner at the Mealey Hotel causes Jess to become upset? What is Louie’s mood?

- 8) Describe Louie’s superstition.

- 9) What does Jess think Louie does for Al Capone? What is her impression of Capone?

- 10) What “issue” does Louie believe has come between him and Jess over the years?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

11) What does say about Louie's sleeping habits? What does she recommend as a remedy?

12) . What does La Cava take late-night drives with Francis Durham? What is Francis' interest in hanging out with La Cava?

13) Why is La Cava's interested in Lucy's maiden name?

14) What do you make of La Cava's comments about the Great War?

15) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):



C H A P T E R S E V E N

The Arrangement

Chapter summary. Walter fears the worst about Emma’s health as he takes her into town for another visit with Doc Ward, then sets in motion all that is required to see that she gets the “remedy” she needs.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe the relationship between Walter and Emma Bierkoff. What is Walter’s fear regarding Emma’s health?

- 2) Why is Leonard, upset?

- 3) Describe “Bee” Leehey and Mrs. Crawley’s reaction to the physical changes in Emma.

- 4) What’s the significance of the town’s Island Park? How has it affected the town to lose access to the park?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

5) Describe “the arrangement” put in place by town’s civic and religious leaders at the turn of the century How has this affected the town?

6) What do the Bierkoffs learn about Emma’s health during their visit with Doc Ward? Why is the illness called “consumption”? What is the cause of the disease? Treatment?

7) What does Emma try to hide from Mr. Bigggs? What role does he play in the community?

8) What effect does the predominant Roman Catholic membership in Oxbow have on the religious climate of the area?

9) How do the words on the I.C. church marquee affect Walter?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

10) Why does Walter linger with Emma outside the I.C. church?

11) What is Sister Mary Margaret's hope regarding Ed and Noritta Schumer's son, Victor? Describe the new nun, Sister Keith and the dynamic she brings to the rest of the nuns.

12) Why does Walter search for La Cava inside the church?

13) What was the special circumstance in the marriage between Walter and Emma (with one being a Roman Catholic, the other a Lutheran)? What provokes Walter's emotional breakdown? Where is Walter in his spiritual awakening/journey now?

14) Describe Louie's relationship to the Roman Catholic faith versus Jess's faith.

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15) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):

C H A P T E R E I G H T

At The Opera House

Chapter summary. Vanessa attends a movie at the Opera House along with a few of her friends, at the invitation of Louie La Cava, Walter and Leonard independently attend the showing, too.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe Olivia's general faith in mankind. How does her faith accommodate even a gangster?

- 2) What role does the Opera House play in the life of the people of the town and surrounding area?

- 3) Describe La Cava's mannerisms that make locals think he is a gangster. What is the reason why other parents allow their children to attend a movie with La Cava?

BETTY BRANDT PASSICK

4) Describe the experience of attending a movie at the Opera House.

5) Describe what's happening in the world, according to the title cards.

6) Describe Olivia's relationship with Vanessa. What precaution does Olivia take to make sure her daughter is safe?

7) Describe Walter's impression of Louie La Cava. And that of people from small towns.

8) What is likely the reason Rev. Van Benschoten, the Baptist minister, passes by the Opera House just as the movie house lets out?

9) Why did Rev. Van Benschoten refuse the prescription from Doc Ward? Why was its color "green"?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

10) How had the loss of Rev. Van Benschoten's son in the Great War changed him as a father? As a pastor?

11) Describe how Walter and Rev. Van Benschoten view the effects on the nation since ratification of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution.

12) How does Leonard know Mary Curley?

13) Describe how Walter is feeling as he watches La Cava, surrounded by the town's children, begin to walk home in the darkness?

14) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.): .

CHAPTER NINE

Visitor At Three A.M.

Chapter summary. Marshal Sweeney catches a burglar at Weibel's Hardware while making his 3 AM rounds of the town's businesses. As he returns to the engine house, Louie La Cava stops by for a visit.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe the newspaper article Sweeney has been reading.

- 2) Describe Marshall Sweeney's basic belief in mankind.

