



Discussion Questions: ***Killer Angels*** by Michael Shaara

1. Consider themes and motifs:

Good versus evil:

Does Shaara think this a black or white issue? What instances in the novel show his beliefs? Are there any villains in his story?

Man against himself, the environment, or his opponent:

Are circumstances in the novel really the “evil?” Consider the war, differences of opinions between men, the physical conditions, miscommunications. How do each of these affect the outcome of the battle?

How a small thing (lack of shoes) starts an enormous event:

What events actually lead to the battle at Gettysburg? Was the location of the battle planned for on either side?

2. Another theme might be how man responds to challenges. How does Grant respond? Longstreet? Buford? Chamberlain? What characteristics do these men have in common? Why does each man fight the battle?
3. Some might argue that Killer Angels is an anti-war novel. Do you agree? Disagree? Use examples from the book that support your opinion.
4. Shaara used personal letters and diaries of the combatants, rather than history books to develop the characters in this novel. How does he use this material to make the men more “real” to the reader?
5. Why does Shaara name his book Killer Angels? The title comes from an incident in Chamberlain’s childhood. Do you think “what a piece of work is man...in action like an angel” or do you think, like Chamberlain’s father, that if man is an angel then he is a murdering one. What do you think Shaara’s belief is?