

Cormac McCarthy's

The Road

Study Guide

If you go on a quest to track the life of author Cormac McCarthy, you need to use a guide.

McCarthy, whose character was stamped early by the brute force of Appalachian culture, won't help you.

He lets only a few into his inner circle and grants precious few interviews. The News Sentinel has tried and failed repeatedly.

In June, after McCarthy's "The Road" won a Pulitzer Prize, Oprah Winfrey snagged his first televised talk. She barely touched him, peeling back little of the real man, his soul or his purpose.

He isn't a craftsman who comes to you gently. No, this is a brawl. His characters butt their way in boldly. McCarthy creates people who are not so much born as spawned, entering the world by blunt trauma. In McCarthy's world, bodies hang in Blount and Sevier county caves like stalactites or pupae. Some characters are dead-on scary, or as the author informs them, "hard times make hard people."

There is some hope, but not much.

His books are often obtuse and dense, critics say. They complain he's guilty of omitting commas, quotes and other grammatical conventions. They say he uses too many arcane words that are far from a normal vocabulary. Legions of fans, however, believe he is America's finest living writer, taking on themes of right, wrong and society's rage against itself.

McCarthy was born in 1933 in Providence, R.I., and named Charles for his father, Charles Joseph. He was the third of six children and the eldest son. Later, he changed his name to Cormac, for the Irish King.

In 1937, his father moved the family to Knoxville after accepting a legal post with the Tennessee Valley Authority. As the family prospered, they moved from house to house on an upward-climbing social scale, and to get a better deal on rent, say family members.

As children, Dennis McCarthy says he and his brother explored caves and roamed woods. They spent days on the rivers, hunting and fishing. "We took hides (of killed animals) and sold them in Knoxville," he said.

McCarthy graduated from Catholic High School in Knoxville in 1950, and attended the University of Tennessee from 1951-52. He joined the U.S. Air Force in 1953 and returned to UT from 1957-59, but then left the academic world for good.

In 1960, he moved to Chicago, where he worked as an auto mechanic, while writing his first novel. He married Lee Holleman, also a former student at UT. They later settled in Sevier County with their son, Cullen, but the marriage ended in divorce.

In 1965, shortly before publication of the book, McCarthy won an American Academy of Arts and Letters grant. He used the funds to travel to Europe aboard the ocean liner Sylvania. There he met De

Lisle, an English singer and dancer, who was performing on the ship.

He and De Lisle moved in 1967 to a Rockford, Tenn., house on Self Hollow Road. She calls it a "pig farm." In 1968, Random House published his second book

After winning a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing in 1969, he and De Lisle moved to a farm in Louisville on Light Pink Road where he built a house from what was once a dairy barn.

"Cormac was always a gentleman. What a sweet guy," said De Lisle, a dance, ballet, music and theater instructor as well as social secretary of the Coudert Institute, a private Palm Beach institution. "We had some fabulous times. We never had a lot when I was married to him. But it always seemed we had as much as we needed."

In 1976, after the marriage with De Lisle dissolved, McCarthy moved to El Paso, Texas. The couple was divorced a few years later.

His 1992 novel *All the Pretty Horses* won him the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, to the delight of faithful readers, who had long awaited national recognition for their literary hero.

Today, McCarthy lives in Tesuque, N.M., near Santa Fe. He moved there sometime after 1986.

