

Choke Creek is based on the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864. The National Park Service and the Arapaho Project offer good introductions to the history of Sand Creek:

<http://www.nps.gov/sand/>
<http://www.colorado.edu/csilw/sandcreek.htm>

1. What are the differences between the Sand Creek Massacre and the massacre depicted in *Choke Creek*? Why do you think the author of *Choke Creek* chose to make these changes? What does this tell you about the way writers adapt history for their novels?
2. What role did *The Rocky Mountain Sun* play in covering up the Choke Creek massacre? Do you think Asa Glauber was justified in hiding the truth?
3. Eason's father and great-grandfather were soldiers. How does the military tradition of his family affect the choices he makes?
4. How did Cyrus Swale's own wartime experiences influence the expectations he had for his son?
5. Eason and his fellow soldiers call Vietnam "Indian Country?" Why do you think they do this? How does the legacy of the Indian Wars influence their conduct as soldiers?
6. *Choke Creek* tells the coming of age story of a teen-aged girl. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that her mother has abandoned the family for mysterious reasons. How does the loss of her mother affect Evie's identity?
7. As a single parent, Jase Glauber struggles to make the right decisions concerning his daughter. Do you think he succeeds?
8. What role does the ghost play in this novel? Do you think it was a real phenomenon or a manifestation of mental illness?
9. The story is told from the points of view of five different characters: Evie, Eason, Jase, Cyrus, and Agatha. Why do you think the author chose to use so many points of view? What is the result?
10. At the end of the novel, Evie reflects, "History, she knew now, was nothing like the dry, dead topic she'd come to dread in school. It was vibrant, colorful, alive. The past was like a prism, full of glowing facets of light, each one a story, illuminating another angle. Only by listening to them all could she begin to approach the truth." Do you agree? Why or why not?
11. The novel begins with an epitaph by Elliott West: "A place is what it is, partly, because of the deep strata of stories that are still being laid down, and will continue to be,

presumably forever." Can you think of other instances in which stories arise from particular places?

Part Three: Projects for further research

1. Research the history of your own area. What were the names of the Indian tribes that originally inhabited your part of the country? What happened to them? Where are they now?
2. Research another Indian massacre. How does it compare to Sand Creek?
3. Compare the massacre of the Vietnamese villagers in *Choke Creek* to the massacre at My Lai. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Lai)
4. In 2005 there was a massacre in Iraq at Haditha. Soldiers today refer to Iraq as "Indian Country." Discuss the ongoing legacy of the Indian Wars. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haditha_killings)

Part Four: Creative Projects

1. Create a newspaper reporting on the incident at Choke Creek. Include battle reports from Stevenson and the soldiers as well as commentary by the editor.
2. Hold a debate in class between two soldiers who fought at Choke Creek. One soldier defends the battle, the other claims it is unjustified.
3. Write a story from the point of view of a Cheyenne or Arapaho Indian who survived the massacre.