

## Little Texas Sweetheart Book Club Guide

1. In the story, Ronald neglects and brutalizes his family. Nevertheless, do the children still owe their father respect, honor, and loyalty? Why or why not?
2. In what ways can Ronald be read as a sympathetic character? Which of Ronald's actions are forgivable? What explanations – other than meanness – might there be for Ronald's behavior? What clues does the writer give that Ronald himself is a victim? Would mental illness excuse his behavior? Would his own unhappy childhood excuse his behavior?
3. How did Julia's molestation by a trusted authority figure set the stage for her unhappy marriage? How did her mother's reaction to the molestation ("My Judy wouldn't do that!") affect Julia's ability to seek help and make wise choices?
4. In what sense is this book a travelogue? Where do the characters go, and what do they gain from their travels?
5. The four oldest children in the story are essentially home schooled during their early years, in a most unconventional way. How did their travel experience serve as an education? What other experiences contributed to the children's education?
6. Ronald believes that each new location will bring luck and success. How is this belief both helpful and fruitless in the story? What is your own experience of "seeking greener pastures"?
7. Even in the most miserable circumstances, the writer includes details of surrounding beauty. How do the characters draw strength from nature and beauty?
8. Julia and her family are helped repeatedly by public and private entities. Public welfare provides intermittent help, while churches and individuals provide emergency aid. Compare and contrast ways in which these forms of assistance both help the family, and also perpetuate the problem.
9. There are many entrepreneurial experiments in the story. Review the various ways that Julia, the children, and Ronald attempt to support themselves by making and selling things. In what ways are these experiments both desperate attempts to survive and expressions of the American spirit?
10. The 1960's are known as a time of cultural upheaval in America. Which aspects of 1960's culture are explored in the story?
11. At the end of the book, the children become successful adults in mainstream society. How do you account for this? Did their hardships prepare them well for life, or is their success a reaction against everything they experienced?
12. This is a story in which the human spirit triumphs. List inner and outer difficulties that Julia and her children must overcome. What difficulties have you overcome?

13. Three generations of women are represented in this story. Women are shown as victims, sinners, and saviors to each other. Is this a full representation of womanhood? Where would you fit in?
14. Throughout the story, the family is immersed in counterculture, only to be later saved by re-engagement with traditional culture. Explore and discuss this journey.