Cold Mountain

Charles Frazier

About the author
Charles Frazier was born in 1950 in Asheville, a mountain town in North Carolina. He graduated from the University of North Carolina, and received his M.A. from the Appalachian State University and his Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. Cold Mountain is a real mountain in North Carolina.

Although Cold Mountain is his first novel, Charles Frazier has written a number of short stories and travel fiction. He has traveled extensively, particularly in South America. Cold Mountain is based on the stories about Charles Frazier’s great-great-uncle, W. P. Inman, who served in the Confederate Army during American Civil War, deserted after being wounded and walked home to Cold Mountain.

Cold Mountain was an immediate success when it was published in 1997, both in the United States and in Europe. It won America’s National Book Award, one of the country’s most prestigious prizes for writing.

In 2003 Cold Mountain was turned into an award-winning movie, starring Nicole Kidman, Jude Law, and Renee Zellweger.

Summary
Cold Mountain has two main characters: Inman, a wounded deserter from the Confederate Army toward the end of the American Civil War; and Ada, the daughter of a preacher who has moved from Charleston, South Carolina to a rural mountain community called Cold Mountain, the area Inman is from. As the narrative alternates between Inman’s story of his hard journey home and Ada’s story of a journey from a young, impractical woman into a more independent woman, the true nature of the relationship between the two unfolds. As Inman approaches Ada’s home, so Ada approaches an understanding of her own feelings and her place in the world.

Chapter 1: The story begins as Inman prepares to leave the hospital where he is being treated for a war injury. He cannot know, at this stage, how he really feels about Ada, but he knows he has to return to Cold Mountain in order to see her at least once again.

Chapter 2: At Black Cove in Cold Mountain, Ada is struggling to get by each day as she finds herself incapable of looking after herself, the house, and the farm. Her neighbor sends her a local girl, Ruby, to help her with the farm. This chapter also explains the Monroes’ early days in Cold Mountain and Ada’s father’s death.

Chapter 3: Inman’s journey is incredibly difficult. He often has to travel under cover of night in order to avoid meeting men known as the Home Guard who go round looking for deserters. He knows that if he is caught deserting the army he will either be killed on the spot or sent to an even worse death on the killing fields. This chapter includes Inman’s memory of the first day he met Ada and an encounter with a preacher, who was trying to kill his pregnant lover.

Chapter 4: Ruby moves into the old cabin near the house at Black Cove. Through hard work, resourceful Ruby helps and teaches Ada to run the farm efficiently. Ada learns that Ruby had a hard childhood and that her irresponsible father joined the army in the first days of the war. This chapter includes a flashback to Ada’s brief intimate time with Inman at the party Monroe gave at Christmas time in the last winter before the war.

Chapter 5: After Inman tied the preacher to a tree with a paper that explains his story, the preacher, Veasey, is exiled from his town. He catches up with Inman and they travel together. Inman and Veasey help a man, called Junior with the dead body of his black bull, but Junior gives them away to the Home Guard. They walk tied with fifteen other men for days, but the Home Guard decides to shoot them. Inman miraculously survives as the bullet that hit him had already gone through Veasey’s body. Inman sets off walking west again, and then he is helped by a yellow slave, who hid him in a barn and fed him.

Chapter 6: Ada and Ruby encounter a group of women who are escaping from the Federals in Tennessee. They feed the women well, before they set off on their journey to South Carolina. Ada and Ruby also hear the story of a deserter when they were in town. They learn that the Home Guard has done horrible things to the deserter’s family.
Chapter 7: Following the map that the yellow slave gave Inman, he arrives in an area called the hill country. He meets a woman who owns goats. She has lived in a caravan alone for twenty-six years. She helps Inman, and the medicine she gives him heals his wounds. Inman also meets a war widow called Sara. The Federals seize her pig, her only source of food for the winter for her and her baby. Inman follows the men, kills them and brings back the pig, which comforts her.

Chapter 8: Ruby's father, Stobrod come to Ada's farm. He is also a deserter from the Confederate Army. Ruby feeds him with mixed feelings as she was left alone by him when she was very young. Stobrod returns next day with another man called Pangle, who plays the fiddle with Stobrod. Stobrod plays beautiful tunes for Ruby and Ada. Ada writes down a line from a love song Stobrod sings: "Come back to me is my request", and sends it to Inman.

Chapter 9: Stobrod and the two men, Pangle and a boy from Georgia, decide to leave the cave where they were living with other outliers (deserters). When they go to a hiding place where Ruby has hidden some food, they are caught by the Home Guard, who shoots them. Only the Georgia boy escapes and brings Ruby and Ada the news. The two women soon set off to the hiding place and find Stobrod badly injured. They take him to a ruined Cherokee village nearby, and camp in a cabin so that he can recover.

