***Cheyenne Autumn*  by Mari Sandoz**

**A Study Guide & Classroom Resource**

*The following discussion questions were created and compiled by students in English 435/535, Native American Literature, in the Summer 2014 Four-Week term at Chadron State College:*

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This study guide is divided into FOUR parts:

**1. Major Themes/Issues related to the book as a whole**

**2. Discussion Questions related to EACH of the 9 chapters**

**3. Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities**

**4. Reader Testimonials: “Responding to *The Story Catcher.”***

**Major Themes/Issues in *Cheyenne Autumn***

These prompts relate to the overall novel itself--and the larger issues, themes, images, symbols, concepts that emerge in the work as a whole. The goal is to help readers dig deeper in the Novel and develop more critical reading responses to the events in the narrative, and perhaps the larger issues surrounding the novel that Sandoz may have been exploring.

**Discussion Questions:**

* *Cheyenne Autumn* is the story of the Northern Cheyenne people and their flight across the plains from the reservation where they had been forced to resettle. A major portion of the book focuses on the health of the Cheyenne people. Sandoz depicts throughout the book how the events of their journey affect the Cheyenne people, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. For example, as the Cheyenne’s depart, she writes “some stumbling a little in weakness or from the contagion of anxiety.” Sandoz also writes of the mental illness that affected the Cheyennes. She notes “Even strong ones died, or turned strange, like Bear Rope.” In Chapter 12, she writes regarding the trouble brought by Black Coyote “Some thought it was the sickness growing in him” (166).
	+ What are the effects of the journey on the Cheyennes physically, mentally and emotionally? What parts/events of their journey affect them most mentally and emotionally? How do their mentalities and emotions change over the course of their journey? How would you handle such a similar journey mentally and emotionally? How do the Cheyenne’s cope physically, mentally and emotionally along their journey?
* In addition to the men, Sandoz focuses on the role of the Cheyenne women during their journey. She describes the role of Cheyenne women, in not only the culture, but their role in the Indian Wars as well. For example, she notes Bull Hump Leaf’s role as a scout. She describes Bull Hump Leaf as “unrecognized, her hair braided like a man’s.” Sandoz also writes of the role the Cheyenne women played in hiding guns. She notes in Chapter 12 “some still kept their revolvers hidden. Black Bear’s wife carried his between her breasts.” What other roles did the Cheyenne women fulfill? What were some of their responsibilities as Cheyenne women? Do you think their roles as Cheyenne women change throughout their journey? How did the roles of the Cheyenne women benefit or deprive the Northern Cheyenne in their journey?
* Mari Sandoz spent years researching material for Cheyenne Autumn. She was around the Cheyenne survivors growing up and spent countless hours interviewing the Northern Cheyennes and touring the area later in life. Reviews of the book were universally positive, and it is widely accepted as a non-fiction account of the Cheyenne flight. Do you think this book is accurate and provides enough source material to be considered non-fiction, or should it be classified as historical fiction? Support your answer.
* How does the media portrayal of the Cheyennes change throughout the book? What about the opinion of the American citizens? Is the opinion different between areas of the country or among different classes of people? (i.e. between average citizens and the military; military officers in the west vs. those in Washington)
* Do you believe that acts of avenging southern Cheyennes and the raids in Kansas affected the treatment of the northern Cheyennes that are captured or turned themselves in?
* Considering all the terrible events that occur during the Cheyennes’ flight and how many Indians die on the journey, do you think they should have left Indian Territory in Oklahoma? Why or why not?
* What are some of the problems that arise during the flight specifically because many of the younger Cheyenne are “agency raised” and have never experienced large hunts or battles with white soldiers?
* One important theme in this novel is culture and heritage, or in the case of this band of Cheyennes, the preservation of culture and heritage. They begin their flight from the Indian Territory back to their old lands near the Yellowstone River partly because they are mistreated, starving, and sick, but also because they cannot tolerate being away from their home country. It is a large part of who they are, and being relocated to the south has disrupted their ability to live as they would choose. On their journey they continue to practice their religion, rely on the medicine man, and, when they can, partake in their traditional ceremonies and celebrations. In Chapter Four, after some cattle have been brought in by a hunting party, they build a large fire and sing, dance, and drum. Despite being pursued by the Army and having very little, the Cheyenne warriors continue to prepare for battle as they always have. Before preparing to escape Ft. Robinson they prepare themselves:

Stooped over the little fires that had been saved to light this preparation, they painted their faces and put on the few good things left. Dull Knife drew the beaded lizard outside his shirt, and Little Finger Nail put on his shell-core collar and tied the watchful, clear-voiced bird in his hair, the bird that brought him the sweetest singing. (Chapter 15)

The councils also continue as they make their way north, continuing the representative governance they have long had, rather than resorting to appointing a leader to act unilaterally. Everything about their escape from the Indian Territory is underscored by the preservation of their culture, identity, and maintaining a connection to their traditions and heritage.

Why is their geographical location so important to the Cheyennes? While there is no doubt that surviving in a new place with different climate and geography is difficult, how much do you think difficulty in adjusting affects their decision to escape to the north? Why, when being pursued closely, is preparing for battle in the Cheyenne way so important?