- 3) How has Prohibition changed his community? His job?

- 4) What did Sweeney see during a recent stakeout that surprised him?

- 5) Describe Sweeney's "celebrity worship" of Capone. What does he say was the experience of his Irish immigrants who came to America versus the Italian immigrants?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

6) What is Sweeney's bad habit?

7) What was the last time Sweeney fired his .38?

8) What's in the bag at the feet of the burglar at Weibel's Hardware break-in?

9) Describe Sweeney's relationship with Agnes Triggers. Why does she ignore his request?

10) When La Cava stops by the engine house, where does he tell Sweeney he'd been earlier in the evening?

BETTYBRANDTPASSICK

11) What does La Cava say he does for a living?

12) What does La Cava think is in the bag on Sweeney's workbench?

13) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.): .



C H A P T E R T E N

Hayward

Chapter summary. Al Capone summons La Cava and a few of his other henchmen to his 400-acre Hayward, Wisconsin estate to hatch a plan to eliminate his biggest competitor, the Northside gang.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe Louie's mood as he arrives at Capone's estate.

- 2) Who does La Cava think arrived in the flashy Rolls Royce Silver Ghost?

- 3) Who greets La Cava on the porch?

- 4) Who are La Cava's house companions for the weekend?

- 5) Describe La Cava's fears as he prepares for dinner. How does his body deal with the stress?

BETTYBRANDTPASSICK

6) Describe La Cava's relationship with Al Capone.

7) What should La Cava glean from the seating arrangement around the dinner table?

8) Why does Capone mention the chef who has prepared the meal?

9) What alias does Capone go by now? Where is his G.H.Q.?

10) What is La Cava thinking as he watches Capone say goodnight to his wife and son, Mae and Sonny?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

11) What is significant about the belt buckle La Cava is wearing?

12) Why is Jack Zuta included in this meeting? Scalise and Anselmi?

13) Why is Jake Lingle a threat to Capone?

14) Why does Capone expound on his rise to fame and fortune?

15) Who does Capone's ask to come up with a "plan" regarding the
Northside gang?

16) What remark does La Cava make about Marshal Sweeney Delaney?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

17) Why was Capone called out of the room earlier in the evening?

18) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.): .

GANGSTER in our MIDST
CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Drowning

Chapter summary. Olivia works several days a month as a beautician in Mary Huegnot's beauty shop, which Mary opened after her husband drowning years earlier.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) What caused the drowning of several individuals over the years in the pool at the bottom of Oxbow's dam, including Mary Huegnot's husband?

- 2) How has the part-time job at Mary's shop changed Olivia?

- 3) Why does Marshal Sweeney get calls many evenings in the middle of dinner with his family?

- 4) Why did Sweeney give up baseball?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

5) Describe Jess La Cava.

6) How does Jess react to the newspaper article about the St. Valentine's Day massacre?

7) What does Olivia think Jess knows about Louie's occupation?

8) Describe Olivia's memory of Delbert Habercamp's comment the day after the St. Valentine's Day massacre.

9) What triggers Olivia's recollection of the male fetus that was pulled from the Wapsie years earlier?

10) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.): .

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

Kill The Sonofabitch

Chapter summary. Walter Bierkoff has a strong reaction when he finally meets Louie La Cava at Fats' Barber Shop.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) What national event is unfolding that triggers Sweeney to think of James Joyce? What is the effect on the town?

- 2) Who is in the barber shop?

- 3) Describe Mayor Gardner and Sweeney's relationship.

- 4) What is La Cava's reaction when Walter enters the barber shop?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

5) How does Walter react to meeting La Cava for the first time?

6) Why does Sweeney keep a close eye on Walter?

7) How does Sweeney break the tension in the room?

8) What is the reason Bill Biggs stops by?

9) Where does La Cava say he is going when he leaves the barber shop?

10) What news about La Cava does Sweeney learn from the phone call with Captain Hughes?

11) Which new technology is allowing the Feds to track Capone's activities and bring an indictment against him?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

12) Why doesn't Captain Hughes ask Sweeney to just arrest La Cava?