Chapter 10: Inman reaches Black Cove, but Ada isn’t there. The Georgia boy tells him what has happened. Ada and Inman finally meet again in the wild countryside of Cold Mountain when Ada was hunting wild turkeys. At first Ada barely recognizes the man before her. But war has taught them both to persevere against all odds. She brings him to the cabin where Ruby and Stobrod are.

Chapter 11: Ruby tells Ada that she doesn’t need Inman at the farm, but Ada says she wants him. Ada also tells Inman that she wants Ruby to stay at the farm as long as she wants. Ruby stays with Stobrod, so that Ada and Inman can sleep together. They make love, and they start to imagine their future life at Black Cove.

Chapter 12: After just a few nights together Inman and Ada make their plans for the future and begin their journey back to Black Cove. But on this final journey, they encounter the Home Guard. Inman kills Home Guard leader Teague, who has destroyed hundreds of people’s lives in the name of personal power and greed. However, Inman is shot by a young Home Guard. He dies in Ada’s arms.

Chapter 13: The book ends several years after the main story. We learn that Ada has had Inman's baby, now an energetic young girl. Ruby is married to Reid, the Georgia boy, and has three children. Ruby's father, Stobrod is there, too. They all live together at Black Cove.

Background and themes

American Civil War: Cold Mountain takes place against the historical backdrop of the American Civil War (1861–1865) in which eleven states in the South broke away to form their own separate government – the Confederacy. What was expected to be a short war, and an easy victory for the Union (the North), became one of the most bitter civil wars in world history. Close to 700,000 people were killed, and there was barely a family in the whole of the United States that was not affected directly. One of the main reasons for war was the difference of opinion about slavery between the North and South. Lincoln abolished slavery in 1863 at great cost to the southern economy and way of life, which relied heavily on agricultural slaves who worked the large cotton, tobacco and rice estates of the area. After 1863, many slaves abandoned their masters and the plantations were left to rot.

Historical references: There are many other historical references in Cold Mountain. The devaluation of paper money is alluded to, as are specific battles such as Fredericksburg, Sharpsburg and Malvern Hill. It also describes some stories of the Home Guard. Although the purpose of the Home Guard was to protect the South and its people, it had become a violent military force that hunted and often killed deserters and citizens who were housing them.

Good and evil: Charles Frazier successfully uses war to highlight mankind’s capacity for great good as well as great evil. Inman has seen men killed by the thousands without emotion or pity. On his travels he comes across successive incidents of horrible violence and cruelty perpetrated by the vilest people imaginable. Conversely, those with the least give all that they have without any thought of repayment.

Love and loyalty: Cold Mountain is the love story of Inman and Ada. Although they knew each other for only a short time before the war, Inman decides to desert the Confederate Army and make the difficult journey home mainly because he wants to see her again.
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Personal development: Throughout the story, we can see Ada's personal development as a responsible and caring woman. Similarly, Ruby is able to find peace by learning to forgive the father who abandoned her as a child. Inman's encounters with a variety of characters tell us that Inman maybe ruined beyond repair but he is still a very honorable man. The war has changed Stobrod as well. Music has become more and more important to him, and Ada thinks that even a man like him could learn and change for the better.

Friendship: The story shows a strong bond of great support and love between Ada and Ruby.

Mountains: Frazier refers to mountains as some kind of healing place, using the stories of Cherokee Indians.

Discussion activities

Chapter 1

Before reading

1 Research: Cold Mountain takes place during the American Civil War. Ask students what they know about the American Civil War. When was it? What were the two sides fighting about? Who won? What kind of battles did they fight? In what ways was life difficult in the American southern states during and after the war? What kind of changes took place in society as a result? Do you know any other books or movies about or set in the American Civil War? Put students into small groups, and have them research the information.

2 Discuss: Cold Mountain is a book about love and war. Have students make a list of other books or movies which use these two subjects to tell a story. Do you think these two subjects work well together? Give reasons for your opinion.

After reading

3 Discuss: Put students into pairs. Have them discuss the following questions: How does the author describe the war? What do you think happens to men's feelings when they fight terrible battles?

4 Discuss: Inman's Cherokee friend, Swimmer, says, “a man's spirit could die while his body continued living.” Ask students what they think about this statement. Swimmer also says that the tops of the highest mountains reach into the healing place where a dead spirit can be reborn. Put students into small groups to discuss their opinions on this healing place.