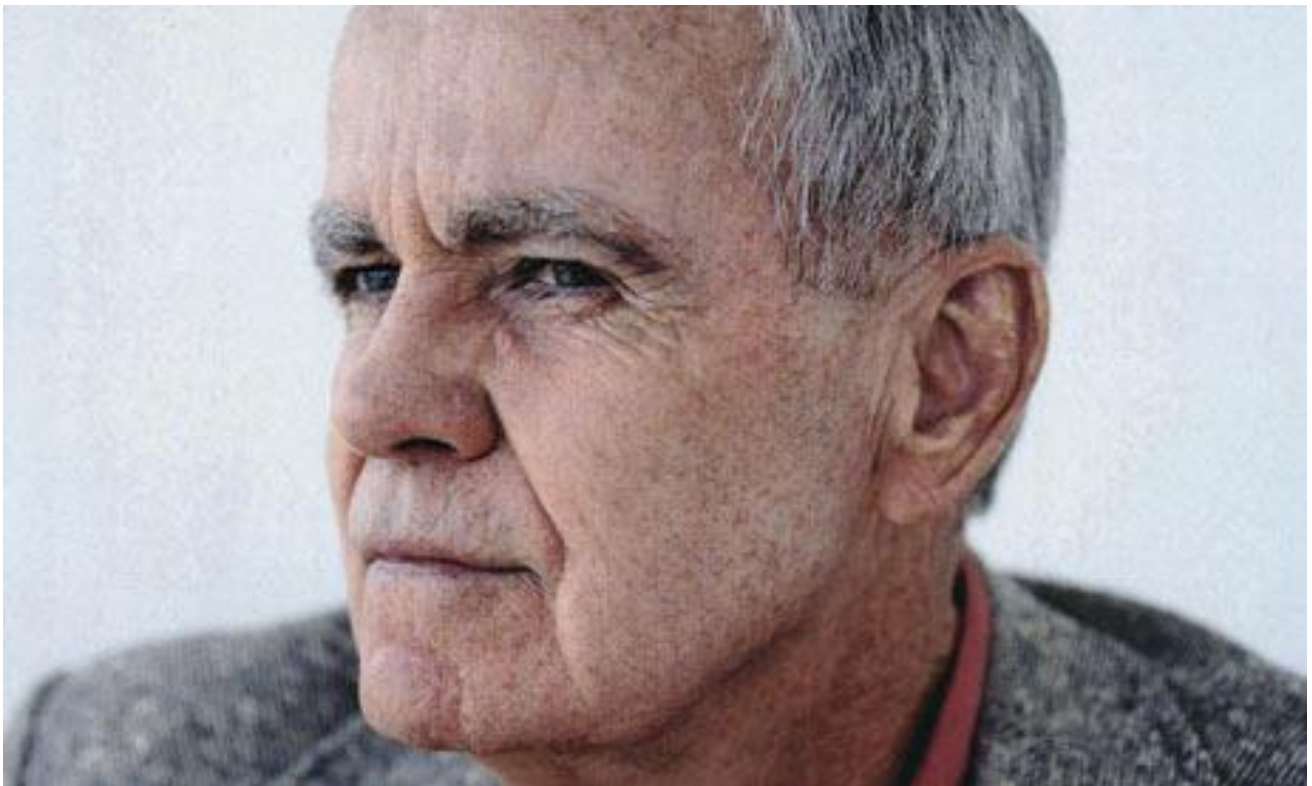
He is married to third wife Jennifer Winkley and is raising an 8-year-old son, John Francis McCarthy. He has said his son was the inspiration for "The Road," the story of a journey by a father and son trying to stay alive in a crazed, post-apocalyptic world.

McCarthy works free at the Santa Fe Institute, which by definition is a "private, not-for-profit, independent research and education center founded in 1984, for multidisciplinary collaborations in the physical, biological, computational, and social sciences."

In last summer's Oprah Winfrey interview, taped in Santa Fe, McCarthy said their interview might be his last for years to come, adding that he preferred to spend his time talking to scientists rather than writers.

Forty years go, when he was first starting out, his books could barely find a reader. Today he sells millions.

—Fred Brown



The Road: Pre-Reading

Brainstorming and Predicting

The Road takes place in an unnamed region of post-apocalyptic America. The main characters—a man and a boy—keep all of their belongings in backpacks or a metal shopping cart. The space is limited and their journey is dangerous, so they can only bring the barest of necessities.

Imagine you're journeying with a child, and all you have is one shopping cart. What are the necessities you would bring and why? Remember, you must keep your list useful and light.



The Road: Pre-Reading

Brainstorming and Predicting

In order to survive the post-apocalypse, the man and the boy will need special skills, attributes, and a new attitude towards the world around them.