* Some of the major symbols in the story revolve around food, warmth, and violence. Symbols such as sugared coffee, tobacco, soft spoken Cheyenne, whiskey breath, and others are prevalent throughout the novel. What do you suppose is the purpose or reason for inserting these symbols throughout the story, and what effect do they have on you as a reader? How do these symbols relate to some of the major themes of the novel such as greed, broken promises, resistance, bravery, family, etc.?
* Throughout the novel there are several indications that the Cheyennes, and many Native American Tribes, are a group of people that seem to treat men and women equally. Many times, it is the women who decide whether or not the men give in and give up. Looking at the novel from a feminist perspective, what were some ways that the Cheyennes hold a positive role for women in their society? Are there any negative ways the women are treated? Look critically at the novel and find some ways their society and our current society are different in terms of gender equality and treatment.
* The systematic removal of Native Americans from their lands to "territories" led the both the destruction of their culture and transformation. However, these groups presented in *Cheyenne Autumn* resisted the government's attempts to permanently move them. Do you feel this is the right choice for them? Is the split between Dull Knife and Little Wolf's bands a poor choice? This novel paints a terrible picture of the U.S. Government at the time; do you feel it is an accurate portrayal from what you know?
* This atrocity is not dissimilar from many genocides across the world. There are passages and entire chapters that could be found in any Holocaust novel. What are some of the similarities in the way the U.S. Government tries to destroy a race and culture and other genocides around the world.
* While telling this story, Mari Sandoz makes a point, many times, to associate how people are related among the Cheyennes to each other, especially in the cases of the wives and decedents of Council Members or great warriors.  Also mentioned throughout the novel are the roles that each family member seems to automatically take up, even as they struggle on through less than ideal circumstances.   Why do you suppose family position and position of families among the tribe are so important?  What are some ways that they try to preserve this as they fight forward?  How does this help and/or hinder them on their journey?  Explain your thoughts.
* During this time period, soldiers would many times attack Indians that had their hands up “in a peaceful way,” holding only a pipe, or even a white flag to show peace, such as with Medicine Arrow (90).  Why do you suppose this happened so often?  It seems as though it was also widely acceptable, by many whites.  What role did the media seem to play in this?  Do you think that it changed as the media view began to change?  Support your answer.
* While the bulk of the novel is presented from the Cheyennes’ perspective, some parts of the story are shown from the perspective of the whites, usually from Army officers. Perspective is an important theme in this book. Very little had been written from the Native point of view when this book was published. Most accounts of the conflicts with the various Indian tribes of the era came from soldiers or settlers.

One interesting device employed by Sandoz that emphasizes differences in perspective is subtle changes in language and cadence between passages from the Cheyennes’ point of view and those of whites. For example, “the sun was overhead and the panting grouse had nothing except her own shadow to stand in.” The language chosen reflects people who are in tune with their environment, and are part of it. The descriptions often come from nature. People at the time of the Cheyenne escape are said to be “humped as buffaloes under their burdens,” and then “going like the fox sneaking up a gully.” When shifting to the white perspective, the language addresses action, people, and places. Chapter Three begins “At Fort Reno Col. Mizner reported good progress. Rendlebrock, out 30 miles by late afternoon the first day, sent a courier to Camp Supply for more cavalry.” Later, “General Pope wired his plans. Lewis of Fort Dodge would take command when southern troops neared there, and the two companies of infantry from Fort Hays...” While the language used when focused on the whites' perspective does not reject the environment , it does not reflect a strong connection or immersion in nature like that employed when viewing the story from the Native point of view.

We also see drastic differences in how each side perceives the actions of the others and the situation as a whole. For the whites it is largely a matter of renegade Indians not going where they are told and marauding their way north. For the Cheyennes it is about being free to live where they had been based on the promise given them by the U.S. government. What is complicating is that we also see that even the Army officers charged with stopping the Cheyenne are not necessarily unsympathetic and may not agree with the orders they must carry out. General Pope, as an example, had written to his commanders in Washington that “in every outbreak the cause was bad faith by the government. In this outbreak there were no depredations until the Cheyennes were attacked.” We also see several instances that demonstrate a respect for the Indians among veterans of the various Indian wars. Highly exaggerated media reports and rumors are mentioned at multiple points in the book, most notably with the reports of hundreds of civilians killed, women raped, children murdered, only to have these same people later show up unaware that there had been an “Indian scare.” At one point the word is that over one hundred civilians had been killed, but the actual number was six, all of whom had taken offensive action against the Cheyenne.

How does the language used when telling the story from different perspectives influence your perception of the Cheyennes, the Army officers, and civilians? There are instances in which military officers call for Indian Agents to be present, such as for the Cheyennes’ transport back to Indian Territory, in order to make the deed not be a military action. Does this change your perspective on the men commanding Army units? How do you think the exaggerated stories of the “marauding” Indians affected public sentiment?

**Chapter by Chapter discussion questions.**

**Preface, The People and the Time, Gone Before**

* What was/is the importance of Mari Sandoz’s research for this novel?
* Why do you suppose the “Indian Territory” was hated so much by the Native Americans?
* What were some of the ways the Cheyennes were swindled into moving off of their land? Why do you suppose the government wanted them gone from their lands?
* What were some of the events that led up to Dull Knife and Little Wolf leaving?

**Chapter 1: Sixty Lodges Standing**

* As the Cheyennes depart from the standing lodges, where do Tangle Hair and his Dog soldiers fall in the group? And what is their purpose?
* Why do each chief have two wives? What does Sandoz describe as “always the first duty” of a Cheyenne woman? Compare this responsibility to your own value system; do you agree with this “first duty” or do you feel another responsibility is more important for women in your culture to fulfill?
* Who are Dull Knife’s two wives, and of what Native American heritage are they? As they depart the wives sing a song together; how is Dull Knife portrayed in that song?
* Who are Yellow Swallow’s parents? What is he a reminder of for the Cheyennes? If you were a member of the Cheyennes, how would you treat Yellow Swallow and why?
* What sacred tribal objects of the Cheyennes are referenced in this chapter? What is the purpose of these objects, and what are they made of? What do the objects symbolize to you?

