

coming into the country john mcphee

Coming into the Country John McPhee is a captivating work of non-fiction that explores the rugged beauty and unique culture of Alaska. Written by renowned author John McPhee, this book delves into the lives of Alaskans, the geography of the region, and the profound connections between its inhabitants and the land. Published in 1976, "Coming into the Country" is not only a travelogue but also an intricate tapestry of stories that capture the essence of life in one of the last frontiers of America.

In this article, we will explore the themes, structure, and significance of McPhee's work, as well as its impact on both literature and the understanding of Alaska.

Background of John McPhee

John McPhee is an acclaimed American author known for his narrative non-fiction. Born in 1931, McPhee has been a significant figure in contemporary literature, with over 30 books to his name. His writing style is characterized by meticulous research, detailed observations, and a deep appreciation for the subjects he covers.

- Education: McPhee studied at Princeton University, where he earned a degree in English literature. He later attended the University of Cambridge as a Fulbright Scholar.
- Career: Before becoming a full-time writer, McPhee worked as a journalist for various publications, including The New Yorker, where he honed his narrative style.

McPhee's passion for storytelling and his ability to bring complex subjects to life have made him a beloved figure in American literature.

The Essence of "Coming into the Country"

"Coming into the Country" is structured as a series of interconnected essays, each focusing on different aspects of life in Alaska. McPhee's journey through this vast and often harsh landscape serves as both a personal exploration and a broader commentary on the experiences of Alaskans.

Exploration of Geography

One of the most striking features of "Coming into the Country" is McPhee's vivid descriptions of Alaska's geography. The state's diverse landscapes,

from towering mountains to expansive forests and pristine rivers, are brought to life through his keen observations.

- Mount McKinley (Denali): McPhee writes about the grandeur of Denali, the highest peak in North America, exploring its significance to Alaskans and the challenges it presents to climbers.
- Rivers and Wildlife: The author paints a picture of the region's rivers, such as the Yukon and Copper River, and the rich wildlife that inhabits these areas, highlighting the delicate balance of nature.

Through these descriptions, McPhee captures the awe-inspiring beauty of Alaska, as well as the challenges that come with living in such a remote and often unforgiving environment.

The People of Alaska

Another critical aspect of McPhee's work is his portrayal of the diverse individuals who call Alaska home. The author meets a variety of characters throughout his journey, each with their own unique stories and perspectives.

- Native Alaskan Cultures: McPhee delves into the history and traditions of Alaska Natives, exploring their deep connection to the land and the impact of colonization.
- Settlers and Adventurers: The book also features stories of settlers and adventurers who have come to Alaska in search of opportunity, revealing the complexities of their experiences and motivations.

By sharing these personal narratives, McPhee humanizes the landscape and provides a multifaceted view of life in Alaska.

Thematic Elements

"Coming into the Country" is rich with themes that resonate throughout the narrative. These themes add depth to McPhee's exploration of Alaska and its inhabitants.

Isolation and Community

The theme of isolation is prevalent in McPhee's writing. Alaska's vast wilderness often separates individuals and communities, yet it also fosters a strong sense of community among those who live there.

- Survival: Many Alaskans rely on one another for support and resources, creating bonds that are essential for survival in such a harsh environment.
- Cultural Exchange: The interaction between different cultures, particularly

between Native Alaskans and settlers, highlights the complexities of community in a place marked by isolation.

Nature and Humanity

McPhee emphasizes the intricate relationship between nature and humanity throughout "Coming into the Country." This theme is evident in the way Alaskans interact with their environment and the respect they hold for it.

- Sustainability: Alaskans often practice sustainable living, understanding the importance of preserving their natural resources for future generations.
- Adventure and Danger: The allure of adventure in Alaska is tempered by the ever-present dangers of the wilderness, illustrating the precarious balance between human ambition and the power of nature.

Literary Style and Techniques

John McPhee's literary style in "Coming into the Country" is characterized by several techniques that enhance the reader's experience.

Descriptive Prose

McPhee's ability to create vivid imagery through descriptive prose allows readers to visualize the landscapes and experiences he describes. His use of sensory details immerses readers in the Alaskan environment.

Interwoven Narratives

The book's structure, consisting of interconnected essays, allows McPhee to weave together various narratives and themes seamlessly. This approach adds depth to the exploration of Alaska, creating a rich tapestry of stories.

Personal Reflection

McPhee often includes personal reflections and observations, providing insight into his own experiences and feelings as he navigates the challenges of Alaska. This introspective element adds a layer of authenticity to the narrative.

Impact and Legacy

"Coming into the Country" has left a lasting impact on both literature and the perception of Alaska. McPhee's work has contributed to a greater understanding of the state and its people, encouraging readers to appreciate the unique culture and environment of this American frontier.

- **Literary Influence:** McPhee's narrative non-fiction style has influenced numerous writers, inspiring a new generation of authors to explore their subjects with similar depth and care.
- **Cultural Awareness:** The book has played a role in raising awareness of the complexities of life in Alaska, promoting a more nuanced understanding of the state's diverse communities and histories.

Conclusion

In "Coming into the Country," John McPhee offers readers an unforgettable journey through the breathtaking landscapes and rich cultures of Alaska. His meticulous research, descriptive prose, and deep empathy for his subjects create a compelling narrative that resonates long after the final page is turned.

As we reflect on McPhee's work, we are reminded of the importance of understanding the intricate relationship between people and their environment, as well as the stories that shape our perceptions of the world around us. Through McPhee's eyes, we come to appreciate not just the beauty of Alaska, but the resilience and spirit of the individuals who call it home.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Coming Into the Country' by John McPhee?

The main theme of 'Coming Into the Country' revolves around the exploration of Alaska's landscape, its natural beauty, and the relationship between its inhabitants and the environment.

How does John McPhee describe the Alaskan wilderness in the book?

John McPhee vividly describes the Alaskan wilderness with rich, detailed imagery, capturing its vastness, rugged terrain, and unique ecosystems, highlighting both its beauty and challenges.

In which year was 'Coming Into the Country' published?

'Coming Into the Country' was published in 1976.

What narrative style does John McPhee use in 'Coming Into the Country'?

McPhee employs a narrative style that blends personal anecdotes, interviews, and descriptive essays, creating a deeply immersive experience for readers.

What impact did 'Coming Into the Country' have on perceptions of Alaska?

The book significantly influenced perceptions of Alaska by showcasing its complexities, diverse cultures, and the struggles of those living in such an extreme environment.

Who are some of the key figures McPhee encounters in the book?

McPhee encounters various individuals, including bush pilots, fishermen, and locals, each offering unique perspectives on life in Alaska.

How does McPhee address the theme of isolation in 'Coming Into the Country'?

McPhee addresses isolation by illustrating how geography shapes the lives of Alaskans, emphasizing both the physical separation from the lower 48 states and the emotional solitude experienced by many.

What role does storytelling play in 'Coming Into the Country'?

Storytelling plays a central role, as McPhee weaves together personal narratives and historical accounts to convey the rich tapestry of Alaskan life.

How has 'Coming Into the Country' been received by critics and readers?

The book has received widespread acclaim for its insightful observations and lyrical prose, often regarded as a classic in nature writing and travel literature.

What is the significance of the title 'Coming Into the Country'?

The title signifies both the physical act of entering Alaska and a metaphorical journey into understanding the land's culture, history, and the people's connection to it.

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