Imagine you're journeying with a child in the post-apocalypse. What are the most essential skills, attributes, and attitudes you will need? What will help you cope and survive in this new environment, and why? (Note: This is not the same as what *objects* you'd need.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

The Road, pages 1-33

Vocabulary

1. **Flowstone** [**floh-stohn**], noun: a layered deposit of calcium carbonate, CaCO₃, left by thin sheets of flowing water, as in a cave. Example: "Their light playing over the wet flowstone walls." (p. 3)
2. **Granitic** [**gruh-nit-ik**], adjective: like granite; anything compared to granite in great hardness, firmness, or durability. Example: "Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast." (p. 3)
3. **Slutlamp** [**sluht-lamps**], noun: A lamp in which the wicks were usually pieces of well worn rags, or "sluts," soaked in tallow (fat and grease). Example: "Oil for their little slutlamp to light the long gray dusks, the long gray dawns." (p. 7)
4. **Gryke** [**graik**], noun: a deep cleft in a bare limestone rock surface. Example: "He descended into a gryke in the stone and there he crouched coughing and he coughed for a long time." (p. 11)
5. **Riprap** [**rip-rap**], noun: a foundation or wall of stones thrown together irregularly; any structure made of irregular materials. Example: "The edge of the lake a riprap of twisted stumps, gray and weathered, the windfall trees of a hurricane years past." (p. 13)
6. **Scabland** [**skab-land**], noun: rough, barren, volcanic topography with thin soils and little vegetation. Example: "It took two days to cross that ashen scabland." (p. 16)
7. **Collet** [**kol-it**], noun: a collar or enclosing band, often used on the inside of a hairspring. Example: "He pulled the bolt and bored out the collet with a hand drill and resleeved it with a section of pipe he'd cut to length with a hacksaw." (p. 16-17)
8. **Gambreled** [**gam-bruh l-ed**] adjective: to hang carcasses by the legs from a frame, usually done by butchers. Example: "In an old batboard smokehouse they found a ham gambreled up in a high corner." (p. 17)
9. **Pipeclayed** [**pahyp-kleyd**], adjective: whitened, as if by pipe clay. Example: "Her nipples pipeclayed and her rib bones painted white." (p. 18)
10. **Chifforobe** [**shif-uh-rohb, shif-rohb**], noun: a piece of furniture having both drawers and space for hanging clothes. Example: "Cheap stuffed furniture together with an old handmade cherrywood chifforobe." (p. 22)
11. **Discalced** [**dis-kalst**], adjective: without shoes; unshod; barefoot. Example: "They were discalced to a man like pilgrims of some common order for all their shoes were long since stolen." (p. 24)
12. **Barrows** [**bar-ohs**], noun: a flat, rectangular frame used for carrying a load, especially such a frame with projecting shafts at each end for handles; handbarrow; a primitive wheelbarrow. Example: "Their barrows were heaped with shoddy." (p. 28)
13. **Shoddy** [**shod-ee**], noun: a fiber-like material obtained by shredding rags or waste; anything inferior, especially a handmade item or manufactured product. Example: "Their barrows were heaped with shoddy." (p. 28)

The Road, pages 1-33

Summarizing & Predicting

1. The Road begins with the man waking from a dream. Describe what he sees in the dream. What could this dream tell us about the man, his situation, and what is going to happen later?

2. What is your reaction to the man? How would you describe his relationship with the boy? Are there any specific moments that tell us about this relationship?

3. What are the most immediate threats to the man and the boy? What about threats that aren't obvious now but might present themselves later?

4. Is there any evidence to tell us what has caused the end of the world? Turn to page 24 and fill in the first row of the chart.

The Road, pages 1-33

Analyzing

Choose one of the excerpts below and explain what it means and why it's important to the story overall.

They passed through the city at noon of the day following. He kept the pistol to hand on the folded tarp on top of the cart. He kept the boy close to his side. The city was mostly burned. No sign of life. Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust. Fossil tracks in the dried sludge. A corpse in a doorway dried to leather. Grimacing at the day. He pulled the boy closer. Just remember that the things you put into your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.

You forget some things, dont you?

Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget.
(12)

It's snowing, the boy said. He looked at the sky. A single gray flake sifting down. He caught it in his hand and watched it expire there like the last host of Christendom. (16)

He mistrusted all of that. He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and of death. He slept little and he slept poorly. He dreamt of walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky was aching blue but he was learning how to wake himself from just such siren worlds. Lying there in the dark with the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard fading in his mouth. He thought if he lived long enough the world at last would all be lost. Like the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory. (18)

The Road, pages 1-33

Literary Techniques

Cormac McCarthy is known for his unique writing style, which is especially on display in *The Road*. In the chart below, list all the ignored or broken rules we usually associate with good writing and literature. Then discuss why McCarthy may have chosen to ignore this rule, how it affects the story, and how it affects our perceptions of what is happening.

Style Choice	Purpose or Affect
Does not use punctuation marks	

The Road, pages 34-101

Vocabulary

1. **Pipsissewa** [pip-sis-uh-wuh, -waw], noun: Also called: wintergreen any of several ericaceous plants of the Asian and American genus *Chimaphila*, having jagged evergreen leaves and white or pinkish flowers. Example: "A rich southern wood that once held mayapple and pipsissewa." (p. 39)
2. **Palings** [pey-ling], noun: a pale, stake, or picket, as in a picket fence. Example: "He wiped his nose on his sleeve and shouldered up his small pack and the man folded away the map sections and rose and the boy followed him out through the gray palings of the trees to the road." (p. 43)
3. **Macadam** [muh-kad-uh m], noun: broken stone or other rough materials often used in the construction of a road. Example: "Late in the day they came to a place where the fire had crossed the road and the macadam was still warm and further on it began to soften underfoot." (p. 48)
4. **Nitty** [nit-ee], adjective: full of nits, which are the eggs or young of parasitic insects. Example: "One of his eyes was burnt shut and his hair was but a nitty wig of ash upon his blackened skull." (p. 50)
5. **Meconium** [mi-koh-nee-uh m], noun: the first fecal excretion of a newborn child, composed chiefly of bile, mucus, and epithelial cells. Example: "The rank meconium." (p. 59)
6. **Rachitic** [ruh-kahy-tis], noun: to suffer from rickets, a disease often found in children in which lack of vitamins, calcium, and sunlight makes bones weak. Example: "He was lean, wiry, rachitic." (p. 63)
7. **Skifts** [skifts], noun: a light covering of snow, or small flurry (gust or shower) of snow, rain, etc. Example: "The new snow lay in skifts all through the woods, along the limbs and cupped in the leaves, all of it already gray with ash." (p. 76)
8. **Sappers** [sap-ers], noun: soldiers employed in the construction of fortifications, trenches, or tunnels that approach or undermine enemy positions. Example: "They moved through the streets like sappers." (p. 79)
9. **Parsible** [pahrs-a-buhl], adjective: the ability to be broken down, separated, analyzed, etc. Example: "The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities." (p. 88)
10. **Woad** [wohd], noun: dye extracted from *Isatis tinctoria*, a European plant of the mustard family. Example: "The teeth in their sockets like dental molds, the crude tattoos etched in some homebrewed woad." (p. 90)
11. **Catamites** [kat-uh-mahyt], noun: young boys who are in sexual relationships with men. Example: "Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each." (p. 92)

The Road, pages 34-58

Summarizing and Predicting

1. Explain the semi-truck on the bridge. What could have been its purpose? What does this theory tell you about the world in which the man and the boy now live?

2. In this section, we are introduced—through flashback—to the man’s wife. What is your opinion of her? What about her makes you feel this way?

3. Think about the man on the road who was struck by lightning. Why is that moment in the book so important? What does it tell us about the man and the boy each?

4. What evidence do we have about possible causes of the apocalypse? Turn to page 24 and fill in the second row of the chart.

The Road, pages 34-58

Analyzing

Choose one of the excerpts below and explain what it means and why it's important to the story overall.

You promised not to do that, the boy said.

What?

You know what, Papa.

He poured the hot water back into the pan and took the boy's cup and poured some of the cocoa into his own and then handed it back.

I have to watch you all the time, the boy said.

I know.

If you break little promises you'll break big ones. That's what you said.