**Chapter 2: Ahh-h, Buffalo**

* American Horse and later Plenty Bears decide not to come along on the journey north.  What are some of the reasons that are either given or implied by them or others?  Why is their staying behind a concern to the others?
* What disagreement do the young and old men have?  Why do they have such varied opinions?  Are there other characteristics that seem to vary more between the young and older men?  Can this be seen in the women also?
* In what ways do the Cheyennes try to hide their trails as they move along?  How does this help them?  Are there signs left by them that are picked up by scouts?
* What do the Cheyenne scouts find? How does this affect their travels at this point?

**Chapter 3: Shooting, and Soldiers Going Back**

* The Cheyennes are obviously at a disadvantage to the Army in several ways when they escape from Indian Territory. Along with illness and hunger, these disadvantages include shortages of weapons, horses, and ammunition. Here they are still out-manned and out-gunned in their battle with Rendlebrock's troops. How do the Cheyennes use their lead on the Army to their advantage? What impact does the site of their stand give them compared to where the soldiers wind up being contained?
* After the soldiers are contained in the ravine, Little Wolf tells the Dog warriors to “Make no attack but let nobody get away.” Why does he do this rather than order the killing of the soldiers? What purpose, if any, is there in telling them to “sing them a few songs, if it pleases [them]”?
* Why are the Cheyenne boys searching for bullets embedded in the hillside after the battle?
* Little Wolf, Howling Wolf, and Dull Knife have a short discussion about northern and southern whites, the Civil War, and the President. What does this short exchange demonstrate about their understanding of U.S. politics and what they expect from the whites based on past experiences?
* Before the battle begins, Little Wolf walks toward Rendlebrock and his soldiers with plans to talk to them. What does he plan to tell them, and what does it demonstrate about their living conditions and treatment in Indian Territory?
* The Indian scouts working under Col. Mizner and Rendlebrock withhold some information about what they have found while tracking the Cheyennes. What don’t they tell the Army officers? Why do you think they choose to not disclose these things?

**Chapter 4: The First Man Killed**

* Finally some events go in favor of the Cheyennes. They have some buffalo meat and new moccasins. What are the immediate concerns of the tribe at the beginning of this chapter?
* Describe the circumstances of Black Beaver’s death. How is he mourned by his family and tribe. What impact does his death have on the Cheyennes?
* What realization does Howling Wolf have while in a Florida prison? How does this change when he returns to the tribe?
* How do the Army commanders in the west view the treatment of Indians at the agencies?
* How is the Cheyenne journey viewed in the media?
* What happens to the Bear Rope family? How are these actions viewed by the rest of the tribe? What disciplinary action is taken?

**Chapter 5:** **Soldiers, Soldiers, and the Flooding Arkansas**

* The morning after the Cheyennes confront a force of soldiers and civilian scouts, they are found to have left before the sun rises. Then “in a few days most of the men who had been reported killed in the raids began to show up, one after another, some surprised to hear that there had been an Indian scare at all.” How many civilians had actually been killed, and how many had been said to have been killed? What does this tell us about the reports and rumors of the Cheyenne's activities during their flight to the north? How does this compare to media and word-of-mouth news of current events today?
* Consider your answer to the previous question, and what you have read so far in the novel. What effect, if any, do you think these reports have had and will have on the actions of civilians who believe they are in the path of the Cheyennes?
* When the Cheyennes discover some buffalo hunters south of the Arkansas River, the hunters give up their guns, ammunition, and other supplies without a fight. The hunters were outnumbered, but for what other reason might they have surrendered so easily? Do you think that what Bear Shield alluded to when the scouts brought word of the hunters had anything to do with it?
* Old Grandmother, who seemed close to dead a couple of days before, seems reinvigorated and takes it upon herself to show the young women how to skin and dress a buffalo. She is also riding well again. Why do you think this is, given their current situation? Why does she burn her travois poles, other than to build a cooking fire?
* Sitting Man, despite a broken femur, mounts a horse when the party departs, rather than riding a travois. Why does he do this? What does this demonstrate about the Cheyennes’ condition and situation compared to earlier in the novel?
* Why does Dull Knife argue against allying with the Kiowa, Sioux, and Comanche?
* Dull knife wonders why “unlimited killing never turned the vejo officers from their path.” What does he suppose might be reasons? Do you agree or disagree with his thinking?
* At the end of the chapter there is mention of the scene in Dodge City where, once again, the evidence shows that the reports of the number of men and cattle lost has been grossly exaggerated. Still, emotions seem to be running high, and Col. Lewis is headed there to take charge with plans to annihilate the Cheyennes. Why, in your opinion, are people still so fearful and willing to kill when the evidence demonstrates that the Cheyennes are only fighting when someone fights them and only taking what is needed to survive?

**Chapter 6: A Soldier Chief Dead**

* Which Cheyennes marry in the beginning of the chapter? What marriage customs of the Cheyennes are referenced in the chapter? Compare and contrast these customs with your cultural views on marriage.
* Where did the Cheyennes position their rifle pits? What is their plan of attack with the rifle pits? As a war strategy, do you feel this is effective or ineffective? Why or why not? What ruins the Cheyennes’ plan to ambush the Calvary?
* Which U.S. colonel is injured and later dies at the battle of Punished Women Creek? Old Bridge states he would trade his powers to the soldier Chief for what? Why does he not attempt to this trade? How do you think this event affects the journey of the Cheyennes mentally and physically?

**Chapter 7: Sappa—Meaning Black**

* What happened to all of the buffalo that once roamed the hunting grounds?  How does this contribute to the problems in Indian Territory?  What actions are taken in retaliation against the hide hunters?  What is the result?
* What are some of the obstacles that the Cheyennes have to overcome in order to make their escape?
* On April 23rd, a group of whites charge out of the fog to attack Medicine Arrow’s camp.  What actions does Medicine Arrow take to show peace?  Why do you suppose these peaceful actions are ignored by the whites?
* What heroic action does Medicine Arrow’s wife take during the attack?  Why is this so important?
* What is the result of this attack?  How do you suppose instances such as this one could have maybe been avoided, if at all?

