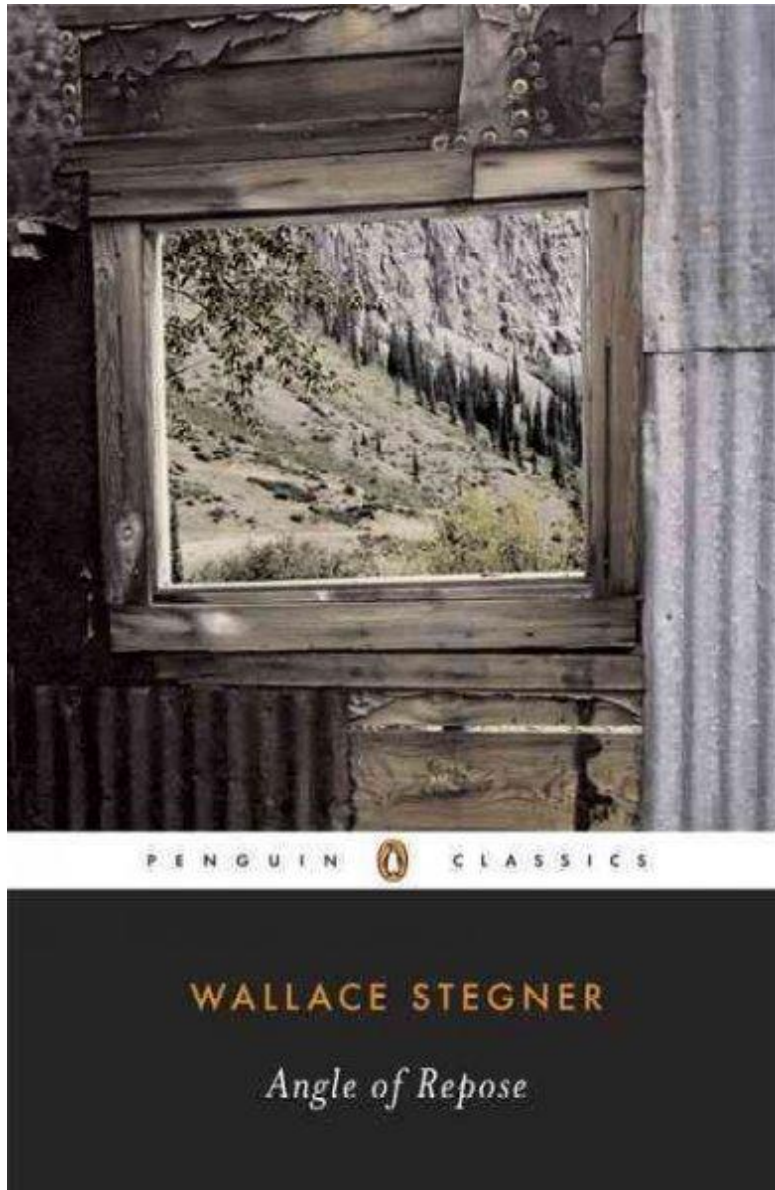


## About the book...



Wallace Stegner's uniquely American classic centers on Lyman Ward, a noted historian who relates a fictionalized biography of his pioneer grandparents at a time when he has become estranged from his own family. Through a combination of research, memory, and exaggeration, Ward voices ideas concerning the relationship between history and the present, art and life, parents and children, husbands and wives. Set in many parts of the West, *Angle of Repose* is a story of discovery--personal, historical, and geographical--that endures as Wallace Stegner's masterwork: an illumination of yesterday's reality that speaks to today's.

*Angle of Repose* is a novel about Time, as much as anything--about people who live through time, who believe in both a past and a future. . . . It reveals how even the most rebellious crusades of our time follow paths that our great-grandfathers' feet beat dusty."

## About the author...

(<http://wallacestegner.org/bio.html>)



Wallace Stegner once said about his writing, "In fiction I think we should have no agenda but to tell the truth." Stegner's prose has inspired generations of Americans to seek their own truth. In [The Geography of Hope, A Tribute to Wallace Stegner](#), written by his friends, colleagues, and his son, Page Stegner, we sense a far greater resonance than a mere collection of memorial applause. "It is a book about what one man has taught us, by his example, about the accountable life; a book about what it means to be a responsible, loving, thoughtful, constituent of the human race. That is the only way he would have it."

