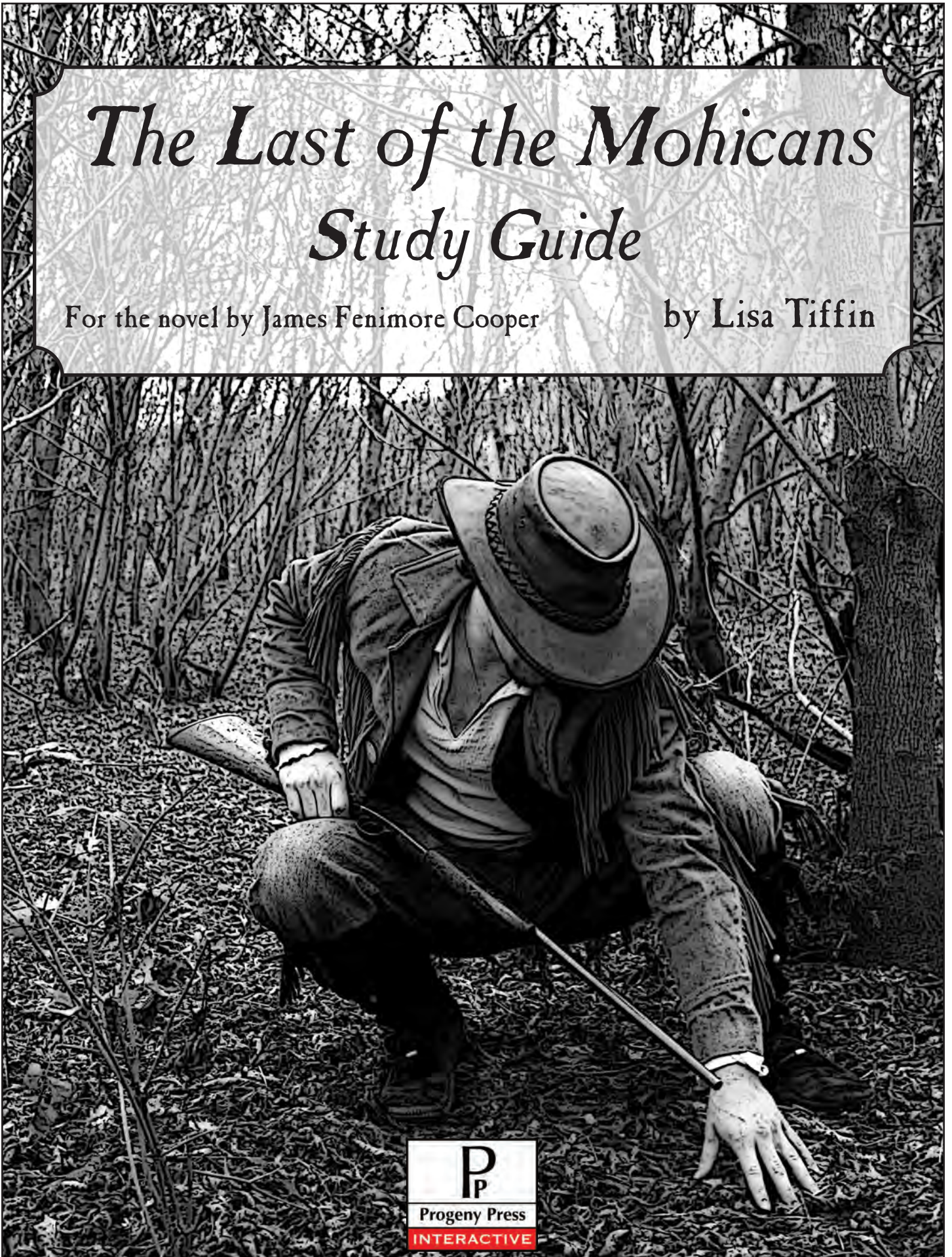


The Last of the Mohicans *Study Guide*

For the novel by James Fenimore Cooper

by Lisa Tiffin



The Last of the Mohicans Study Guide

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The Last of the Mohicans Study Guide
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Synopsis

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, the second book in his *Leatherstocking Tales*, James Fenimore Cooper weaves a tale of love, courage, and honor in the format of an adventure novel, the likes of which had never been seen before in American literature.

Set during the third year of the French and Indian War (1754–1763), the plot revolves around the journey of two sisters, Cora and Alice Munro, as they attempt to reach their father, General Munro, at Fort William Henry. Escorted by a young officer, Duncan Heyward, and an Indian runner named Magua, the girls are soon joined by the psalm-singer, David Gamut. When the party becomes lost in the woods, a scout, Hawkeye, and his Native American companions, Chingachgook and Uncas, agree to show them the way to the fort.

Cooper employs twists and turns, captures, deceptions, and double agents to keep the reader engaged as he explores issues of love, prejudice, race relations, land ownership, and courage. Through it all—the bloody battles, the treachery and the defeats—Cooper continually raises the question of unity among the races.