**Chapter 8: To Make the Bad Heart Good**

* Is there a reason that certain people are given horses first?  How might this help the tribe as a whole?
* Why do you suppose the numbers of those killed always varies so much between different reports of soldiers, hunters, and the Cheyennes?  Do you think one might be more accurate than the other(s)?  Why or why not?
* Why is it important to the Cheyennes to refrain from killing women and children?
* Why do you suppose Little Wolf is so angry when he discovers that some of the young Southern warriors have gone from camp?

**Chapter 9: The Parting**

* In the opening scene, Little Wolf is taking his turn on foot, following the tribe. What realizations does he come to while thinking during his run?
* “Many things were of the today in this country they had to cross, a country that was fat as fall buffaloes with memories.” This sentence describes the country surrounding the Platte River. What are some the remembered events? What impact do you think these events had on the Cheyennes’ decision to return north and/or on the decisions made during the resulting journey?
* The Cheyennes fleeing north meet Little Chief’s band moving south. What information does Little Chief have for them? How does Little Wolf react to this news? How does Dull Knife react to it? What are the decisions of Little Wolf and Dull Knife?

**Chapter 10: Out of the Blizzard**

* This chapter opens with a scene from a saloon in Sidney, NE, in which a new soldier brags about the routing that he and the rest of Thornburgh's men plan to give the Cheyennes. Meanwhile, a veteran of the Seventh Cavalry recalls similar bold talk before Custer's men were defeated at Little Bighorn and drinks a silent toast to the fallen. What do these two different approaches to the possibility of battle show us about popular opinion and that of the soldiers who had fought the various tribes on the plains?
* The text mentions that in the newspaper articles about the Cheyennes and the military response to their actions that “something new was creeping into the stories—admiration” for the leader who had managed to lead a band of people, mostly women, children, elderly, and the sick, across 600 miles of settlers, cattlemen, scouts, railroads, and the Army. Do you think that this shift in the media's treatment of the story had any effect on public opinion at the time? Why or why not?
* Thornburgh, after losing the false trail left by the Cheyennes, decides to head them off at the Niobrara. They have no scouts and no pack train with supplies. On the third day they kill some cattle, just as the Cheyenne had before, as their rations are running out. Other than their motivations for heading north, what, in your opinion, is now different between these soldiers and the  Indians they are pursuing? Do you think Thornburgh is any more justified in killing a rancher's cattle than the band of Cheyennes?
* During his pursuit, Thornburgh and his men see smoke to their northwest. Who set the fires and why?
* When Thornburgh encounters couriers from Ft. Robinson, he tells them that their rations have run out and they've been “reduced to fresh game, and everybody's so loose-boweled the saddles are empty much of the time.” How does this compare to changes in the Cheyennes’ condition since they have had fresh game? Why do you think this is?
* When Carlton questions Red Cloud about Cheyennes slipping into his camp, his answer leaves Carlton unsure about what the Chief had promised. How do you interpret Red Cloud’s answer?

**Chapter 11: The Rejection**

* The chapter opens with fog covering the tribe like “a blanket pulled up over the shame of separation.” Who separated and went with Dull Knife? Who went with Little Wolf? What are the implications of each? (Consider the importance of leaders/chiefs/warriors/sick/injured).
* When Dull Knife reaches the White River near Pine Ridge, he stops and is like a “lost man come home.” What is the importance of this area to the Cheyennes of the past? What was the importance of this area to these Cheyennes now?
* Consider this quote: “No people is whipped until the hearts of its women are on the ground, and then it is done, no matter how great the warriors or how strong the lance.” Why do you suppose the morale of the group relies so heavily on the women? What does this say about the Cheyennes as a whole?
* Why did Dull Knife’s group give in to Captain Johnson and go to Chadron Creek? Why would they not want to go back to Fort Robinson?

**Chapter 12: Stepping Aside**

* The title of this chapter is “Stepping Aside” and in it Sandoz portrays many different ways in which the Cheyennes were forced to “step aside.” What conflicts does she describe that called for “stepping aside” as a solution?
* Who led the Cheyenne women through much of their journey? How is she portrayed in this chapter and throughout the book?
* Little Wolf’s people receive many words of news in this chapter. What news and gifts does Little Hawk bring from Red Cloud? A man of Dull Knife’s also brings news to Little Wolf,-what is it?  At the end of the chapter news is brought from Red Cloud--what is it? What is the significance of the news to the Cheyennes?
* In this chapter Sandoz writes of some of the relationship issues between the Cheyennes. What are these issues and how do the Cheyennes demonstrate their feelings for the opposite sex, particularly Spotted Deer and Bald Eagle’s cousin? What role does Thin Elk play in relation to the Cheyenne women?
* What actions by Thin Elk and Black Coyote cause Little Wolf to consider punishing them? What does Little Wolf eventually decide is the best course of action for these troublemakers?
* Do you feel the group dynamics between the Cheyennes changes in this chapter? Why or why not? What do you feel has contributed to the changing relations among the Cheyennes?

**Chapter 13: In the Barracks**

* Sandoz describes the surgeon Moseley treating the Cheyennes’ illnesses and injuries at Fort Robinson. How does he do this? What pills does he provide? What condition do these pills treat? How does he demonstrate compassion for Lame One?
* Colonel Carlton lays out instructions for Dull Knife’s Cheyennes. What are these instructions? If you were one of Dull Knife’s Cheyennes, how would these instructions affect you? Describe your reaction to the Colonel’s words “we are friendly now.”
* How do you feel the Cheyennes are treated at Fort Robinson? Compare and contrast this with how current war prisoners are held?
* In this chapter Sandoz references many outside opinions on the treatment of Native Americans. What sources does she reference? Are these sources in favor or against the reservation system for Indians?
* In the end of the chapter, Hog receives a newspaper clipping from Tangle Hair. What does this clipping say? What does Hog plan to do with it?