Wallace Stegner was born on February 18, 1909 in Lake Mills, Iowa. Over a 60 year career he wrote 30 books. Among the novels are, [The Big Rock Candy Mountain](#), 1943; [Joe Hill](#), 1950; [All The Little Live Things](#), 1967 (Commonwealth Club Gold Medal); [Angle of Repose](#), 1972 (Pulitzer Prize); [The Spectator Bird](#), (National Book Award), 1977; [Recapitulation](#), 1979; [Collected Stories](#), 1990, and [Crossing to Safety](#), 1987. The nonfiction includes [Beyond the Hundredth Meridian](#), 1954; [Wolf Willow, \(A History, A Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier\)](#), 1962; [The Sound](#)

of *Mountain Water*, 1969; [\*Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West\*](#), 1992, a collection of essays that earned him a nomination for the National Book Critics Circle award.

Although Wallace Stegner is called "the dean of Western writers," not all of his fiction is laid in the West. One of his most successful novels, *Crossing to Safety* takes place in Wisconsin and Vermont. *The Spectator Bird* is in California and Denmark. *All The Little Live Things* is pure California, not typically Western. Many of his short stories have a variety of settings: Vermont, Egypt, the South of France, as well as the American West. His non-fiction, however, and one of his most eloquent statements about the environment, *The Wilderness Letter*, are definitely Western. His impact, historically and environmentally, is Western.

Wallace Stegner wrote about the need to preserve the West, and he also fought for it. He became involved with the conservation movement in the 1950's while fighting the construction of dam on the Green River at Dinosaur National Monument. In 1960 he wrote his famous *Wilderness Letter* on the importance of federal protection of wild places. This letter was used to introduce the bill that established the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964. Wallace Stegner also founded the Committee for the Green Foothills in Santa Clara County, California and was

involved with The Sierra Club and Wilderness Society. He also served as assistant to the Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, during the Kennedy administration. There, he worked on issues dealing with the expansion of National Parks. His passion about the need to protect our wild places, and his respect for our landscape are a themes that Mr. Stegner eloquently expresses in many of his books and essays.

In 1964 Stegner started the Creative Writing Program at Stanford University, where he served on the faculty until 1971. He also taught at University of Utah, University of Wisconsin, and Harvard University. His students include: Wendell Berry, Larry McMurry, Thomas McGuane, Ernest Gaines, John Daniel, Raymond Carver, Edward Abbey, and Poet Laureate of the United States, Robert Haas. Mr. Stegner has twice been a Guggenheim Fellow and a Senior Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities. He was a member of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the National Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1992 he turned down the National Medal for the Arts because he was "troubled" by the political controls placed upon the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1934, Stegner married Mary Stuart Page. For 59 years they shared a "personal literary partnership of singular facility," wrote Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. The dedication of Stegner's last book *Where The Bluebird Sings* to the

Lemonade Springs, reads "For Mary...who, like Delsey has seen the first and the last, and been indispensable and inspiring all the way." They have a son, Page Stegner who is also a writer and professor at University of California, Santa Cruz.

Mr. Stegner died at 84, on April 13, 1993 following an auto accident in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He left a legacy as writer, professor, and environmentalist that once moved Edward Abbey to pronounce him "the only living American writer worthy of the Nobel." Indeed, Stegner was one of the American West's preeminent historians and arguably the most important of its novelists.

James Hepworth  
*The Quiet Revolutionary*

## **Awards**

Pulitzer Prize, 1971

## **Reviews**

### *Booklist*

The poetic title is actually a geological term for the slope at which rocks cease to roll and is used here as a symbol of human life. Time is the protagonist and a

tragically crippled but talented man, himself past middle age, explores through his grandmother's drawings, letters, and publications her life with her engineer husband in his struggle to use his talents in a time not quite ready for him. It is also an objective yet affectionate look at a long-ago love and failure of love which the protagonist associates with his own love and its tragedy. Stegner's integrity of vision is evident again in his respect for the victories and failures that surround the search for a vision.