Chapter 2

Before reading

5 Research: Now we know that Inman has set off on his journey home. Bring in a map of that area (Virginia and North Carolina). Ask students to look for the places mentioned in Chapter 1, such as Malvern Hill, Sharpsburg, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, and Cold Mountain.

After reading

6 Write: Both Inman and Ada begin writing letters in Chapters 1 and 2. Ask students to read the letters again (pages 5 and 6). Ask them how much they have learned about the relationship between the two characters from these letters. Then, in pairs, students write an ending for each letter.

7 Discuss: Put students into pairs or small groups. Have them ask each other the following questions: Who sends Ruby to help Ada? Why do you think she does this? What does it suggest about Ada's neighbors in the countryside?

Chapter 3

Before reading

8 Guess: The heading of this chapter is The Journey Begins. Lead a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: What kind of journey do you think Inman will experience? How is he going to travel? How long do you think it will take to get home? Where does he sleep? How does he get food?

After reading

9 Discuss: Put students into small groups, and have them discuss the following questions: What do we learn about Inman's character from the story about the preacher? Did Inman do the right thing? What do you think will happen to the preacher? Later groups can share their opinions with the rest of the class.

10 Role play: Put students into groups of three or four. Have them act out the conversation that took place on the first day Inman met Ada at the church. Student A is Inman, Student B is Ada, and Student C is Sally Swanger. (In groups of four, Student D is another man in the church.) Give them sufficient time to practice acting. Later ask them to perform in front of the class.

Chapter 4

Before reading

11 Describe: Have students work in pairs or small groups. Ask them what they know about the two main characters so far. Ask them to write notes first, before they discuss with their partners. Later ask some students to report to the class.

After reading

12 Discuss: Ada sells her piano, and Ruby exchanges it for the things they would need to get through the winter. Have students work in pairs to talk about the following questions: What are the things that Ruby got? What did Ada and Ruby do when they found a sack of coffee beans? What did Ruby exchange it for? What farm animals do they have now? What are they for? Later in class, pairs can compare their answers.
13 Retell and discuss: Ruby spent a night in the open when she was only four. Put students into pairs and ask them to tell the story again in their own words. Then pairs can talk about Ruby. Encourage them to think about what effect the event had on Ruby’s life and character.

Chapter 5
Before reading
14 Discuss: In the last chapter, Ada thinks about the party before Christmas in the last winter before the war. Inman also remembers this party very well. Have students go back to Inman’s letter on page 5. Ask them to write Ada’s response to this letter. Remind them to think about how Ada is changing now.

After reading
15 Discuss: Put students into small groups. Have them ask and answer the following questions:
   a. When Inman sees the preacher again, what does he look like?
   b. What happened to the preacher?
   c. Do you think the wood cutters have really gone to get their dinners? Why was a saw left next to the tree?
   d. What do you think of Junior? What do you think of his trap?
   e. What do you think of the Home Guard? Were they right to shoot the deserters?
   f. How does Inman survive the shooting? What do you think about his survival?
   g. Why do you think Inman goes back to Junior’s house?
16 Research: The yellow slave gives Inman cornmeal and meat before he sets off. Use resources such as the Internet, books from the library, etc. to find some recipes for cornmeal. Students could work in small groups. Ask them to make a presentation when they finish their research.

Chapter 6
Before reading
17 Discuss: Inman meets several cruel and selfish people. Put students into groups and assign one of these characters to each group: Veasey, Junior, Lila, and the leader of the Home Guard group. Each group should make a list of reasons why their character is worse than the others. Then, ask each group to present their reasons to the rest of the class. Finally, the whole class votes for the character they dislike the most. Do most students agree?

After reading
18 Discuss: Put students into small groups, and have them discuss the following questions: What does the crowd outside the courthouse think about the prisoner’s story? What do you think? How do people in the town feel about the Home Guard?

19Role play: Little by little, Ruby is teaching Ada about the natural world. And she’s teaching her practical things, too, like how to farm and cook. In pairs, students imagine an everyday conversation between Ruby and Ada. Students should choose one simple subject for their conversation, such as how to cook bread, how to cook meat, how to find north, or how to wash clothes. Ruby tests and teaches Ada, and Ada asks some questions. Finally, some pairs to act out their conversations in front of the class.

