

Reading Group Guide

Monument Road a debut novel by Charlie Quimby

INTRODUCTION

"In prose that might have been chiseled from the magnificent landscape he describes, Charlie Quimby has written a great big American Novel. Full of pathos and humor and sadness, you won't reach the end of this book without feeling fuller and wiser."

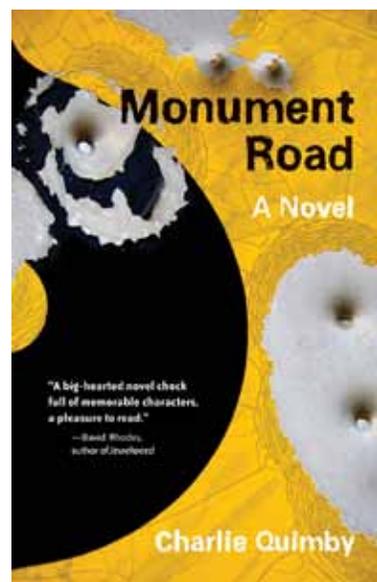
— **PETER GEYE**, author of *The Lighthouse Road*

"*Monument Road* is so rich with landscape, character and event that such a small telling cannot begin to do it justice. Read this exquisite story; it is a joy and a wonder and a *tour de force* of authorship."

— **SHELF AWARENESS**

"What a gorgeous novel this is – the kind that seems straightforward yet reverberates with layers of meaning. Scenes unfold as if a sudden guest appears at the door then later one discovers every guest has a purpose. The landscape of *Monument Road* is both beautiful and fraught with danger; so too are the risks one must take in a journey towards what has heart and meaning."

— **SHERYL COTLEUR**, Copperfield's Books, Sebastopol, CA



Leonard Self has spent the last year paying down debts, unwinding from his marginal ranch and fending off *the darkening*, a dangerous depression which wrought tragedy on his family in the past. Just one obligation left: taking his wife Inetta's ashes to her favorite overlook, where he plans to step off the cliff with her.

On this final drive, his path intersects with the stories of those who once found solace, inspiration or escape on Monument Road—as well as very alive individuals who just aren't through with him. A puzzle-piecing neighbor. A former foster kid accused of child molestation. A high school girl in search of her inner Joan of Arc. A journalist who can still hit the notes of his former acapella group when the occasion calls. And Inetta herself, who, even from inside a jar by the passenger seat, seems to have a better grasp on the situation than Leonard. Their stories come together in Leonard's journey through the beautiful high desert of Western Colorado.

As night descends and complications mount, Leonard must decide whether his life is over after all. With humor, grace, and understated insight, this exceptional debut novel connects the precarious waypoints between loss and redemption.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. The landscape of the Colorado Plateau appears throughout the novel in a variety of guises—as a place that attracts all kinds with promises of inspiration, enrichment, isolation and scientific as well as religious truth. How does the physical setting both shape and reveal the characters?
2. When describing the Grand Valley, Leonard reflects that “where you think you are depends on where you look.” How does this observation also play out in his life?
3. The relationship of Leonard and Inetta Self is only lightly sketched. How does the author reveal the nature of their marriage? How much do you think Inetta knew about what would occur after her death, and what hand did she have in the outcomes?
4. *Monument Road* presents many instances when characters deal with ambiguity or misunderstanding. Identify some examples and explore what they mean to you about the nature of truth and certainty.
5. Helen is both skeptical and hungry as she explores religious beliefs. Inetta and Neulan seem to have their minds made up. Other characters seem antagonistic toward religion. Did these varying views of religion and faith affect your opinion of any characters? Why do you think the author, who is not religious, devoted so much of the book to questions of faith and belief?
6. The main storyline in *Monument Road* follows Leonard Self’s eventual redemption—but there are a number of instances when characters try to save someone and are not always successful. Drawing from examples within the novel, what are your thoughts about one’s responsibility for the welfare of others?
7. The author’s father took his own life. The possibility of suicide shadows several of the characters. Based on the book, what do think the author would say to people who have suffered the suicide of a loved one?
8. Were there moments in the novel that made you laugh or cry? Describe a favorite scene or line that touched you.
9. Who was your favorite character? Describe a scene in which they became real for you.
10. At what point in the book did you know what Leonard’s final decision would be? How did you know?