I know. But I wont. (35)

He'd carried his billfold about till it wore a cornershaped hole in his trousers. Then one day he sat by the roadside and took it out and went through the contents. Some money, credit cards. His driver's license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gambling cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood up and they went on. (51)

Sometimes the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. He thought hard how to answer. There is no past. What would you like? But he stopped making things up because those things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad. The child had his own fantasies. How things would be in the south. Other children. He tried to keep a rein on this but his heart was not in it. Whose would be? (54)

I should have done it a long time ago. When there were three bullets in the gun instead of two. (56)

The Road, pages 59-101

Summarizing and Predicting

1. In this section of the book, we are introduced to some “bad guys.” What makes these people bad? What are some specific things they do or have done?

2. The man and boy insist they are “carrying the fire.” What do you think this means? What does this tell us about their attitude towards the world?

3. What evidence do we have about possible causes of the apocalypse? Turn to page 24 and fill in the second row of the chart.

The Road, pages 59-101

Analyzing

Choose one of the excerpts below and explain what it means and why it's important to the story overall.

They listened. Then in the distance he heard a dog bark. He turned and looked toward the darkening town. It's a dog, he said.

A dog?

Yes.

Where did it come from?

I dont know.

We're not going to kill it, are we Papa?

No. We're not going to kill it.

He looked down at the boy. Shivering in his coats. He bent over and kissed him on his gritty brow. We wont hurt the dog, he said. I promise. (83)

The dog that he remembers followed us for two days. I tried to coax it to come but it would not. I made a noose of wire to catch it. There were three cartridges in the pistol. None to spare. She walked away down the road. The boy looked after her and then he looked at me and then he looked at the dog and he began to cry and to beg for the dog's life and I promised I would not hurt the dog. A trellis of a dog with the hide stretched over it. The next day it was gone. That is the dog he remembers. He doesn't remember any little boys. (87)

The Road, pages 102-175

Vocabulary

1. **Tang** [tang], noun: a long and slender projection that attaches one part of an object to another, such as where a knife blade connects to the handle. Example: "Then he stood on the tang of the shovel and raised the edge of the hatch and leaned and got hold of it." (p. 109)
2. **Chert** [churt], noun: a compact rock consisting essentially of microcrystalline quartz. Example: "He found pieces of flint or chert in a ditch but in the end it was easier to rake the pliers down the side of a rock at the bottom of which he'd made a small pile of tinder soaked in gas." (p. 129)

The Road, pages 102-175

Summarizing and Predicting

1. Are there any hints beforehand that the house (with the basement) is not a good place? This includes hints outside and inside the house. What do the man and the boy eventually discover in the house's basement?

2. The man and the boy live in a world where survival takes importance over ethics. In this section of the book, the man faces a choice in the house: help the people in the basement or leave them behind. In the space below, list reasons why he should and shouldn't have helped the people, then discuss what you would have done.

Help Them (Positives)	Help Them (Negatives)

3. What do the man and boy uncover in the backyard of the old farmhouse? What do the boy's reactions to this discovery tell us about him? What about the man's reaction?

4. What is the role fire plays in this section of the book? How does that connect to other instances of fire in the book? Think about what the man says on page 137: "If you don't want to take the lamp you'll have to take the pistol."

5. Discuss how the man and boy treat the old man (Ely) and what that tells us about how their journey has changed them.

The Road, pages 102-175

Drawing Connections

“Ely” is the only name that appears in this book—every other character is referred to by vague nouns and pronouns, like “the man” and “the boy.” Look up the name Ely/Eli. What does the name mean, and where else can it be found? Why might McCarthy have chosen this name for the old man to give himself?

The Road, pages 102-175

Analyzing

Choose one of the excerpts below and explain what it means and why it's important to the story overall.

"He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it." (110)

Maybe he thinks we're not real.

What does he think we are?

I dont know.

We cant stay here. We have to go.

He's scared, Papa.

I don't think you should touch him.

Maybe we could give him something to eat.

He stood looking off down the road. Damn, he whispered. He looked down at the old man. Perhaps he'd turn into a god and they into trees. All right, he said. (163)

The boy turned and looked at him [the man].

I know what the question is, the man said. The answers is no.

What's the question?

Can we keep him. We cant.

I know.

You know.

Yeah.

All right.

Can we give him something else?