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Chapters 25–27

Vocabulary:

Choose the word from the Word Box below that best completes each sentence. One or more synonyms for the missing word is given in parentheses.

Word Box

desolate	austere	discreet	obliterated
sagacity	resolution	expeditiously	pinioned
mortification	ludicrous	injudicious	eloquence
duplicity			

1. The beast still continued its rolling, and apparently untiring movements, though its _____ (*laughable, ridiculous, comical*) attempt to imitate the melody of David ceased the instant the latter abandoned the field.
2. . . . Duncan now found himself alone in that wild and _____ (*barren, wretched, dismal*) abode, with the helpless invalid, and the fierce and dangerous brute.
3. In a moment every frightening or offensive mark was _____ (*blotted, erased, expunged*), and the youth appeared again in the lineaments with which he had been gifted by nature.
4. The exulting Indian had resumed his _____ (*stern, severe, serious*) countenance, though he drew warily back before the menacing glance of the young man's fiery eye.
5. When the formidable Huron was completely _____ (*arms bound tightly*), the scout released his hold, and Duncan laid his enemy on his back, utterly helpless.
6. Their _____ (*graceful speech, rhetoric*), and ingenuity were expended in vain.
7. Notwithstanding the high _____ (*determination, purpose*) of Hawkeye, he fully comprehended all the difficulties and dangers he was about to incur.
8. But the scornful expression of the young man's eye admitted to so many constructions, that the worthy scout was spared the _____ (*humiliation, embarrassment*) of such a discovery.
9. He silently and _____ (*efficiently, promptly*) encased himself in the covering of the beast. . . .

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10. The least _____ (*unwise, indiscreet*) or impatient movement on the part of David might betray them, and time was absolutely necessary to insure the safety of the scout.
11. In the meantime, some of the swiftest and most _____ (*cautious, prudent, wary*) of the young men were ordered to make the circuit of the clearing, under cover of the woods, in order to ascertain that their suspected neighbors, the Delawares, designed no mischief.
12. He arose, and told his tale without _____ (*double-dealing, treachery*) or reservation.
13. Had any of the Hurons turned to look behind them, they would have seen the animal watching their movements with an interest and _____ (*shrewdness, keenness, acumen*) that might easily have been mistaken for reason.

Questions:

1. Chapter 25 opens with, "There was a strange blending of the ridiculous with that which was solemn in this scene." Explain and compare that statement with Hawkeye's entrance.
2. Why wasn't Magua afraid of the bear?
3. How do Hawkeye and Heyward get Alice out of the cave?
4. How has Magua cultivated favor with the neighboring Delaware tribe? How does this improve Magua's reputation among his own people?
5. Name three specific things Magua did in his speech to persuade the Hurons to follow his plans for recovering Cora from the Delaware. What is the final result of his oration?
6. Cooper consistently shows us many sides of each character. Compare Magua as an orator and great chief with Magua at his home.

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Think About the Story:

7. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that good writing should produce “a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” In other words, the telling of a story should contain sufficient truth that the reader is willing to ignore portions that may be impractical or impossible. The term “*willing suspension of disbelief*” has come to be a literary term meaning that something generally impossible or implausible is made to seem plausible by the author’s skill at telling the story. In a fairy tale, we are willing to believe that a prince will search the entire kingdom for a girl who fits a slipper, and that it only fits one person. In Narnia we are willing to believe in speaking animals and passages into other worlds. In these chapters of *The Last of the Mohicans*, name at least two things that you, once you analyze it, find impossible or implausible, though it seems plausible in the story.

8. With *verbal irony*, the author or character says one thing but means something entirely different. In Chapter 25, Hawkeye makes a joke or conceit regarding his disguise. Find and write this example of verbal irony here, and also explain what Hawkeye is actually saying.

Dig Deeper:

9. Why does Hawkeye believe that while it would have been okay for an Indian to kill the conjurer and Magua, it is wrong for him to do so?

10. Read James 4:17. What does the scripture say regarding knowledge and sin? How does this apply to Hawkeye in this situation?

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11. When David agrees to act the part of Uncas so Hawkeye and Uncas can escape, Hawkeye assures David that he and Uncas will seek revenge if the Hurons kill David. Why does David insist they not seek revenge? What does he ask them to do instead? What is Hawkeye's response?

12. Read Luke 23:34, Colossians 3:13, and Romans 12:19. What do these verses teach and what can we learn from Jesus' example?

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5. Answers may vary but should mention some of the following. Montcalm stays to think over the exchange with Le Renard and begins to wonder whether he can control the Hurons. He also broods over his responsibility for the Huron's possible future actions, since he chose to involve them in the first place. He then shakes off the thoughts as weakness and goes back to his tent. Magua is furious about the treaty and shows Montcalm the scars he has from his previous whipping by Munro. He says he will talk to the Hurons, but he stalks off without waiting for Montcalm to answer him and does not respond to any of the French sentinels who try to question him.