13) Why does Sweeney linger with the receiver to his ear after Captain Hughes ends their phone call?

14) When Sweeney catches back up with Walter, what request does Walter make of Sweeney? What update about Emma does Walter provide?

15) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Winters Without Mercy

Chapter summary. Louie La Cava stops by to make confession to Father Halpin, the Catholic priest, before leaving town.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Who is Henry Earl J. Wojciechowski, and why does Capone fear him?

- 2) What is La Cava's mood as he searches for Father Halpin inside the church? Why has he come?

- 3) What announcement does Father Halpin make to La Cava?

- 4) Of what is La Cava fearful?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

5) Describe La Cava's family's first years in America?

6) How did La Cava end up in the "business"?

7) How does La Cava's navigate between Roman Catholicism and the "business"?

8) What mortal sin does La Cava confess?

9) What does Father Halpin suspect about La Cava?

10) What is La Cava's impression of Father Halpin?

BETTYBRANDTPASSICK

11) Why does La Cava hate winter?

12) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.): . .

CHAPTERFOURTEEN

Landing A Sailfish

Chapter summary. Al Capone glimpses the end is near and tries to find a way to avoid a Federal indictment and jail.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe Capone's mood in late 1930. What has caused his depression?

- 2) Who are the three generals in the room?

- 3) What is the significance of the ivory elephants on Capone's desk and religious medals in the drawer?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

4) Describe Barney's relationship with Capone?

5) What lesson has Capone learned the hard way, several times?

6) Where is La Cava, according to Barney?

7) Why have the Feds paid visits to Capone?

8) What errand does Capone say he needs to run before heading off to Florida?

9) From what illness does Capone suffer?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

10) What is Capone's illusion about his situation regarding sail fish?

11) Describe Al Capone and his wife May's relationship. What does Mae know about "the business" he is in?

12) Why has Capone gone to this house on Chicago's south side? (How does it happen that an alley is cleared after a heavy snowfall in Chicago?)

13) What happened to the dog?

14) Where is La Cava hiding out? Who is his new Godfather?

15) What was discussed at the Big Seven mafia meeting in May 1929? What was the fate of Albert Anselmi and John Scalise?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

16) What changes does John Torrio suggest to the *borgota*?

17) Where is La Cava when served with a subpoena to testify at Capone's trial? How long has he been in hiding?

18) What does La Cava learn in subsequent newspaper articles that signals the end of Capone's reign as Chicago Kingpin?

19) Why does La Cava blame Frankie Yale for all the attention Capone is getting from the Feds? Is he right?

20) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.): . .



C H A P T E R F I F T E E N

Christmas – 1931

Chapter summary. Walter prepares for another Christmas without Emma in their home; and, the people of Oxbow are still reeling three years after the Wall Street crash.

Questions for your consideration.

- 1) Describe what it means to be a hero.

- 2) How well is Walter surviving with Emma gone and a deepening national depression? Leonard and Samuel?

- 3) What memories does this time of difficulty evoke in Walter? Who is one of his favorite authors? What advice does he give his sons?

- 4) Describe Emma’s letter. How is she progressing at the Oakdale Sanatorium? What role has the Lutheran church played during her absence? The Catholic church? Who is the new priest?

BETTY BRANDT PASSICK

5) What has become Walter's crutch during this time of strain?

6) Describe Leonard's fear. (Can one inherit such a fear?) How does Sister Mary Margaret react when he studders?

7) Describe how Sister Keith is pressing at the I.C. school.

8) What does Samuel say he will invent one day?

9) How are Walter and the boys preparing for Christmas? The schools?

10) Describe the effects of the ongoing national depression on the people of Oxbow.

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

11) Describe the contents of the newspaper articles read by Walter. What has happened to Capone? La Cava? Jack Zuta? Ralph Capone? Why didn't the Federal government go after the banks for the financial ruin they caused?

12) Which of the two Oxbow banks failed during the depression?

13) Why does Barney Finkle stop by the farm? Will Walter likely ever see Barney again? Describe the difficulties facing the farmers.