**Chapter 14: The Fasting**

* The Moon of Falling Leaves is described as a good and quiet time at Fort Robinson. Compare the events and mood at the opening with those at the end of the chapter.
* What is the difference between the beading patterns made by the Cheyenne women on garments for Indians and whites?
* What is the reaction of the Cheyennes upon discovering white people are experiencing economic hard time throughout the United States?
* What is portrayed in Little Finger Nail’s story pictures? What reaction does the rancher Bronson have to this book? What do the older Cheyenne men think of it?
* What concessions does Red Cloud secure from his long talks with Dull Knife?

**Chapter 15: The Ordeal Begins**

* Part of the escape plan includes stealing horses from Bronson's ranch. Why do they plan to pay Bronson back for the horses when they have stolen other horses along their flight to the north and do not mention such plans?
* Great Eyes gives his shield to his nephew, Red Bird, and tells him to make every effort to escape with it. Why does he charge the boy with such a responsibility? What is his justification to Red Bird for not including him in the fighting?
* White Antelope, to avoid capture after finding his wife dying and his child dead, attempts to kill his wife and himself, but both are gathered with the wounded. Dr. Mosley, while examining him, says “The will to live runs very strong in these people.” Do you think this comment is meant to describe their physical fortitude, or their resolve in remaining free and not going back to Indian Territory? Why?
* Little Finger Nail is “no longer a man of the warpath.” What does this mean? What is, in his mind, his purpose now?
* How does Lt. Chase's relationship with the Cheyennes affect the outcome of the escape? What, in the eyes of the remaining Cheyennes, separates his conduct on the night of the escape from most of the other soldiers?

**Chapter 16: This is the Place**

* How is Little Finger Nail suddenly forced toward leadership?  What immediate action does he take?  What are some of the thoughts that he has while walking among his people?
* No one speaks of the plan or of Dull Knife’s whereabouts as they are captured.  Why do you think this is so important?  How could the outcome have changed had someone spoke?  Do you think it would play out in Cheyennes’ favor?
* How do the reports in the media begin to change at this point in the narrative?  What influences were there to the media that may have caused this change?  How did this change influence the perceptions of others?

**Chapter 17: The Remnant**

* What is the significance of the chapter title? Why are these remnants important?
* What would you say is the overall feeling of this chapter? Why?
* We find out what has happened to Dull Knife in this chapter. What is he doing and why? How does he manage to go unnoticed by the whites?

**Chapter 18: And Now the Yellowstone**

* This final chapter seems to be one of triumph for Little Wolf’s group. What are some of the triumphs they hold at the end of the chapter? What does this mean for his people?
* Why do you suppose White Hat Clark made such an effort to help Little Wolf?
* Coming to the end of the novel, so many terrible things have happened to the two groups of Cheyennes because of the white men. However, there is some good. Who do you think tried the most to help the Indians, and why do you suppose they did that for them?

**In the Aftertime**

* Who are the Indians responsible for attacking the two soldiers repairing the telegraph? What happens to these Indians?
* What happens to the group of Cheyenne men taken to Kansas to be tried for murder?
* Contrast the media portrayal of the Northern Cheyennes’ flight between the beginning and end of the book.
* Describe Dull Knife’s life after the events of 1878-1879. Describe Little Wolf’s. Which was a more fitting end for a great Cheyenne chief.

**Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities**

Here are some teaching activities for use with this novel, offering some specific ways to make *Cheyenne Autumn* come alive in the classroom for, perhaps, reluctant students/readers.

**Melissa Rosfeld**

I plan on teaching high school English but have no experience writing lesson plans yet. My lesson plans for teaching the book *Cheyenne Autumn* would culminate in a final project chosen by the students from a list of projects. This would be in addition to going through the book chapter-by-chapter as a class with daily class discussion led by a reading guide and small quizzes. A reader’s reaction journal would be kept as a bell ringer in-class writing activity pertaining to the assigned chapter.  Length of assignments and how quickly the book is read depends on the grade level of students and ability, along with length of class periods.

Samples of other assignments include:

* A small group exercise to introduce the book in which students make a list of preparations and necessary items for the flight.
* A short paper 1-2 pages imaging what would have happened if Little Wolf and Dull Knife had not split up.
* An in class discussion and list of pros and cons for the Cheyenne staying in the north or moving to Indian Territory.

Final Project Choices:

* Create a detailed timeline with important events summarized leading up to and during the Cheyenne flight from Indian Territory. (Event summarizes should be at least one paragraph long. Other sources are encouraged with necessary citation.)
* Choose one character from the book and write a biography- 500 word minimum- about that person. (Two additional sources must be used.)
* Create a detailed map of the Cheyenne journey north, with both historical and modern day place names. A one paragraph summary of each the important event occurring at each site is required. (Additional sources encouraged.)
* Choose an important scene from the book and rewrite it from a different point of view. (For example: The scene on pages 200-202 where the Indians break out of the barracks at Fort Robinson from a soldier’s viewpoint.)

As always, grammar, spelling and punctuation count and proper citation of sources is necessary. Originality, creative and detailed work is rewarded.

**Jacqueline Weise**

At this time I have no plans to go into education, but I do have a few ideas for lesson plans. When creating these two lesson plans, I thought of what would have helped me while reading *Cheyenne Autumn.* I think keeping a log of main characters would have been particularly helpful.

