



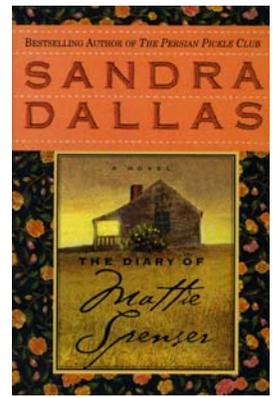
The Diary of Mattie Spencer

By Sandra Dallas

St. Martin's Griffin

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About the Book:

No one is more surprised than Mattie Spencer herself when Luke Spencer, considered the great catch of their small Iowa town, asks her to marry him. Less than a month later, they are off in a covered wagon to build a home on the Colorado frontier. Mattie's only company is a slightly mysterious husband and her private journal, where she records the joys and frustrations not just of frontier life, but also of a new marriage to a handsome but distant stranger. As she and Luke make life together on the harsh and beautiful plains, Mattie learns some bitter truths about her husband and the girl he left behind and finds love where she least expects it. Dramatic and suspenseful, this is an unforgettable story of hardship, friendship and survival.

Reading Group Guide Questions:

1. Mattie bears her troubles in silence, talking primarily to her journal and sometimes to other women. But the men of Colorado Territory have even fewer socially approved ways to ask for understanding. Do you think this makes their lives more difficult?
2. How does Mattie's attitude toward Indians change through the book? Why do you think Mr. Bondurant marries Kittie? Do you think this marriage, with all its language barriers, is more or less intimate than the other marriages in the book?
3. What challenges does Mattie face in trying to be both a lady and a pioneer? How successful is she in managing both roles?
4. In Colorado Territory, the men are often brutal toward women in obvious ways--they beat, rape, and wear their wives out with too many children too fast. How do the women respond to this brutality?
5. The Osterwalds are the most brutal of the men within Mattie's community, yet their treatment of Mrs. Osterwald goes ignored until they actually kill her. Discuss the fact that some men are more upset about the way the Osterwalds treat their livestock than their woman.
6. Mattie's best friends--Tom Early and Mr. Bondurant--are men. What in Mathe's situation allows her to relate more easily to men than to other frontier women?
7. Do you think Mattie should have gone with Tom Early? Do you think flaunting her breakage of society's rules would have freed her or made her more bitter?
8. Is Mathe's decision to marry Luke and leave Fort Madison a good one? If she had remained and married Abner would she have led a happier life?