

Book Discussion Questions for The Rim of the Prairie by Bess Streeter Aldrich

Presented by Gretchen Garrison of "Odyssey Through Nebraska"

About the author: Bess Streeter Aldrich was born on February 17th, 1881, in Cedar Falls, Iowa. She was the 7th child of James Wareham Streeter and Mary Wilson Anderson Streeter. Her closest sibling was ten years older, so she described herself as having the "world's record for the number of bosses over her."¹ As a young adult, Bess began entering story contests and even won several. She received her degree from Iowa State Normal School in 1901, then she taught for several years. During this time, she met Cap (Charles) Aldrich. They were married on September 24, 1907. In 1909, their daughter was born. Soon after, they moved to Elmwood, Nebraska, to run the American Exchange Bank in Elmwood with Bess' sister and brother-in-law. By 1920, the Aldrich family also included three sons. During these years, Bess would find snatches of time to write. She published many short stories in magazines and some of her serials became books. When her husband died in 1925, Bess' hobby became necessary for her family's livelihood. Over time, Bess wrote nine novels. Additional stories were combined into compilations. Bess died on August 3rd, 1954. In 1972, she was named to the "Nebraska Hall of Fame" and is now a part of the display at the Nebraska Capitol.

Photo is of "The Rim of the Prairie" room found at Bess Streeter Aldrich's former home in Elmwood, Nebraska.



About The Rim of the Prairie

This title was Bess Streeter Aldrich's first full length novel. This novel is set in the fictional town of Maple City, Nebraska. Full of interesting characters, this novel ponders life in both a small town and on the farm.

Carol Miles Peterson devoted chapter four in her Bess Streeter Aldrich biography to "The Rim of the Prairie." She notes why this novel was a significant work for Aldrich.

*"The Rim of the Prairie is probably the most personal of Aldrich's novels, for here she expresses her philosophies and also her deep regard for her husband more overtly than in any other work."*²

For additional information regarding the book or author, please contact "The Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation" at aldrichfoundation@gmail.com

Background of Rim of the Prairie

Why was writing the book's dedication possibly a bittersweet experience for the author?

¹ Quoted from the Bess Streeter Aldrich Scrapbook by Vopal Gowman Youngberg (page 11)

² Quoted from Bess Streeter Aldrich by Carol Miles Peterson (page 55)

Is Maple City similar or different than other Midwestern towns, specifically other Nebraska towns?

Some people might say that Maple City may be based on Aldrich's own town of Elmwood. What does an author have to do to make sure townspeople are not type-casted? How can she help people see themselves without identifying too closely?

Characterization

Which characters used the phrase, "The Rim of the Prairie," most often? Do you think this might be evident of a particular bond? Back then, the plains were wider open. Do you think this term could still be applied to Midwest land, specifically parts of Nebraska today?

This novel contains an interesting cast of minor characters, particularly at the boarding house. Did any one of them particularly appeal to you? Did any of them annoy you? Why or why not?

Plot

This story seems to be written in third person with a multi-person point of view. This approach is sometimes referred to as having an omniscient narrator. Did having the perspective of multiple characters add or detract from the story? Why?

What was the significance of the brown shawl?

Can you sympathize with why Nancy felt like she must leave for a season? Or did you feel like that she overreacted? Would you have wanted to come back?

Do you think Alice ever truly loved Warner? Or was she in love with the idea of him? Is there any clear cut proof in the story? Or do you have to jump to conclusions?

Did you predict that Warner and Nancy had a common connection to a particular person? Do agree with their initial reaction of obligation? Should they have allowed that to drive them apart? Or do you think true love should always find a way?

Did the natural disaster that drove them back to each other make sense in the story line? Or do you think that part was overly sensationalized?

Do you agree with Warner keeping the secret of his wife's parentage from her? Why or why not? Do you think that Nancy will try to find out about her parents for herself? Or is she now content to allow her past to remain a mystery? What reasoning helped to form your conclusion?

Thematic Elements

Two of the common themes in the book that I noticed seem to be forgiveness and restitution. Would you agree with that view? What other themes do you see that seem to be prevalent?