Chapter 7
Before reading
20 Discuss: Have students look at the chapter title Two Women. Ask students to guess who these two women are. Chapter 6 was the story of Ada, so this chapter would be another story of Inman. Then who could these two women be? Are they Ada and Ruby? Are they someone else? Is Inman going to meet two women? Put students into pairs to discuss what will happen in this chapter. Then ask each pair to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

After reading
21 Discuss: Have students work in small groups to discuss the following questions: What are the main similarities and differences between the two women in this chapter? Why do you think the author makes them so closely together in the story?
22 Guess: Have a whole-class discussion by asking these questions: What do you think will happen to Sara and her baby? If you were Sara, what would you do?

Chapter 8
Before reading
23 Predict: The chapter heading is Stobrod Returns. Put students in small groups to talk about Ruby and Ruby’s father: Ruby’s father comes back to her. How would you feel if you were Ruby? What do you think she will do?

After reading
24 Retell and discuss: Have students work in pairs: In your own words, tell the old Indian woman’s story about Cold Mountain again. Do you believe it? What do you think it means? Why does the author introduce this story at this point in the book?
25 Role play: Put students into pairs to practice acting out the conversation between Inman and Ada on the last day he saw her before the war. Remind them what happened the day before, and have them think about the characters’ emotions. Students can use this information to decide what kind of facial expressions and body language to use. Give pairs sufficient time to practice. While they’re practicing, walk around the classroom to monitor. Choose some pairs to perform in front of the class.
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Chapter 9

Before reading
26 Retell: Put students into pairs, and have them recount what has happened in Chapter 8.

After reading
27 Discuss: Lead a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: How does Ada get the horse into the cabin? What does this tell us about the change in Ada’s character since the beginning of the book?
28 Write: Have students work in small groups to write a script for the Georgia boy telling Ada and Ruby the news.
29 Watch and write: Bring in the movie of Cold Mountain and show students the scene from pages 63 and 64, where Stobrod, Pangle, and the Georgia boy start a small fire and the Home Guard approaches. Make it short (Perhaps until Pangle gets shot.) Ask students to watch and listen carefully so that they can write down what was said. Play the scene again if necessary. Put students into small groups, and have them compare their notes.

Chapter 10

Before reading
30 Group work: Put students into groups. Ask them to choose sentences from the chapters they’ve read so far. The sentences should describe an action, either a very important one or something more trivial: for example, “Ada sat on the porch and took the letter from her pocket” or “Pangle raised his hat and put it over his face, and when he did the guards fired.” Ask each student to copy one or two sentences onto a piece of paper, without showing anyone else. They put their papers together on one table and then gather round to read the papers and decide in what order the sentences should appear.

After reading
31 Discuss: Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions: Is the meeting between Ada and Inman interesting and exciting? Is it romantic? How do you think the author wants us to feel at this part of the story?
32 Role play: Put students into pairs. Have them go over the meeting of Inman and Ada. Ask them to think about what they are wearing, what they are carrying, and what kind of voices they are using. When they are ready, they can act out the scene. Ask some pairs to perform in front of the class.

Chapter 11

Before reading
33 Guess: Ask students to think about ending of the story. Now that Inman made his journey back to Ada, do you think the story can end here? Why do you think the author wrote three more chapters? Have a whole-class discussion.

After reading
34 Discuss: Have students work in small groups to discuss the following: Inman says, “I’m ruined beyond repair,” and Ada says, “I know people can be healed.” Who is right, do you think? Give reasons for your answer. Later, ask groups to share their opinions with the rest of the class.
35 Speech: Inman and Ada talked of the past, describing their childhood and youth in great detail. Ask students to prepare a short speech to talk about their childhood and youth. Encourage them to include a memorable event in detail. Give them time to prepare and practice their speech. Help them if needed. Then organize a speech day.

Chapter 12

Before reading
36 Guess: Ask students to guess what the chapter heading means. This chapter is called The Last Goodbye. What does it mean? Who says goodbye to whom? Encourage them to come up with some possibilities.

After reading
37 Discuss: Put students into pairs, and have them discuss the following questions: How do you feel at the end of Chapter 12? Is Inman dead or will he live? What do you think will happen next?

Chapter 13

Before reading
38 Predict: Start a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: The chapter heading is October, 1874. It is nine years later after the end of the war. What’s happening in October, 1874? Do you think Ada is happy? Do you think Ruby is still there at Black Cove? Who else?

After reading
39 Check and discuss: Have students check if their predictions in Activity 38 were right. Put them into small groups to talk about Ada. Do you think Ada is happy? Give reasons for your opinion. Later in class groups can compare their opinions.
40 Write: The final four chapters bring four characters together: Ada, Ruby, Inman, and Stobrod. Each of these characters’ experience of events is very different. Allocate a character to each student and ask them to write about the events in these chapters from the viewpoint of their allocated character.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.