Let's see how he does with this. (164)

The Road, pages 175-204

Vocabulary

1. **Cowled** [kould], adjective: wearing a cowl or hooded garment. Example: "Cowled in their blankets against the cold and their breath smoking, shuffling through the black and silky drifts." (p. 177)
2. **Middens** [mid-n], noun: a hill of dung, refuse, or garbage. Example: "Middens of anonymous trash." (p. 177)
3. **Patterans** [muh-kad-uh m], noun: marks left by gypsies on a journey meant to guide those who follow. Example: "They were signs in gypsy language, lost patterans." (p. 180).
4. **Mattock** [mat-uh k], noun: an instrument for loosening the soil in digging, shaped like a pickax, but having one end broad instead of pointed. Example: "Watching while they opened up the rock hillside ground with pick and mattock and brought to light a great bolus of serpents perhaps a hundred in number." (p. 188)
5. **Bolus** [boh-luh s], noun: a soft, roundish mass or lump, especially of chewed food. Example: "Watching while they opened up the rock hillside ground with pick and mattock and brought to light a great bolus of serpents perhaps a hundred in number." (p. 188)
6. **Knurled** [nurld], adjective: having knots, bends, or ridges; gnarled. Example: "The knurled lid turned in the wood grinding the paint."

The Road, pages 175-204

Summarizing and Predicting

1. Should the man be shielding his son from the horrors of this world or not? Why do you think this?

2. *The Road* is filled with discussions about God and Christian imagery, much of it symbolic. Read the paragraph below and discuss what McCarthy is attempting to say with this paragraph, how it relates to the man and boy's journey, and how it connects to what has happened to this world.

Standing at the edge of a winter field among rough men. The boy's age. A little older. Watching while they opened up the rocky hillside ground with pick and mattock and brought to light a great bolus of serpents perhaps a hundred in number. Collected there for a common warmth. The dull tubes of them beginning to move sluggishly in the cold hard light. Like the bowels of some great beast exposed to the day. The men poured gasoline on them and burned them alive, having no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be. The burning snakes twisted horribly and some crawled burning across the floor of the grotto to illuminate its darker recesses. As they were mute there were no screams of pain and the men watched them burn and writhe and blacken in just such silence themselves and they disbanded in silence in the winter dusk each with his own thoughts to go home to their suppers. (188-189)

The Road, pages 175-204
Analyzing

Choose one of the excerpts below and explain what it means and why it's important to the story overall.

The boy turned away. The man held him. Listen to me, he said.
What.

When your dreams are of some wild world that never was or of some world that never
will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant
give up. I wont let you. (189)

Do you think that your fathers are watching? That they weigh you in their ledgerbook?
Against what? There is no book and your fathers are dead in the ground. (196)

Okay. Do you want to ride in the cart?
It's okay.
Why dont you ride for while?
I dont want to. It's okay. (200)

The Road, pages 204-287

Vocabulary

1. **Isocline** [*ahy-suh-klahyn*], noun: a formation so tightly compressed that both limbs dip in the same direction. Example: "At the tide line a woven mat of weeds and the ribs of fishes in their millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see like an isocline of death." (p. 222)
2. **Clerestory** [*kleer-stawr-ee, -stohr-ee*], noun: a raised construction, as on a roof, having windows or slits for admitting light or air. Example: "The weak sea light fell through the clerestory portholes."
3. **Baize** [*beyz*], noun: a soft, usually green, woolen or cotton fabric resembling felt, used chiefly for the tops of billiard tables. Example: "He held it in his hand and then he fitted it back into the blue baize lining of the case and closed the lid and snapped the latches shut and set it back in the locker and closed the door." (p. 228)
4. **Pampooties** [*pam-poo-tees*], noun: a rather distinct type of Highland moccasin, and appear to have been worn by many Highlanders when they needed a covering for their feet but could not afford or did not want to wear their good (and probably uncomfortable) hard shoes. Example: "They wrapped their feet in sailcloth and bound them up in blue plastic pampooties cut from a tarp and they left strange tracks in their comings and goings." (p. 243)
5. **Salitter** [*boh-luh s*], noun: the divine substance of God as expressed through the entities of the world. Example: "The salitter drying from the earth." (p. 261)
6. **Ensepulchred** [*en-sep-uh l-kerd*], adjective: buried or locked away, as in a tomb; entombed. Example: "Ten thousand dreams ensepulchred within their crozzled hearts." (p. 273)
7. **Stoven** [*stoh-ven*], noun: broken in and smashed. Example: "A veteran of old skirmishes, bearded, scarred across his cheek and the bone stoven and the one eye wandering." (p. 282)
8. **EPIRB**, noun: acronym for Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon. Example: "A yellow plastic EPIRB."
9. **Vermiculate** [*ver-mik-yuh-lit, -leyt*], adjective: intricate and wavy, as if made by worms. Example: "On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming." (p. 287)