Objectives:

1. To help students understand the role of the main characters in Cheyenne Autumn

2. To help students visualize the path of the Cheyenne’s journey north

3. To help students relate the impact of the events in Cheyenne Autumn with the feelings of the Cheyennes

4. To help students understand the role/impact of the Cheyenne’s journey in Native American history

Materials:

            -2 large poster boards or more

            -Markers or other writing utensils

            -Journals for each student

Preparation: No preparation is needed for these two lesson plans.

Lesson 1:

            After reading each chapter, have the students make a list of the main characters and their role. This will include mostly the Cheyennes in the beginning, with the addition of US Calvary members towards the middle and end of the novel. The students should also include which Cheyennes followed Dull Knife and those that chose to follow Little Wolf in the corresponding chapters. The students should keep the log updated on a poster board following the review of each chapter.

With the other poster board have students keep a map log of the Cheyenne’s journey. Again after reviewing each chapter, have the students map out where the Cheyenne’s traveled during the corresponding chapter. Students should add names of rivers or other landmarks where applicable, such as Fort Robinson, Platte River, etc.

This lesson serves to help students follow main characters throughout the novel and the role these characters play. It will also help students understand the role of the main characters in many of the events throughout the story. The map will assist students to visualize where the Cheyenne’s journey took them. They can also discuss how the environment and terrain of the land affected their journey. For further critical thinking, have students compare and contrast the land the Cheyenne’s traveled to what the land is like now.

Lesson 2:

            While reading the novel, instruct the students to envision themselves as a member of the Cheyenne’s. The students can choose to be a main character or simply a member of the tribe. Provide each student with a journal and instruct them to journal their thoughts, feelings, reactions, etc. following each chapter. The goal of this lesson is to have students reflect on the reading and to connect on a personal level with the Cheyenne’s and their journey.

**Reader Testimonials**

Share your reactions and responses to *Cheyenne Autumn.* These can be both personal and critical responses, formal and informal. Think of book clubs, blogs and other places were people express their responses to what they read. Here are some specific areas you might respond to:

* What were your most favorite/least favorite parts of the novel?
* Is the novel well-written? Point to specific examples to illustrate, yes or no.
* Can you relate to the characters in the narrative? Howso?
* Can you relate to the setting of the narrative? Howso? (does living in Nebraska affect your response)?
* What larger issues do you think Sandoz was trying to investigate in the novel?
* Do you see any of the themes and issues that we ourselves have been exploring in this course at work in this novel?

**Allen Maltbie**

For me, reading this novel was almost as arduous a task as Thornburgh's fast-paced trek across the Panhandle toward the Niobrara.  I've never been a fan of Mari Sandoz, and this book hasn't changed my mind. The pace at which I had to absorb the novel did not make the reading any easier. With that said, I have to also admit that this book is much better in every category than other books of hers I have been made to read over the years. I won't go into the gory details, but I was first introduced to this author via “Old Jules,” followed by a couple of others, about 20 years ago in high school. I was not impressed one bit. I'm still not what anyone would call a “fan” of hers, but this piece is a Ferrari compared to the rusty Ford Pintos I was force-fed back then. She really grew as an author by the time she wrote Cheyenne Autumn.

Overall, this novel was well constructed and well researched. I have to admit that I find the choices she made in telling this story pretty gutsy, especially coming from a mid-century female author. First, choosing to telling the story from both the Native and white points of view was a bold choice, as was focusing on the Cheyenne rather than those charged with their pursuit. Sandoz managed to capture the ambivalence both sides felt about the other. These mixed feelings are well expressed in several of the Army personnel. Lt. Chase befriends the Cheyenne and demonstrates an admiration for them and shows them respect as people. Gen. Pope expresses his dismay at the treatment of the Natives, and cites bad faith on the government's part as the cause of every outbreak he had witnessed, this one included. (Chap. 10) Even the press began to admire what the Cheyenne had accomplished in covering 600 miles with elderly, young, and sick people while eluding capture, though it did little to quell the exaggerated reports of hundreds of people slain.

It is the mixed emotions that make the characters relatable and believable. It is too easy to choose a side when telling a story and then paint the “others” to be one-dimensional bad guys. Sandoz could have simply made every soldier a bloodthirsty killer or order-following robot, but chose to show us their humanity, especially those who came to know the Cheyenne such as Bronson and Lt. Chase. While both pursued the Cheyenne when they attempted their escape from Ft. Robinson, Chase is clearly doing his duty as an officer rather than turning into a killer. People surrendered to him peacefully, and he was respected for not shooting the wounded as so many of the soldiers had.

Many of the settings of the book are very familiar to me having lived in northwest Nebraska for over 20 years. Ft. Robinson, the Chadron area, and Sheridan County are all too familiar. I live very close to the sites of Camp Sheridan and the Spotted Tail Agency and have spent a great deal of time at Ft. Rob, and know the layout of the area well. I was already aware of the movement of the players in these events and have visited many of the sits, but the book sort of “brought it to life.” I know where the Cheyenne went in their escape from the barracks, and where the few who mad it out escaped to up the bluffs and to the north, but that was always more like an annotated map in my mind. Having gotten to know them, in a sense, I could picture their flight toward the bridge and the bluffs. Next time I'm eating lunch at the covered picnic area near the barracks I'm not sure I'll be able to watch my kids on the playground without getting chills.

**Melissa Rosfeld**

I had read *Cheyenne Autumn* before, but it was a long time (probably 20 years) ago. When I first came here with my husband and my in-laws found out I was a reader, they handed me a pile of books related to the area and that included many Mari Sandoz books. My father-in-law grew up as neighbors to the Sandoz family and remembers Mari’s youngest brother, Fritz, as one of the “cool” older high school kids when he was in grade school. He also remembers how people in the neighborhood were horrified when *Old Jules* and *Slogum House* were published because the stories reflected badly on the area and everyone locally knew the people involved. Locals considered these things that shouldn’t be talked about at all.

