

When I Crossed No-Bob

by Margaret McMullan

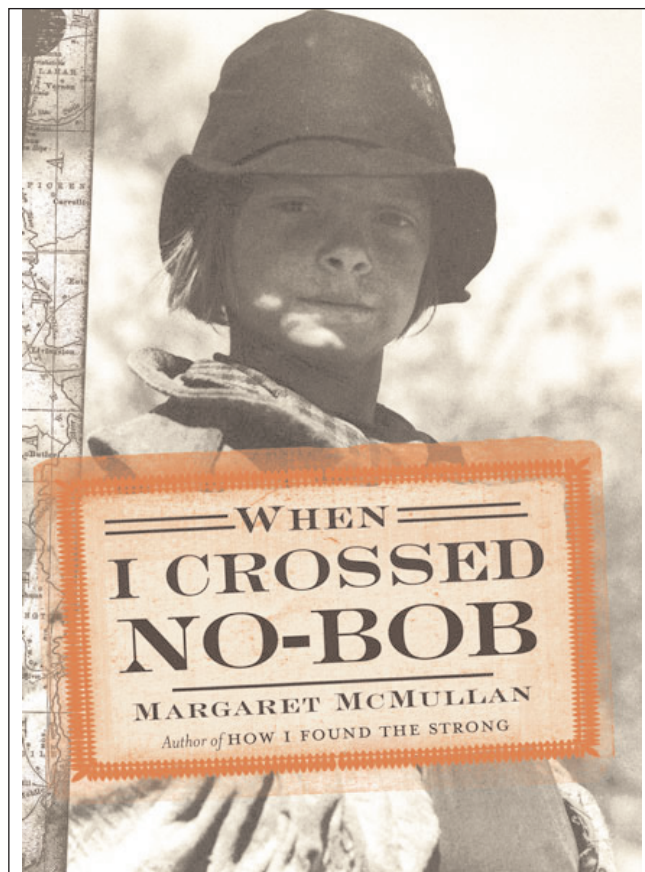
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About the Book

Life as an O'Donnell is all twelve-year-old Addy knows, and life as an O'Donnell means trouble. Tucked away in a gray patch of woods called No-Bob, the O'Donnell clan has nothing but a bad reputation. So when Addy's mama abandons her on the afternoon of Mr. Frank Russell's wedding celebration, nobody is very surprised. A reluctant Mr. Frank and his new wife take Addy in, and Addy does everything she can to prove that at least one O'Donnell has promise. But one day, Addy witnesses a terrible event that brings her old world crashing into the new. As she finds herself being pulled back into No-Bob and the grips of her O'Donnell kin, Addy is faced with the biggest decision of her life. Can she somehow find the courage to do what's right, even if it means betraying one of her own? decides, most people have a hard time figuring out which way is left or knowing when to let go and when to stay.



Discussion Questions

1. By having Addy O'Donnell narrate the novel, the author provides a very personal portrait of Southern life after the Civil War. Consider some of Addy's observations and what they say about the time period. You may start by discussing her observations of men wounded in battle and their broken spirits; the clash between black and white—particularly the rise of the Ku Klux Klan; and the displacement of the local Native Americans. To further discussion, research the socio-economic and political circumstances in the South during Reconstruction.
2. Pick one adjective that describes the character of Addy (such as brave, strong, loyal, honest). Reflect on her heritage as an O'Donnell, her ability to adapt to life inside the Frank household, her time in the wilderness, and the various other hardships she endures. Share your adjective, using specific examples from the story to support your choice.
3. Discuss the setting of No-Bob and its inhabitants. Read again how No-Bob came into being. There is a sense of pride among the O'Donnells despite their gloomy surroundings, extreme poverty, and violent tendencies. What is the root of their pride, and how has it affected Addy? What are the implications—specifically for the O'Donnells—of being white and impoverished?
4. In the early pages of the novel, Addy and her mother attend a wedding uninvited. Here readers get their first glimpse into Addy's social situation within Smith County. Her brown dress is set in direct contrast to the white bridal gown. What other details offer clues about Addy's social situation? Discuss how this scene lays the groundwork for other events in the story.
5. Addy's mother abandons her at the wedding of Mr. Frank and Irene. Her father is already gone. Examine Addy's relationship with her parents. She maintains affection for them despite their neglect and abuse. Discuss Addy's loyalty and how her view of her parents shifts throughout the narrative. Be sure to mention her father's return and her mother's absence. At the end of the novel Addy reflects, "My momma and pappy are no longer the center of my life. I have other things to consider." What does she mean?

6. Fighting and conflict play a central role in the novel. A war has left the Confederate states divided. Early on Addy fights with Little Bit in the river, soiling their wedding attire. And Mr. Frank and Garner O'Donnell eventually resolve a long-standing quarrel over land. In the last part of the novel Mr. Frank's mother says, "Haven't we all had enough fighting and destruction for a lifetime? I for one don't need to sit around and remember it." Later, Mr. Tempy remarks, "Fighting's mostly about land, money, and women." Examine these and other examples of conflict throughout the novel. Are resolutions reached? What is left unresolved?

7. Discuss Addy and Little Bit's friendship with Jess Still. Their time playing together is perhaps the best representation of childhood innocence in the book. Consider the three children, their backgrounds, and how their experience of childhood differs from that of children today. How does the fire in the church signify their loss of innocence and the impossible circumstances of the time? Discuss the tragedy of Jess's death and the events that follow. How does this loss affect Addy?

8. Addy and Little Bit draw elaborate maps so they can navigate the woods. When Jess dies, they draw the events on their map as a way to remember the horror of what they saw. Discuss this scene and what it reveals about these characters. Why do they immediately bury the map? Do you think this process helps them grieve? What is the significance of Little Bit's giving the map to Addy in the courtroom?

9. Throughout the narrative, Addy ponders the idea of love in a religious and romantic sense. Early in the story, while staying with Mr. Frank and Irene, Addy imagines, "Being in love must feel like sitting on a log with someone special, someone a little like yourself." What does she mean? Think about other places where love is mentioned throughout the novel. Addy describes her parents' love as "fierce" while Mr. Frank and Irene's love seems pure and idyllic. Examine this contrast and the different examples they set for Addy. What does Addy discover about love?

10. Discuss Addy's testimony against her father. What are the implications of telling the truth? Before testifying, Addy thinks, "Truth should be easier than it is. I recall that poem by Mr. John Keats. The one I told Zula. Truth is beauty and beauty is truth and that's all you need to know. That is powerful troublesome. For I have seen some of the ugliest truth and it was not beautiful." What truths is Addy referring to? To explore this reference further, read "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats. Addy first recites a portion of the poem for Zula before she leaves the woods and goes to court. The poem observes a scene preserved for eternity on an urn. How does this reference resonate with Addy's situation and struggle with the truth? How is it different? Think about the past, present, and future—both in the poem and for Addy.

11. Although set at a different moment in history, *When I Crossed No-Bob* brings to mind other scenes of classic literature. The racial divide within a small Southern community and the courtroom scenes are reminiscent of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. The last line, "Maybe I will just find me a river and follow it to its source," alludes to the adventures in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Do you see any parallels between Addy and Scout or Huck? Discuss the significance of *When I Crossed No-Bob* as a Southern novel.

Praise

"The simple prose can be pure poetry." —Booklist

* "McMullan again proves herself to be a superb prose stylist, creating a haunting portrait..." —Kirkus, starred review

* "This will make a fine addition to libraries seeking to expand their historical fiction offerings." —*School Library Journal*, starred review

"[A] deeply philosophical, first-person account of life...uplifting and heartbreaking as the same time." —Bookpage