14) Why would President Hoover likely not get re-elected? Why was Walter sensitive to Hoover's plight?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

15) How do the people of Oxbow prepare for Christmas?

16) Describe Walt Polege and the snow removal on Main Street.

17) What had the Opera House been converted into?

18) Of what is Sweeney reminded during his visit to Rechkemmer's show room? How did Agnes Triggers likely know about the "little cloth book"?

19) Why didn't La Cava receive a jail sentence like Capone?

20) How have the Pythian Sisters assisted in preparation for Christmas?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

21) Describe the Christmas pageants at the country. Public school?

22) Where does Sweeney hang out when the schools let out for Christmas vacation?

23) What notable thing have Tuffy Adams and his wife done?

24) What notable bill did President Hoover secure passage before leaving office?

25) Describe Adams' opinion of La Cava.

26) How do some area people still prefer to get to church on Christmas Eve?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

27) Who made surprise appearances at the Christmas Eve Mass at the I.C. church?

28) Why does Walter hide a section of the bulletin in his coat pocket?

29) Why is Walter moved by the priest's words? Where is he in his spiritual awakening/journey now?

30) Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Lucy Ann Dean Wiltse Minton

Chapter summary. Lucy Minton, an Iowa pioneer, has died. Agnes Triggers keeps track of the comings and going of Louie La Cava and notes a mysterious happening one evening six months after Lucy's funeral.

Questions for your consideration.

1. What loss is the whole town now facing?

2. How did Lucy end up in Oxbow? What does Jacob know of the years she was married to Dr. Edwin Wiltse?

3. How did Lucy and Jacob meet?

4. How did Lucy end up owning Hotel Wiltset?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

5. What is Lucy's legacy, according to her obituary? Who attends her funeral?

6. Whom does Olivia suspect has given the cardless spray of flowers at Lucy's funeral?

7. Which rumor does Olivia hear at Lucy's funeral?

8. What does Agnes Triggers think she sees from her living room in the middle of the night? What role does she play in the town? (Have you ever known an "Agnes Triggers?)

9. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A Nickel An Ante

Chapter summary. Louie La Cava attends a poker game at the engine house; Sweeney reminisces about Saint Lucy, and gun ballistics. Sweeney invites La Cava to go duck hunting. Main Street gets a bath due to Sweeney's forgetfulness.

Questions for your consideration.

1. Describe the country's optimism under President Franklin Roosevelt. What changes has Roosevelt's policies already meant for Oxbow?

2. Describe the newspaper article. Why does Sweeney intend to show this to La Cava at the poker game? Who does Sheriff Willey think was behind the attempted robbery?

3. What was Rechkemmer's Ford dealership converted into after Prohibition ended? How has the end affected the town?

BETTY BRANDT PASSICK

4. Why does Sweeney start to fill the water tank?

5. Some four years after the depression began, what's been the effect on the township and surrounding area? Why does Sweeney bring up the murder of the Keefer sisters by Knoxville? The Oran bank robbery?

6. What does Sweeney suspect about La Cava's card dealing?

7. Why does Sweeney bring up the *Time* magazine article?

8. What does Sweeney suspect about La Cava's card dealing?

9. Which of La Cava's comments gets Sweeney's attention?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

10. Why does Sweeney bring up the passing of Lucy Minton?

11. Which of Sweeney's characteristics is responsible for the deluge of water on Main Street?

12. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Even The Sparrows

Chapter summary. Walter gets a letter from Emma at the Oakdale sanatorium announcing her impending return home. Sweeney's coaching skills pay off and Leonard's pitching wins the baseball game for the home team.

Questions for your consideration.

1. How long has Emma been at the sanatorium? How has her lengthy departure affected Walter and the boys? What is Walter's response to her impending release?

2. Describe Emma's letter. What profound thing happened at the sanatorium? How are her and Walter's spirituality/journeys alike and different?

3. Where is Walter in his spiritual awakening/journey now?

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4. What specific help did Walter ask of Sweeney during Emma's absence?