I think that *Cheyenne Autumn* is a heart breaking book. It illustrates very well many of the themes we have studied in other pieces especially the misunderstandings that arose between Indians and white people, or the military, and the tragic consequences of those misunderstandings. This especially evident when considering the words “Just go down to see. If you don’t like it you can come back…” (1) The Cheyenne treated this as a serious promise. To the agency officials it was a way to get the Cheyenne to agree to move south, off the Red Cloud agency. These few words, never remembered by the whites, were the catalyst for the entire Cheyenne flight and the tragedy that followed.

It also touches on the difficult decision Native Americans were facing in regard to the need for adopting white culture to survive and the difference in values between the two cultures. Little Wolf states, “With the whites you have a right to nothing that you do not already hold in the palm.” (116) At the beginning of Chapter 9, Little Wolf contemplates how the world has changed during his lifetime, from one where there were no white people, to the world full of whites he was facing at that time. “The Indian has always lived by knowing the ways of the things around them. Now, far too late, he must study these whites and their Great Father who could talk soberly of peace while big bunches of their young men did nothing but practice charging up and down, shooting at a target that was like a man, stabbing with the bayonet, crushing with the gunstock.” He thinks of all times that the whites have asked for things for peace and then attacked the Indians.

There is much to admire about the Cheyenne in this story. They are certainly the more honorable people when judged against the military and white government. Except for a small band of southern Cheyenne who were avenging a massacre at Sappa, the Cheyenne avoided killing except when necessary for survival, honored their promises and took only what they needed. Diseased and half starved, they undertook a 1,500 mile walk with elderly and small children along, that under the conditions the Cheyenne faced would kill most strong healthy men, even with the high tech survival gear of today. If they had been allowed to stay in their northern home country, permitted peaceful hunts and taught farming methods, the Cheyenne could have supported their people. “God-these people die hard!” (237) A soldier remarked viewing the carnage from the battle at Last Hole and that was reinforced through the entire book.

One of the most tragic parts of this book are how Dull Knife and Little Wolf lived out their lives after the flight was resolved. They both were such courageous and brilliant leaders throughout the journey north and then had nothing useful to do after.  Dull Knife settled on the Tongue River Reservation and died shortly after, “silent, sorrowful and embittered.” (271) Little Wolf got drunk and finally killed his nemesis, Thin Elk. He lived shunned by his people for another 25 years and died in 1904, “the humblest of a reservation people.” (272) He was buried on a hill by his few remaining followers.

I found myself attempting to decide where exactly many of the events in the book took place in relation to present day places that I know, especially the part where Little Wolf’s band was hiding in the Sandhills. The description seemed very familiar. I also wondered about the connection between characters in the book and people I’m acquainted with or heard stories about. I know of a Thin Elk family on the Rosebud Reservation and wonder if the soldier White Hat Clark is family to the White Hats at St. Francis.

**Jacqueline Weise**

               I enjoyed reading Cheyenne Autumn. I am not a history buff by any means but I do enjoy reading stories based on true events. The only part of history that interests me is American history, so Cheyenne Autumn did appeal to me being based on the true account of the Cheyenne’s journey. I think living in Nebraska for most of my life made the account of the Cheyenne’s journey relatable to me. I was very confused in the beginning with so many different names but I felt that by reading the book quickly it helped me to keep track of who was who in the story.

   When I first started the book, I was amazed by the amount of facts Sandoz included. I was also disappointed to learn in one of the lessons that some of Sandoz’s facts have not been proven. Despite this, Sandoz’s ability to mix fact with fiction made the story interesting for me. I have not read any other books by her and it would be interesting to explore her other books. Her inclusion of facts made the story a learning event for me as well. Her ability to mix in fiction made it easier for me to relate to the characters.

In my opinion the novel is well written. Instead of writing from one point of view, she includes perspectives of both the Cheyenne’s and the soldiers. I felt she focused mostly on the perspective of the Indians but the soldiers’ side of the events was already well known. I was very surprised to learn people like Chase and Dr. Moseley interacted with the Cheyenne’s in the manner they did. Chase and Dr. Moseley did seem to have some respect for the Indians, as well as a few other whites Americans. I am not sure if this was respect they held for the Indians or rather an overall respect for the humanity of mankind. To me the most shocking part of her writing is the lack of dignity and respect the Soldiers had for mankind.

I did feel many of the issues we have already explored in class were present in this novel. One of Sandoz’s main themes was identity and the book centered on the Cheyenne’s struggle for survival of their culture. The Cheyenne’s tried very persistently throughout their journey to maintain their identity. The story began because of their resistance to assimilating to the white American way. The Cheyennes furtherer resisted assimilating, even when no other option was left but to surrender, by committing suicide/homicide. For instance Sandoz writes “a  woman stabbed a child and then herself, and then more singing, all the others joining in now-the thin, high death chant of the Cheyennes” (236).

Note the inclusion in the above quote regarding the death chant. Language is also a focus of Cheyenne Autumn. The oral traditions of the Cheyenne were noted many times throughout the book, specifically the death chant sung by many. The language barrier between the Indians and Americans made their journey all the more difficult. Sandoz also includes many of the important cultural elements to the Cheyenne’s. Sandoz includes accounts of the courting and marriage relationships among the Cheyenne’s. For example, she focuses on courting and the relations between Spotted Deer and Yellow Bead. She also notes the account of Limpy’s marriage.

