



Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions for *The Broken Statue*

Synopsis

A limestone statue of a striking young woman is buried and lost for thirty years. The statue, broken into a hundred pieces, is uncovered from a remote location – a broken statue representing shattered lives and shattered dreams.

This intriguing story captures the wild risk taking, broken lives, and lavish lifestyles of the gilded age of the early oil industry. The story is based on the real-life legacy of oil-baron E.W. Marland, who made and lost a fortune in the oil fields of northern Oklahoma. Marland became notorious when he married his adopted daughter, Lydie. Later he became a United States Congressman and 10th governor of Oklahoma. *The Broken Statue* reveals the determination, grit, successes, and frustrations of E.W. Marland and the tragic challenges he left for his young widow.

Discussion Questions

1. What main themes emerge in *The Broken Statue*?
2. What perspective does the author use in *The Broken Statue* and why do you think he chose this voice?
3. According to the fictional narrative of *The Broken Statue*, what factors contribute to Lydie's paranoia toward the end of the story?
4. On Page 77, 135, 160, and 229 a natural phenomenon occurs to foreshadow dramatic events in the plot. What occurs and why do you think the author used it?
5. On Page 191, Lydie and Charlie interrupt a poker game to warn E.W. Marland about the activities of Randle Haman. This is a vague reference to what Biblical story?
6. On page 170, E.W. Marland has a conversation with Charlie. What is the significance of Marland's perspective of the party?
7. What factors does the author attribute to Marland's demise?
8. On page 139, Walt Johnson dies. What is the symbolism of the time and date?
9. On page 49, Charlie McDonagh and Walt Johnson encounter E.W. Marland in the country. Marland looks at Walt Johnson while explaining that he is borrowing Daniel Craigan's car. What is the significance of this event?
10. What 19th century authors and philosophers does Walt Johnson read in his self-education?

Discussion Questions

The Broken Statue

Author Responses in italics

1. What main themes emerge in *The Broken Statue*?
Everyone sees the theme differently, but I hope people take away from the story:
 - *The importance of balancing contentment with desire (Page 266 third paragraph)*
 - *The broken statue represents opportunities and opportunities lost (Page 7)*
 - *The importance of perspective and seeing the current reality (Page 170 and other instances)*
 - *The importance of balancing driving force with controlling force (Page 180).*
2. What perspective does the author use in *The Broken Statue* and why do you think he chose this voice?
The story is told from the first person perspective of a fictional narrator, Charlie McDonagh who is a friend of Lydie Marland. Using an outside perspective let me tell the story and describe events without assuming the motives or psychology of E.W. or Lydie Marland.
3. According to the fictional narrative of *The Broken Statue*, what factors contribute to Lydie's paranoia toward the end of the story?
The radical economic extremes she was exposed to and the isolation with which George and E.W. subjected her became contributing factors to her state of mind in the story. In real life, Lydie possibly had some form of psychosis or schizophrenia.
4. On Page 77, 135, 160, and 229 a natural phenomenon occurs to foreshadow dramatic events in the plot. What occurs and why do you think the author used it?
Several times the magnificent and terrifying Oklahoma thunderstorms are used to signal life changing events are about to occur. To me, the storms symbolized the uncertainty of the upcoming situation and the inherent dangers of the early oil era.
5. On Page 191, Lydie and Charlie interrupt a poker game to warn E.W. Marland about the activities of Randle Haman. This is a vague reference to what Biblical story?
The story of Esther in the Old Testament is the inspiration for this scene. The villain in the book of Esther is also named Haman. The Esther's story is one of my favorite dramas.
6. On page 170, E.W. Marland has a conversation with Charlie. What is the significance of Marland's perspective of the party?

By being away from the dance floor, Marland is able to better see all that is going on. Ironically in the story, his inability to create a vision of the current reality contributed to his losing Marland Oil.

7. What factors does the author attribute to Marland's demise?
Marland's failure to see the current reality and the loss of controlling force to temper his ambition when Virginia Marland and George Miller die.
8. On page 139, Walt Johnson dies. What is the symbolism of the time and date?
April 19 at 9:01am is when the Murrah Building was bombed in Oklahoma City. Since Walt Johnson became my symbol of rugged Oklahoma individualism taken away, I thought the correlation an appropriate way to remember the tragedy of the bombing.
9. On page 49, Charlie McDonagh and Walt Johnson encounter E.W. Marland in the country. Marland looks at Walt Johnson while explaining that he is borrowing Daniel Craigan's car. What is the significance of this event?
Although never explicitly stated, Walt's mother is a woman of dubious repute (a prostitute) and the insinuation is that Craigan was spending time with Walt's mother.
10. What 19th century authors and philosophers does Walt Johnson read in his self education?
Walt Johnson reads Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Allen. The character of Walt Johnson is somewhat based on the ideas of self-reliance and responsibility these two authors promoted.