5. Describe Sweeney's (a fallen-away Catholic) relationship with Father Torpey? How does this play out at the baseball game?

6. Which profound saying of Walter's does Sweeney quote back to him?

7. How has teaching Leonard how to pitch made Sweeney introspective about his own years as a young man and amateur pitcher? How does Sweeney and Leonard's relationship evolve during these years?

8. What surprise awaits Leonard at the end of the ball game? Describe that reunion. Describe Emma's physical appearance?

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9. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Duck Blind

Chapter summary. Sweeney and La Cava go duck hunting, Sweeney confronts him about his “business.”

Questions for your consideration.

1. Why does Sweeney invite La Cava to go duck hunting at his remote blind in the woods? What kind of gun does Sweeney use?

2. Describe La Cava’s mannerisms as he arrives at Sweeney’s home? (Do they support why the town thinks La Cava is a gangster?) What kind of gun does La Cava bring along?

3. Why does Sweeney take this opportunity to prob about La Cava’s “business”? (Does this seem reckless on Sweeney’s part?)

4. What does Sweeney learn about La Cava? What does La Cava learn about Sweeney?

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5. How does Sweeney surprise La Cava? How does he gain respect in La Cava's eyes?

6. Why does Sweeney inquire about the location of Capone's twenty million dollars?

7. How does La Cava respond when Sweeney asks about an allegation (from Agnes Triggers) of a person trying to kick his way out of the back of Louie's car one night some time ago?

8. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):...

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y

Morning Train

Chapter summary. A new Amish colony arrives at the train depot, plus two mystery men who are looking for La Cava.

Questions for your consideration.

1. Describe Charlie Daniels. How does he know so much about the gangster activity in the area? Who had he hoped would show up while he was Oxbow's depot agent?

2. Who is Daniels expecting on the morning train? What has he been able to learn about the new colony? Why are they relocating to Iowat? Describe the Amish.

3. Does the railroad think of the hobos from the train just another kind of "gangster"? What about Sweeney and Mayor Gardner?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

4. What did the train represent to people along the line during that era?

5. What does Mayor Gardner notice about the two suited men who step from the train?

6. Why does Olivia direct the suited men who come into the Brick Hotel to Sweeney's office? (Is she protecting La Cava??)

7. What does Olivia learn about why the new Amish colony has relocated to Oxbow?

8. How does Sweeney react to hearing about the two new strangers in town?

9. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.).

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Storm On The Horizon

Chapter summary. Walter attends the Lutheran church service and hears a sermon about Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his response to the rise of Chancellor Adolph Hitler in Germany.

Questions for your consideration.

1. Describe the unsettling scene Walter observes the day he and Rev. Heilmann climb the steeple steps for an aerial view of the township?
Where is La Cava now?

2. Who is the new gangster Walter has begun paying attention to on the world stage?

3. Describe the sermon. How has Hitler successful manipulated the German Church through the use of Martin Luther's quotes?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

4. How well does Walter (and other people in the area) likely understand what's happening politically in Germany?

5. What is the storm on the horizon? What does Walter fear will be the result for those of German descent in America?

6. Which Scripture does Walter want Rev. Heilmann to decipher? Why does he pick this Scripture? Describe Walter's relationship with his pastor. Where is Walter in his spiritual awakening/journey now?

7. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y T W O

Boxing On The Island Park

Chapter summary. Sweeney attends the first boxing match on the Island Park since the walk bridge washed out years earlier. He reads in the newspaper about the indictment of Johnny Torrie, with La Cava is named as defendant.

Questions for your consideration.

1. How did the town of Oxbow get funding to build the new cable walk bridge to the island? And new water tower and concrete dam?

2. Describe the economic situation for the people, now a decade into the depression? Why do the people arrive dressed in their finest attire?

3. Who is the organizer of the event, and his protege? Who are Sweeney's favorite boxers?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

4. Describe the economic situation for the people of Oxbow and surrounding area, now a decade into the depression.?

5. What does Sweeney learn in the newspaper about La Cava and what does he believe will likely be his fate? Where is La Cava? What's happening in Germany?

