

Discussion Questions for *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara

(Some questions taken or adapted from <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/killerangels/study.html> and <http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmKiller79.asp>. Page references are to the original hardback.)

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Which of the narrators did you like the most?
3. Did this book alter your opinion of Robert E. Lee?
4. One of the major conflicts in the novel is the disagreement between Lee and Longstreet on how they should fight the battle. What does each man think the army should do? Should Longstreet have acted differently?
5. The main characters on the Confederate side are all generals: Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, George Pickett, and Lew Armistead. But the main character on the Union side is a colonel, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Why would the author choose to use Chamberlain instead of the Union generals?
6. Does Shaara sympathize more with the realist Longstreet or the idealist Lee?
7. What qualities made Lawrence Chamberlain a successful leader?
8. Why do you think the Confederate army lost the Battle of Gettysburg?
9. Author Shaara changes some of the historical facts about the battle—for instance, he puts Chamberlain in the middle of the Union line during Pickett's Charge, when in fact Chamberlain was more than a mile south. Why do you think Shaara does this? Do you think it is good or bad to change the facts in a historical novel?
10. What did you think about the various viewpoints expressed about the cause of the Civil War?
11. Was Fremantle (the Englishman) an effective character?
12. What is the purpose of Shaara's detailing the Armistead-Hancock friendship?
13. What about the relationship between the two Chamberlain brothers? Shaara has Chamberlain think (p. 325-326):
Must think on the theology of that: plugging a hole in the line with a brother. Except for that, it would all have been fine. An almost perfect fight, but the memory of that is a jar, is wrong. Some things a man cannot be asked to do. Killing of brothers. This whole war is concerned with the killing of brothers. Not my family. ... Must send Tom somewhere else. In that moment, Chamberlain made up his mind: Tom would have to go.
14. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Shaara's switching point of views? Could this book have worked from a limited third person point of view? First person?
15. I found this passage particularly effective at putting me on the battlefield (p. 329-330):
[Chamberlain] became aware for the first time of the incredible variety of sound. The great roar was composed of a thousand different rips and whispers, most incredible noise he had ever heard or imagined, like a great orchestra of death: the *whicker whicker* of certain shells, the weird thin scream of others, the truly frightful sound made by one strange species that came every few moments, an incredible keening, like old Death as a woman gone mad and a-hunting you, screaming, that would be the Whitworth, new English cannon the Rebs had. Then there were the sounds of the bursts, flat splats in the air, deeper bursts in ground, brutal smash and crack of shot into rock, shot splattering dirt and whining off, whispers of rock fragments and dirt fragments and small bits of metal and horse and man rippling the air, spraying the ground, humming the air, and the Union cannon braying away one after another, and an occasional scream, sometimes even joy, some of the cannoneers screaming with joy at hitting something as when they saw a caisson blow up across the way.

Are there passages or images that made an impact on you?

16. Are there questions you would like to ask?