

Videoconference with Leif Enger
September 13, 2006

Introduction of the author (2-3 minutes)

1. Topic 1: Impetus for the novel
 - a. I'll ask Leif to read an excerpt, "Clay." (5-6 minutes)
 - b. The novel is a story about miracles. Reuben says that people are too quick to call something "entirely normal" a miracle. He claims that miracles require a witness and that he is the witness of his father's miracles. Why did you decide to write a story about miracles, as witnessed by a young boy? Can you tell us a little bit about the process of writing the novel—how did it take shape? (6-7 minutes)
 - c. Time for students to ask questions about the impetus for and genesis of the novel. (6-7 minutes)
2. Topic 2: Relationship between books and readers
 - a. At the beginning of the novel and several times during the novel, Reuben tells readers about the miracles he witnesses and then says, "Make of it what you will." This creates an interesting relationship between Reuben, as the witness/narrator, and the reader, as the one who must "make" of Reuben's story what he or she will. What are some of your ideas about the relationship between narrators and readers; between books and readers? How do readers contribute to a story? What kinds of stories do you like to read? (6-7 minutes)
 - b. Time for students to ask questions about how or why readers connect with books and characters or about how this affects Leif's writing. (6-7 minutes)
3. Topic 3: Relationship between the author's background/early writing experiences and his characters
 - a. In the novel, Reuben's 9-year old sister, Swede, is writing an epic poem about Sunny Sundown. Could you read us a few stanzas from Swede's poem? What's happening at this point in the poem (pages 160-161; excerpt attached)? Did you write as a young person? How much of yourself as a writer is in Swede? What advice would you give to young people about telling/writing their own stories? (6-7 minutes)
 - b. Time for students to ask questions about what it means to be a writer. (6-7 minutes)
4. Topic 4: Creating a sense of place
 - a. In her essay, "Place in Fiction," Eudora Welty states that "Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place. . . . Every story would be another story, and unrecognized as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else" (541). What is the relationship in your novel between the story's setting and feeling? How do you create a sense of place in your writing? (6-7 minutes)
 - b. Time for students to ask questions about setting and place in the novel. (6-7 minutes)

From *Peace Like a River*, pages 160-161

*The blizzard shipped in from the west like a grin
On a darkened, malevolent face,
And the posse that sought Mr. Sundown was caught
In an awfully dangerous place.*

*For their horses were sore and their chances were poor
Of locating warmth or repose,
When the sweet sudden sight of miraculous light
Shone die in the dark and the snows, my lads,
A light through the dark and the snows.*

*And the lady who answered their knock at the door
Had answered another, an hour before. . . .*

*She bid them to stay, in her courteous way,
And insisted they sit by the fire,
And she poured them all brandy and sang them a song
And they slept as though lulled by a choir.*

*The sheriff next morning was first to awake
And he called all his men to the chase,
For a dream had suggested their quarry sought rest
In the hay in the barn on the place, lads—
He'd slept in the barn on the place.*

*But when they crept into the building to spy,
Gone horses, gone lady, gone outlaw, goodbye!*

Source from above:

Welty, Eudora. "Place in Fiction." 1956. *A Modern Southern Reader*. Ed. Ben Forkner and Patrick Samway. Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1986. 537-48.