6. Who does Sweeney meet up with at the match? What did Dustin Cobbledick likely attempt to steal at the Weibel Hardware breakin?

7. Describe the lightweight boxing match (did you attend matches similar to ones like this?) What's a Daniel Boone?

8. Why might the Baptist church have allowed its membership to participate as a vendor at a boxing match on the Island Park in the late 1930s?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

9. Why is Cassius Ward disqualified?

8. Who is Sweeney thinking about as he departs the boxing match?

9. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

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CHAPTER TWENTYTHREE

Guilty Plea

Chapter summary. Johnny Torrio’s trial finally gets underway, and La Cava is brought in to testify, though La Cava also faces possible jail time for helping Torrio hide his assets to avoid paying income tax.

Questions for your consideration.

1. What does Johnny Torrio attempt as the Feds were closing in? How long has Torrio been awaiting trial? Why is La Cava named as a defendant?

2. How did Johnny and Anna meet? What is the La Cava’s relationship with Johnny?

3. What has Jacob “Yasha” Katzenberg testified?

4. What has Al Capone allegedly done to help the Feds convict Johnny (and La Cava)? What is La Cava’s opinion of this allegation?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

5. Why was Mrs. Frances Flegenheimer's testimony important?

6. Why does Attorney Klein attempt to block La Cava's vision of Torrio during questioning?

7. How does La Cava describe his relationship with Johnny? How does Attorney Klein describe their relationship?

8. How did Johnny benefit from the death of Dutch Schultz?

9. What happens that brings the trial to an abrupt conclusion?

10. What does La Cava expect to happen to him, once Johnny pleads guilty?

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10. Is La Cava envious of Johnny and Anna's relationship?

11. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

CHAPTER TWENTYFOUR

Epitome of Evil

Chapter summary. Leonard leaves from the railroad depot to serve in the U.S. Navy soon after America enters WW II.

Questions for your consideration.

1. Why have Walter and Leonard been at odds about his joining the U.S. Navy? (What words of wisdom from the Baptist church pastor, Rev. Benschoten, might have been going through Walter's mind at this time?)

2. What is a fear of Leonard's as he prepares to off to fight in a war?

3. Describe Leonard's relationship with Walter versus Sweeney.

4. Describe Leonard's relationship with his mother, Emma? His brother, Samuel?

5. How Leonard and his friends—Jason and Bill—prepare to fight in a war?

6. What decision has Leonard made for his return from war? How will this likely affect Walter?

7. What does Walter give Leonard to carry with him while he's away from home?

8. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

CHAPTER TWENTYFIVE

While You Were Gone

Chapter summary. While La Cava is hiding out from the mafia (following his testimony at Torrio’s trial), in Oxbow the Methodist church burns; Gippers buy Hotel Wiltse; and a young boy, Dale, is killed by a train.

Questions for your consideration.

1. What sentence did La Cava receive at the Torrio trial? Why does Sweeney think La Cava has gone missing all these months? Where is Josephine staying?

2. Where do the Oxbow town’s people believe La Cava keeps all his money?

3. Why has Captain Hughes recently been in touch with Sweeney? What does Sweeney learn about Louie’s family’s involvement in the “business”? What does Hughes recall about Louie that’s pretty remarkable?

4. Describe the loss to the community of the Oxbow Methodist church. (Why does Sweeney believe La Cava will support its rebuilding?)
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5. Describe La Cava's relationship with the Hotel Wiltse, once run by Lucy Minton—now owned by the Gippers. (Why does Sweeney believe La Cava will make it a point to stop by for a visit upon his return to Oxbow?)
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9. How does Sweeney believe La Cava will react to learning of the young boy's (Dale) death from being struck by the train? (Has La Cava shown he really cares about children, other than to shield him from potential) harm?)
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10. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..
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CHAPTER TWENTYSIX

Homecoming

Chapter summary. Sweeney runs into Josephine at the Post Office; a short time later he sees a news article that La Cava is back in the area. WW II comes to an end, and Sweeney makes plans to retire.