### *Kirkus Reviews*

A late autumn retrospective, accomplished with a long lens, in which Lyman Ward, retired, ill and wheelchair-bound, attempts to affirm the continuity of the past and the "Doppler effect" of time by reconstructing his grandparents' lives. This in partial contrast to and rebuttal of his son at Berkeley "interested in change but only as a process. . . in values, but only as data" (the schism of his last book, *All the Little Live Things*). Much as one respects the amplitude of this novel and its sincerity, it all goes on and on (except for occasional present day interruptions) and one is never really very interested in Susan Burling Ward and her deracination from the cultured East to the uncivilized West in the 1870's by her husband, an engineer. It was always for her an "exile" and except for the terminal incidents ( a muted love affair which resulted in the accidental death of a child, her lover's suicide

and permanent separation from her husband) there is almost no narrative incentive. The repose, however pleasant, becomes a kind of narcosis

### **Discussion questions**

([http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/angle\\_of\\_repose.html](http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/angle_of_repose.html))

1. What do you think of Stegner's narrative technique, i.e., his use of a contemporary historian to tell Susan Ward's story? Is Lyman Ward a reliable narrator? How would this novel be different if Lyman's own story were excluded?
2. Stegner's narrator is confined to a wheelchair and partially paralyzed. He cannot move his head to either side, and thus can only look straight ahead. How does Stegner use these limitations to shape Lyman's role as a narrator and biographer? What is Stegner saying about the past and future?
3. How much of Susan Ward's destiny was determined by the era in which she lived and the limitations that era placed on a woman's freedom? Do you think of her as a woman ahead of her time?



4. Throughout the novel, Susan is torn between her old life on the east coast and her new one on the west. To each of her western homes she strives to bring a sense of gentility and comfort, even in the most rudimentary of circumstances. Her cabin in Leadville, for instance, becomes a magnet for the town's cultural elite despite the cramped quarters. Are the efforts futile or worthwhile? Do you applaud her attempts at civilizing the West or is she merely unable to accept another way of life for what it is? Is there a fundamental difference between America's two coasts today?
5. Stegner eliminates any concrete evidence of Susan's infidelity with Frank Sargent, leaving Lyman the task of piecing together the events that led up to Agnes's death. Why are these details left deliberately obscure? Does this heighten or mitigate the effects of Agnes's death on the story? Is Lyman being fair to Susan in his depiction of these events?
6. Susan often wonders if she made the right decision in marrying Oliver. Would someone like Thomas Hudson have brought her more happiness? What do you imagine Susan's life would have been like if she had stayed in the East? How did her years in the West shape her character?

7. Why does the novel end with Susan's return to Idaho? Why is it significant that the details of her life in the house in Grass Valley are given to us through the present only?
8. Do you think Lyman identifies more with his grandmother or his grandfather? How do the various aspects of his present situation—i.e., age, physical disability, marriage, career—compare and contrast to those of his grandparents?
9. The geologic term 'Angle of Repose', defines the angle of the slope at which debris will cease rolling downhill and settle in one place, as in a landslide. Why do you think Stegner chose this term for the title of his novel? By the end of the novel, has Lyman reached his own *Angle of Repose*? How does he change over the course of the summer in which this novel takes place?
10. Stegner's novels are known for their strong sense of place. What role does the terrain in the West play in *Angle of Repose*? Would you consider the land to be a 'character' in the novel? Can you describe this character in human terms?
11. The story of America's western expansion has been told in myriad ways, but often with the same details: danger and hardships, brave but crude

pioneers, and get-rich-quick schemes peddled by untrustworthy scam artists. How do Susan and Oliver's experiences compare and contrast with these myths of the American West? How is each a hero in his or her own right? How are they different from the stereotypical western hero?

12. *Angle of Repose* was written in 1971, during a period of great upheaval in America's social and political culture. How does Stegner's novel reflect the issues that were prevalent at the time of his writing? What are the parallels, if any, between Susan Ward's story and that of Shelly Hawkes? How does each woman represent her own era? Is either story as relevant today?