Trivia about *The Broken Statue*

- On page 19, the quote “Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another,” is from Solomon’s *Proverbs*.
- The “Cherokee Kid” on page 22 the men are discussing would have been Will Rogers, frequent visitor to the 101 Ranch, and later a personal friend of Marland’s.
- The discussion on page 23 about the Native American heritage of Charlie’s mother would have been common during this time. Many native people struggled in that era to assimilate with the white culture without losing some of their native roots.
- On page 25, the character Walt Johnson is introduced. Originally intended to be a minor character to provide dialogue opportunities for Charlie, Walt became a popular character. As the story evolved, Walt transformed into one of the main characters. To me, Walt Johnson is the personification of an Oklahoman. He did not have a strong family heritage or pedigree, but he has an almost inextinguishable believe in himself that makes him a natural leader and very likable. As the character and story matured, I used Walt Johnson to bring out some traits I thought a young E.W. Marland might have had. Many of my younger readers not familiar with the Marland story were disappointed when I let Walt die in the book. I thought that tragedy reflected the danger and heartbreak many workers in the oil fields have endured. His early death also helps immortalize him as a heroic character. You can probably tell Walt became one of my favorite characters and I actually brought him back for a “cameo” in my next novel entitled *Mimosa Lane*. I always visualized a young Brad Pitt for Walt Johnson’s character. Brad Pitt was born in my hometown of Shawnee and I always felt the actor had a natural, Oklahoma handsomeness to him.
- The train station figures prominently in the story as the setting for many of the plot elements. I’ll have to admit, I was thinking more about the Santa Fe Depot train station in Shawnee than I was about the train station in Ponca City, but these transportation hubs did serve as “the gateway to the world.”
- On page 29, I describe Virginia Marland’s practicality as the perfect balance to E.W. Marland’s ambition. I could find very little about Virginia Marland’s personality, but she seemed to be very well respected. In my first book, a non-fiction book entitled *Dynamic Thinking: Models for Organizational Leadership*, I write about the importance of balancing driving forces with controlling forces. I always thought of this interpersonal dynamic when writing about the Marlands.
- In Chapter 6, Walt Johnson and Charlie McDonagh try chewing tobacco for the first time with less than positive results. This story is based on a tale I’ve heard

- On page 43, an Indian man confronts the gang of boys by telling them not to whistle because it will bring evil spirits. This part of the story does represent an event that actually happened to me when an Indian man told me whistling in the dark was bad luck. The gang of boys is a compilation of people I knew growing up as well as characters my parents and grandparents talked about. The names are meaningful to my family members. Floyd Wills is a combination of my two grandfathers, Floyd Perry and Lloyd Wills. The character nicknamed “Cricket” was my aunt’s nickname as a child. The character named “Perry McGee” was actually named after my family’s furniture store in Shawnee called Perry & McGee Furniture Company. The story of the boys setting the field on fire was inspired by a couple of my daughter’s friends that started a fire in a field while playing with fireworks.
- Red Bud Creek is actually a drainage creek that runs through the center of my hometown of Shawnee. I used Red Bud Creek Bridge, the train station, and the gardens at the Grand Mansion so much that I always thought this story might make a good stage play.
- I don’t know if there was ever a Sacred Heart Cemetery in Kay County, but there is such a place in Pottawatomie County where kids would go to get scared and cuddle.
- In chapter 17, Walt Johnson’s dismal living quarters are described as being in the Norwood Hotel. To the best of my knowledge there never was a Norwood Hotel in Ponca City, but the Norwood Hotel and store called Sunshine Market were old buildings still standing from that era in my hometown of Shawnee.
- The letter from Walt Johnson was a compilation of actual letters I read from soldiers serving in the trenches of World War I. Not every editor liked this letter, but I thought it described the horrors of that conflict well. One of my grandfathers fought in France during The Great War and he did not like to talk about it.
- In my opinion, two of the more dramatic scenes in this story happen close to each other, when Walt confronts E.W. Marland on the steps of the Grand Mansion and two chapters later when Lydie drops her glass of tea on the marble floor in the sunroom. My “research” for writing this fictional story consisted primarily of taking the Marland Mansion tours, news clippings from a newspaper in Bliss, Oklahoma, and from simply looking at pictures. I had never been to the Grand

Mansion until after the book was published. It was a haunting experience to stand in the places I had described, but I was grateful to find they looked almost exactly as I had imagined.