Questions for your consideration.

1. Describe the weather of 1944.

2. Describe what's happening with WW II? What has Sweeney learned about Leonard's experience?

3. Who are the women standing in line with Sweeney outside the post office?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

4. What does the Baptist minister's wife, Mrs. Snoden, think should be done about the Jews in Europe that have petitioned to come to America?

5. What does Sweeney learn about La Cava's whereabouts from Josephine? What does Sweeney think she knows about Louie's involvement in the "business"?

6. Sweeney finally sees a blurb in the newspaper that La Cava has returned to the area. What is La Cava's reaction to seeing Sweeney after all time has elapsed?

11. What decision does Sweeney come to after learning about the bombing of Japan? What are his insecurities as he plans this change?

7. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

CHAPTER TWENTYSEVEN

Redemption and Grace

SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

Chapter summary. Louie and Sweeney make final trip to Chicago and pick up a female hitchhiker south of Oelwein, who is running away from home.

Questions for your consideration.

1. What do you glean about La Cava from the license plate and car he now drives?

2. What happened to the 190 Club?

3. Who is Gracie Failes? How is she like/different from Josephine La Cava? Why does she say she is running away from home?

BETTY BRAND TPASSICK

4. Why does La Cava put out his cigar after picking up Gracie?

5. Why does La Cava acknowledge he carries a gun to Gracie? Has he done this before?

6. How does Gracie compare a gangster to an immoral man?

7. What announcement is made about Germany on the radio?

8. What scare is plaguing America following the election of John F. Kennedy as the country's president?

9. How does La Cava answer Gracie's question about why he became a gangster?

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10. How does La Cava react when Gracie asks if he is the gangster that married the girl from Oxbow? If he knows John Dillinger? How he will explain all the bad stuff he's done to God?

11. What is La Cava's explanation for what he's done in his past?

12. Is Sweeney really asleep during this time? Does Gracie talk differently to Sweeney than she does La Cava?

13. What advice does Sweeney give Gracie? (Do you think she takes it to heart? Is she in the car for the return trip to Oxbow?)

14. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

CHAPTER TWENTYEIGHT

A Long Shadow

FOURTEEN YEARS LATER

Chapter summary. Sweeney dies. Olivia dies. La Cava dies, and a new rumor erupt amongst the townspeople.

Questions for your consideration.

1. How does Vanessa learn of her father's (Sweeney's) passing?

2. How does Rev. Gaide eulogy Sweeney?

3. What does Captain Hughes have to say about Sweeney? Agnes Triggers? George Weiland?

4. How does Vanessa describe her mother, Olivia?

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

5. When does Vanessa say La Cava's strut turned into a swagger?

6. Describe the home the La Cavas built.

7. How was the Florida obituary different from the one that appeared in the Oelwein newspaper?

8. What new rumor was floating amongst the Oxbow locals?

9. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

Face In The Crowd

Chapter summary. Walter visits Emma’s grave, and he discloses thoughts about what he’s learned along his spiritual journey. Then he and Maggie partake in the Oxbow Days Parade.

Questions for your consideration.

1. Describe Samuel.

2. Where is Walter in his spiritual awakening/journey now?

3. What does Walter first see at Emma’s grave?

4. Why is Walter drawn to the writings of Dorothy Parker?

5. Why did Walter decide to accept La Cava’s invitation to accompany him on a day trip to Chicago? What does he sense about La Cava he’d never

G A N G S T E R in our M I D S T

noticed before? What questions does this memory evoke in Walter about the Creator of the Universe?

6. What are the three constants Walter has lived by?

7. What has become of Ed, Noritta and Samuel?

8. What is Leonard's current occupation?

9. How has Oxbow changed over the years? How does Walter describe its people?

10. What memories does Walter recall about the sixty years La Cava lived among the people of Oxbow? What did La Cava likely think of Oxbow?

B E T T Y B R A N D T P A S S I C K

11. What question remains unanswered about La Cava, according to Leonard?

12. Notes (memorable moments, thoughts for follow-up, etc.):..