### **Readalikes** (*Book & Authors*)

[\*Broke Heart Blues\*](#) by Joyce Carol Oates

At Willowville High School, John Reddy Heart is a small-town hero, admired by the boys and adored by the girls. But his small fame is blown to international proportions when his mother's boyfriend is murdered one night, apparently by John Reddy himself. John Reddy flees, never to be caught, and his name becomes the stuff of legends. Thirty years later, we meet John R. Heart, a repair man, from whom we

learn all about the boy behind the teen heartthrob and the real story of what happened that night long ago.

[\*Close Range: Wyoming Stories\*](#) by Annie Proulx  
Pulitzer prize-winning author Annie Proulx adds a stunning collection of short stories to her resume. Set in Wyoming, the 11 stories presented in this volume capture the essence of its windswept, forlorn landscape. Burdened by hardship, hard knocks and hard heartedness all around them, Proulx's characters nevertheless remain stoic, persevering by staring down the difficulties that confront them, even if the outcome is inevitably tragic. With her trademark mastery of language, nuance and the human spirit, she gives the reader a whole new set of offbeat characters and a rendering of the West that shows off all its harsh beauty. Among the stories are two award winners: "Brokeback Mountain," a tale of doomed lovers, two cowboys who know that acknowledgement of their love in public could be deadly, and "The Half-Skinned Steer," an account of an old man's fateful return trip west to his brother's funeral and the place that he'd been forever trying to escape.

[\*Daughter of Fortune\*](#) by Isabel Allende  
This wide-ranging portrait of mid-19th century life begins in Chile when a British brother and sister adopt an abandoned child and raise her as their own. Eliza Sommers, however, disappoints her adoptive family

when she falls in love with Joaquin Andieta, a clerk in the family's firm. Left pregnant by Joaquin, who heads for the California goldfields, Eliza follows. Befriended by a Chinese herbalist, Tao Chi'en (whose history in China is also described), Eliza, disguised as a man, seeks her lover and witnesses the brutality of frontier justice, race-baiting, and gang warfare of the period. In the process, she evolves from hapless victim to independent and determined survivor

[House of Sand and Fog](#) by Andre Dubus, III

A small house is at the center of *House of Sand and Fog*, by Andre Dubus. Drug addict Kathy Lazaro is evicted from her small bungalow in northern California because she owes taxes on it. For her it is the greatest disaster in a life of disasters. Massoud Amir Behrani purchases the house for a song at the county auction. After struggling for four years to keep up the appearance of a self-respecting man of means, the former Iranian army officer sees this purchase as the greatest opportunity he has so far encountered in America: the chance to enter the business world, to be perceived as a success by his family and acquaintances. This is his chance to escape the state road works crew and shifts behind the counter in convenience stores. Kathy uses all means at hand to regain her house while Massoud tenaciously clings to his purchase, his last chance for success.

## **Readalikes** (*NoveList*)

[\*The Living\*](#) by Annie Dillard

When Native Americans help two struggling pioneer families in Washington, the behavior and attitudes of both groups change.

[\*The Half-Life of Happiness\*](#) by John Casey

In a tragi-comic novel about two Virginia liberals--a lawyer and an artist--their marriage collapses under the pressure of an ill-considered congressional campaign.

[\*Caramelo\*](#) by Sandra Cisneros

During her family's annual car trip from Chicago to Mexico City, Lala Reyes listens to stories about her family, including her grandmother, the descendant of a renowned dynasty of shawl makers, whose magnificent striped shawl has come into Lala's possession.

[\*Interpreter of Maladies: Stories\*](#) by Jhumpa Lahiri

In nine stories imbued with the sensual details of Indian culture, Lahiri charts the emotional journeys of characters seeking love beyond the barriers of nations and generations. This short fiction collection blends elements of Indian traditions with the complexities of American culture in such tales as "A Temporary Matter," in which a young Indian-American couple

confronts their grief over the loss of a child, while their Boston neighborhood copes with a nightly blackout.

[Consequences](#) by Penelope Lively

In 1935, privileged misfit Lorna falls for a penniless and bohemian artist, Matt. She moves to a rustic cottage in Somerset. A baby, Molly, is born, but the coming war takes Matt - and Lorna's dreams - away. Lorna's decisions and their unforeseeable consequences come to shape the lives of her daughter, Molly, and her granddaughter, Ruth.



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