- Leroy Finchem on page 137 was a long time sheriff in Pottawatomie County and a friend of my grandfather.
- On page 157, I introduce two characters named Tim Wilson and Ron McKeever. They represent the next generation of “the gang” and I liked the continuity of how some things do not change much from generation to generation. These two characters are named after two of my best friends from college, Ron Wilson and Tim McKeever.
- I am not a lawyer, but I decided to make my character Charlie an attorney. I’m unusual because I actually like attorneys and feel they have the very difficult job of helping people discern opinion from truth. On page 157, I added a couple of paragraphs that subtly state my feelings about the nature of conflict and the importance of seeing the current reality.
- Kelly’s sandwich shop and “the Pargen Burger,” describes a café located around the corner from my family’s furniture business. I can barely remember it, but it would have certainly dated to this era. Surprisingly, I have had several people from Ponca City tell me they think they remember the place although I did not use the right name. As I have gone to places talking about this story, I am beginning to believe all small towns have much in common.
- In pages 195-198, I incorporated several chapters from an earlier draft I had started and abandoned. I originally tried to tell this story beginning with E.W. Marland in college in Michigan with Randle Haman as his roommate. I liked the chapters, but was having a hard time telling the story I wanted to tell. When I decided to write the story from the perspective of Charlie instead of the Marlands, the story started to come together for me. I had almost forgotten about the earlier chapters, but salvaged some of the ideas for this dialogue between E.W. and Charlie.
- On page 222, some of Lydie’s quirky behavior is described. I always enjoy talking to readers who pick up on small details of the story and I am often impressed by their insightfulness. I had originally planned to have a chapter or two with Charlie following Lydie back to her old neighborhood in Flourtown. I was fascinated by the fact Lydie had grown-up in humble circumstances, became the wife of a millionaire, and then became almost destitute. I thought an insight into her background might be interesting. I abandoned the idea of these chapters, because I feared the manuscript was getting too long and I was not sure it would add to the story. I have had at least one reader come to me and ask what Lydie did on her trip to Philadelphia and noticed that there was more story there.

- Chapter 52 (when Charlie meets an aging Daniel Craigan) was an interesting chapter for me. From the beginning of writing this story I struggled with how I felt about E.W. Marland. It was easy to portray him as a bit of a scoundrel that would do anything to get ahead. As I learned more about him, I felt he was a flawed and conflicted character, but I became a big fan of E.W. Marland during the process. I believed he truly loved Oklahoma and Ponca City. He could have left the state many times, but he chose to stay and to serve. I felt I needed some conflict to add interest to the later part of this story and the idea that E.W. had plotted for years to have Lydie as his wife was intriguing. Hinting that he was somehow involved in Walt's death I think summarized some of the feelings people have about his relationship with Lydie. I did not know exactly what I would do with this conflict until late in the writing process, but I like the fact that the hero E.W. Marland and the villain Daniel Craigan were both flawed. Craigan, as a villain, turned out to be more pathetic than dangerous. I think showing this character as a broken, old man was perhaps the best way to portray him.
- On page 242, I describe a meeting between Lydie and Charlie at the Skirvan Hotel's Venetian Room. I needed some dialogue between the two characters while Lydie was in Oklahoma City to tie up loose ends to the story, and I chose the Skirvan Hotel as a historical location. At the time of the writing, I did not know the hotel was being renovated. My description came from pictures and newspaper clippings. A friend of mine was working at the Skirvan Hotel during its remodeling and took me on a hardhat tour of the facility, including the Venetian Room. They have done a remarkable job of restoration and going into the Venetian Room is like stepping back in time.
- On page 245, I make a comment about Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Probably not a good idea for an unheralded author to criticize a Pulitzer Prize winner, but I never much like his stereotype of my ancestors of the era and there is some evidence E.W. Marland did not like the portrayal either. I'm an Oklahoman and entitled to my opinion.
- The conversation between E.W. Marland and Charlie in chapter 55 was almost an afterthought, but this turned out to be one of my favorite parts of the story. It allowed me to describe E.W. Marland in a positive way and I thought it showed the unique relationship between E.W. and Lydie.