Sandoz’s inclusion of the Cheyenne’s cultural and social practices is another reason I found Cheyenne Autumn interesting. Once again I know relatively nothing of Native American life and I enjoy learning about other cultures. One example of the Cheyenne cultural practices evident in the novel is the Sacred Arrows. Dull Knife recalls the one instruction left by Sweet Medicine about the sacred arrows: “The last woman among you must carry the Sacred Arrows to a high hill and lay them down for the time when people shall return to the earth” (247). Her detailed accounts of how the Cheyenne’s organize their tribe for warfare were fascinating.

While I enjoyed her novel and it presented a lot of knowledge for me, it’s hard to say I really enjoyed it. The total lack of both respect for man and dignity regarding man’s self-worth is particularly evident by the actions of the soldiers and many white Americans. For example the white man’s claim of “God, these people die hard.” Cheyenne Autumn does reveal some fairly horrific scenes in regards to how the Cheyenne’s were treated, especially at Fort Robinson and during the massacre. It was also difficult to read of the mistreatment of women and children. While her book is good and it gave me a good idea of what the journey was like for the Cheyenne’s, I do not believe any piece of literature can actually convey the despair and loss the Cheyenne’s felt. However, the fact that some of the living  Cheyennes, following the massacre, took their own life indicates that there was nothing left for them to live for.

**Jacob Smiley**

I enjoyed the story Mari Sandoz told with “Cheyenne Autumn”. It was unbelievably sad and made me view the land I was from a little differently. I think one of the most intriguing points in the novel was the chapter “This Remnant”. Even though it was a short chapter after the escaped prisoners had all been brought back to Fort Robinson, it was chilling. It was depressing seeing all these great people who had once been great leaders reduced to prisoners and the leaders of a diminished group of destitute human beings. The government had given them no choice but to give up.

I think the characters are beautifully written. While reading, I felt like I was there for the decisions they made, for the hardships they witnessed, and for the happiness they felt. There were a few scenes from the novel that described the women as beaten down. I could see them, head slumped down over their shoulders, riding their horses unaware of what’s ahead and what’s behind; only continuing riding mattered. I felt like there were so many overwhelming emotions present that it was hard to remember that this happened. This actually happened to these people.

I grew up in the Sandhills. There were parts of the novel that could have happened very near here. The Niobrara river runs just North of here and White River north of that. I’ve driven through Fort Robinson many times. I never thought about the history here. Not any more than “Native Americans used to live here”. I never thought about any great sorrows or battles or anything like that could have happened here. Knowing this now, though, it makes me want to read more about where I’m from and what has happened here. This novel really made me consider the land around me and what transformations it has gone through, and what the land has seen in its time.

The only negative thing I have to say about this novel is the writing style. I loved the story. I loved the information, but sometimes I felt that the writing was a bit too long winded and historical. There were too many times when I would get lost in a sentence and have to reread it to understand what was being said. Characters’ names changed from one sentence to another as well. Sometimes it was Little Wolf, sometimes it was Wolf. This wasn’t particularly confusing, but sometimes when there were several characters with similar names, I would get a little bit confused on what was going on. It was the same issue with the generals. However, this is only a minor complaint, and I really enjoyed the novel overall.

**Amanda Qualley**

Cheyenne Autumn was honestly one of the toughest books I’ve ever had to make it through.  I’ve never been a tremendous fan of Mari Sandoz writing, actually I have never been able to force myself to finish one of her books before now; however she has been someone that I admire for her ability to capture the rich history of this area and convey the many perspectives of life on the Plains, including her very own.  I have looked up to her as an inspiration because she was a strong, intelligent woman that lived and wrote about many experiences that others did not at that time.  She tells a part of history that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

I feel like I should have heeded the warning in the Preface “To convey something of these deep, complex and patterned interrelationships which I myself sense only imperfectly, I have tried to keep to the simplest vocabulary, to something of the rhythm, the idiom, and the figures of Cheyenne life, to phrases and sentences that have flow and continuality,” and allowed myself more time to read this book, however our time schedule also interferes with those decisions as well.  I found myself re-reading lines and paragraphs two or three times and even sometimes flipping back to previous pages trying to comprehend what was happening or who was who and played what role.  I did like that Sandoz connected family members together throughout the story, it made it easier as I read on to keep all of the variations of names straight.

I think that this was also in part to share how important family relations are to the Cheyenne, in addition to or as part of the preservation of their culture.  This came up many times throughout the narrative and was something that I did enjoy about it; also these are things that have come up throughout this course to this point.  Language barriers and misunderstands of each other’s cultures and lifestyles that led to mass destruction, connection to the spirit world, oral traditions, importance of ceremonies, assimilation and acculturation of Native peoples, I think are all important topics also addressed by Sandoz in this novel, and well before the time that many of these things were being addressed or recognized by others.

Growing up in “Indian Territory,” I’ve always been intrigued by the history of the land that I’ve made so many of my own travels across.  From the Sandhills stretching across the Great Plains to the Black Hills, some landmarks History has recorded, other times I can’t help but wonder of exact locations of various events, where the land I stand on holds the secret truths of the past.   This is why I was previously a History major, with American Indian Studies/Museum Studies minors.  There is too much history all around me to not be recognized and I fully believe that it should be shared; the whole of it should be shared with those that care to know.  I think that Mari Sandoz excels is this.  She includes the perspectives of soldiers of varying beliefs, hunters, the media, as well as the Cheyenne, even using direct quotes that show the obvious language differences that led to many misunderstandings and ultimately the death of too many innocent people.

Overall, I think this book conveys history very well, from my previous knowledge of the area and happenings during the time period, but I would not try to read it again.  Maybe the help of a study guide will help others grasp some of the concepts I feel like maybe I missed in trying to comprehend the writing.