The Road, pages 204-250

Summarizing and Predicting

1. What are the man and the boy's reactions upon reaching the ocean? Based on these reactions, what does the ocean mean to both of them?

2. Throughout this book, the man takes the blame for the boy's mistakes. Why does he do this? Is this the right thing for him to do? Why or why not?

3. Fire and water have appeared over and over again throughout *The Road*. Discuss how water and fire play roles in the final moments of the book, and how that fits with the roles they've played up to this point.

The Road, pages 204-250

Analyzing

Choose one of the excerpts below and explain what it means and why it's important to the story overall.

The boy didnt want him to go upstairs. He tried to reason with him. There could be blankets up there, he said. We need to take a look.

I dont want you to go up there.

There's no one here.

There could be.

There's no one here. Dont you think they'd have come down by now?

Maybe they're scared.

I'll tell them we wont hurt them.

Maybe they're dead.

Then they wont mind if we take a few things. Look, whatever is up there it's better to know about it than to not know.

Why?

Why. Well, because we dont like surprises. Surprises are scary. And we dont like to be scared. And there could be things up there that we need. We have to take a look.

Okay.

Okay? Just like that?

Well. You're not going to listen to me.

I have been listening to you.

Not very hard.

There's no one here. There has been no one here for years. There are no tracks in the ash.

Nothing disturbed. No furniture burned in the fireplace. There's food here.

Tracks dont stay in the ash. You said so yourself. The wind blows them away.

I'm going up. (210)

At night when he woke coughing he'd sit up with his hand pushed over his head against the blackness. Like a man waking in a grave. Like those disinterred dead from his childhood that had been relocated to accommodate a highway. Many had died in a cholera epidemic and they'd been buried in haste in wooden boxes and the boxes were rotting and falling open. The dead came to light lying on their sides with their legs drawn up and some lay on their stomachs. The dull green antique coppers spilled from out the tills of their eyesockets onto the stained and rotted coffin floors. (213)

He remembered waking once on such a night to the clatter of crabs in the pan where he'd left steakbones from the night before. Faint deep coals of the driftwood fire pulsing in the onshore wind. Lying under such a myriad of stars. The sea's black horizon. He rose and walked out and stood barefoot in the sand and watched the pale surf appear all down the shore and roll and crash and darken again. When he went back to the fire he knelt and smoothed her hair as she slept and he said if he were God he would have made the world just so and no different. (219)

Every day is a lie, he said. But you are dying. That is not a lie. (239)

The Road, pages 251-287

Vocabulary

1. In your opinion, is the boy safe or not at the end of the book? What are the clues that make you think this?

2. *The Road* ends with a strange paragraph about fish. Read this paragraph again and think about why McCarthy chose to end his book this way and what the paragraph is telling us.

Once there were brook trout in the streams of the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins whimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (287)

The Road:

The Apocalypse and its Causes

In the space below, theorize what could have caused the apocalypse based on first impressions. As you read each section, add evidence related to possible causes. When you've finished the book, evaluate all your evidence and use it to decide on the most likely scenario.

Possibilities: _____

Part	Evidence
Part One, p. 1-33	
Part Two, p. 34-101	
Part Three, p. 102-167	
Part Four, p. 167-204	
Part Five, p. 204-287	

Conclusion: _____

Sources

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*The biographical information on pages 1-2 was adapted from this article. A lot has been edited out to keep the information relevant and consistent, but the words are still those of Fred Brown.

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*Source of artwork on page 1.

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*Source of shopping cart drawing from page 3.

NOTE: All graphic organizers, while sometimes based on others, were created in Word and PowerPoint by the author of this study guide.