

The Bridges of Madison County
Discussion Questions

1. *The Bridges of Madison County* is both an epistolary—a novel written as a series of documents like letters, diary entries, and newspaper clippings—and a frame story—a narrative that frames or surrounds another story or set of stories. What do you think this adds to the novel? Why did the author choose to tell the story this way?
2. What do you think about the unnamed narrator's claim in "The Beginning" chapter that "In spite of the investigative effort, gaps remain. I have added a little of my own imagination in those instances, but only when I could make reasoned judgements flowing from the intimate familiarity with Francesca Johnson and Robert Kincaid I gained through my research. I am confident that I have come very close to what actually happened." Does this affect the credibility of the story in your opinion?
3. The novel seems to revolve around a magical moment and describes Robert Kincaid as having a magical and even ghost like quality about him. Have you had a magical moment or known someone you would consider magical? A moment that, whatever it was, you can take yourself back to and relive time and again?
4. Robert Kincaid says the why is not important, "Analysis destroys wholes. Some things, magic things, are meant to stay whole. If you look at the pieces, they go away." Is this true? What about the things that can be discovered when you read between the lines?
5. Francesca tells Robert that she is supposed to tell him that Iowa is "Just fine. It's quiet. The people are real nice." Do you have a standard reply to this type of question? Who can you be honest with and what would you tell them?
6. Why do you think the name of Robert Kincaid's truck, Harry, comes up so often throughout the novel? And why did he name his dog highway?
7. Robert Kincaid called himself the last of the cowboys and a peregrine (which Francesca elaborates on in her note), but he is called a hippie by others and a leopard by Francesca. Which of these is most accurate in your opinion?
8. What do you think about Robert's ideas concerning the environment, male hormones, capitalism, and safety? What was the purpose in these monologues?
9. Have you read "The Song of Aengus" by William Butler Yeats? Why was this poem alluded to? Are there any common elements between the poem and novel?
10. What do you think about the sentiments relating to female expectations on page 95, "The women's magazines talked about these matters. And women were starting to have expectations about their allotted place in the gender scheme of things, as well as what transpired in the bedrooms of their lives. Men such as Richard—most men, she guessed—were threatened by these expectations."
11. What is Dimension Z? What did you make of the manuscript?
12. Do you agree with Francesca's decision to share her story with her children?
13. Would you have shared Robert and Francesca's love affair as Michael and Carolyn did?
14. Does this book have a happy ending?