MORE PRAISE FOR *Monument Road*

“Part modern western, part mystery, this first novel will appeal to fans of Louise Erdrich and Kent Haruf. Quimby’s prose reads so true, it breaks the heart.”

— **BOOKLIST**, starred review

“The Colorado setting and the author’s simple style of prose perfectly complement the complexity of the human spirit in this superb debut.”

— **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

“Quimby’s storytelling, his humane impulses and his lyrical passages on the meaning of love and time, and on the history, geology and botany of the region, will surely impress readers.”

— **MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE**

"Quimby uses words as spare as Colorado's landscape to describe characters who range from endearing to crusty, wise to foolish, spiritual to downright evil. The folks who live near Monument Road aren't just descriptions in a book; they're complex people readers will care about."

— **FOREWORD REVIEWS**

"Not to be overlooked is the love, humor and friendship among pain and loss, which makes it a book far more about the richness of life than the finality of death."

— **GRAND JUNCTION DAILY SENTINEL**

"*Monument Road* is a wonderful novel full of wit and wisdom, generosity and malice."

— **GRAND JUNCTION FREE PRESS**

"While not exactly a happy novel, *Monument Road* is beautiful and real, full of landscape imagery of the American Southwest as a poignant and sometimes haunting metaphor of our connections to the land."

— **15 BYTES**

"Quimby's writing is sensitive and graceful; he has a talent for revealing slowly blossoming characters who are beautifully flawed and realistic."

— **THE DESERET NEWS**

"This is a novel with size and scope and generosity, with an acute understanding of human nature and a deep appreciation for the ways people face change and work out their lives in relation to each other."

— **KENT MEYERS**, author of *Twisted Tree* and *The Work of Wolves*

"The landscape and characters ring true. Charlie Quimby has created a story that is hard to forget."

— **DAN O'BRIEN**, author of *Stolen Horses*

"*Monument Road* is a legitimate modern western...A pleasure to read."

— **BONNIE NADZAM**, author of *Lamb*

"...a rewarding climb into the hearts and souls of real people searching for peace and understanding in an unforgiving landscape. This novel is ambitious in scope and as sweeping as the broad skies of Western Colorado, but delivers on all fronts. Fans of Kent Haruf, Ron Carlson, or Wallace Stegner will find a lot to like."

— **MARK STEVENS**, author of *Buried by the Roan*

WHAT BOOKSELLERS ARE SAYING ABOUT *Monument Road*

"Leonard Self will stay with you for a long time after you finish this novel. It's the best book I've read in eons!"

— **ANNE HOLMAN**, The King's English Bookshop, Salt Lake City, UT

"With grit, grace and a full range of emotions, *Monument Road*'s characters take dead aim at challenges to the Code of the West. Readers of Brady Udall and Louise Erdrich will appreciate the subtleties of language shaped by the landscape."

— **MARGIE WILSON**, Grand Valley Books, Grand Junction, CO

"Charlie Quimby gets inside his character's heads better than any writer I've come across in a long time. The voices in this book ring so true to life you can feel their pain, their laughter, and their longing."

— **AARON CURTIS**, Books & Books, Coral Gables, FL

ABOUT CHARLIE QUIMBY

Charlie Quimby's writing life has always crossed divides. A playwright turned critic. A protest songwriter who worked for a defense contractor. A blogger about taxpaying and homelessness. He wrote award-winning words for others in *Harvard Business Review*, *Financial World* magazine and the NFL Hall of Fame. Naturally, he splits his time between Minneapolis and his native western Colorado.

For more about Charlie, visit his website: CharlieQuimby.com.

For introductions to the characters of *Monument Road*, visit Charlie's YouTube channel: ow.ly/IOGXd



Charlie is available to discuss *Monument Road* with reading groups in person or via Skype. For more information, email Charlie@charliequimby.com.

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