6. David begins to sing. David thought that the warriors would be inspired or moved by his sacred songs to stop fighting. The warriors don't hurt him because they admire his courage in singing his "death song." The singing also, unfortunately, alerts Le Renard to the location of the sisters, enabling him to capture Alice.

Thinking About the Story:

7. Cooper says these things because Montcalm did not provide the escort promised to Munro's troops and allowed the Iroquois/Hurons to massacre the English.

8a. Metaphor. Le Renard is referring to the fact that he is in favor with his tribe, he is the leader, and they listen to him.

b. Metaphor. Montcalm's memories were flowing one after another like a train—a length of material—attached to a robe or formal dress, such as a modern wedding dress. c. dark cloud of savages: Metaphor. So many Iroquois were watching the English retreat that they looked like a storm cloud at the edge of the woods. hovering . . . like vultures: Simile. Cooper compares the Indians to vultures who prey on dead carcasses of animals. The Hurons' desire to massacre the already defeated (dead) English.

9. The saying means that a good outcome justifies any means used to attain it; that actions or methods that are wrong from a moral point of view are at times necessary in order to obtain the desired results; that any cost is worth the end result. Montcalm's means (the Indian allies of the French) are uncontrollable and lusting for blood and treasure or goods. They kill mercilessly and collect scalps and goods. His end (attaining the destruction of the fort) was justified in his own mind because he wanted it at any cost. In an ethical or moral judgement, it was not worth it; it was morally unacceptable. Answers may vary.

10. One of the women will not give up a shawl, the Indian gets angry, takes her baby, kills the baby and then her. Violence erupts around them.

11. During the massacre, David sings loudly to "calm the savages and still the war" and later he follows the girls determinedly. David, realizing he is left and disregarded as too worthless to even kill, throws himself onto the other horse and follows the girls into the wilds to do what he can. He is becoming a man who will do what he can, with the abilities he has, for what he knows is right. He takes his commitments seriously.

Dig Deeper:

12. Hawkeye seems to be referring to the final judgement by God when Montcalm must account for his actions. God will judge him and punish him for his sins. See Revelation 20:11–15.

13. Our actions should be pleasing to God; we will all appear before God to be judged. It is better to suffer on earth for doing good than suffer for eternity for doing evil. We will all stand before the throne of God and be judged according to what we have done.

14. Answers will vary but should mention some way of Montcalm protecting the retreating English from the Hurons.

15. Hawkeye views the devil as the source of all the evil that has occurred, though he does not absolve the men of blame. These verses teach us that Satan is like a roaring lion prowling around looking for a way to devour us, that we will suffer in this world, and this world is under the control of Satan who causes evil.

Chapters 19–21

Vocabulary:

Answers may vary but should have the same general meaning. 1. attract, turn aside; 2. reject, to absorb; 3. forgiving, unyielding; 4. straight, indirect; 5. growing, diminishing; 6. lying, sincere; 7. repaired, decayed; 8. love, hostility; 9. straightforward, cunning; 10. differ, imitate; 11. moving, immovable, fixed; 12. hinder, help

Questions:

1. French: When they have won, they have a party and dance with their women. Hurons: They are content with scalping their enemies; then they forget their fury and let the dead rest.

2. He drops his tomahawk, relaxes his body and pretends to sleep. He does this so if any enemies see him, they will not suspect that he and the others are aware of an enemy.

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3. Hawkeye and the Mohicans treat each other with mutual honor and deliberation. Although they disagree, it is obvious that Hawkeye and the Mohicans are listening respectfully to each other's opinions. Uncas' words are received with as much attention as the older men's words, and after each speaks, the others pause to consider the words before responding.

4. He stands and speaks in the manner of the Indians, acting out the consequences of going over land with the older and beaten-down Munro as opposed to the swiftness of going by canoe. By communicating in a way that the Mohicans relate to, he is able to convince them his idea was the best.

5. They carry the canoe on their shoulders and make an obvious trail through the woods to a large rock. They then retrace their steps backwards to their original spot and push off in the canoe under cover of darkness.

6. David Gamut.

Thinking About the Story:

7. Answers may vary. Heyward acts protectively towards Munro. He often takes his arm or guides him to a place to sleep.

8. Compare: Heyward respects Munro, just as Uncas respects Chingachgook. Both pairs show obvious affection for each other. Contrast: The relationships differ in that Uncas always respects Chingachgook as an elder and never speaks before him or pushes for his own way. Heyward, on the other hand, tends to take initiative and often makes decisions without consulting Munro (such as when he ordered the guards back in their meeting with Montcalm) and often defends his own position over Munro's. Heyward also speaks his desires first (such as in the canoe when he reminds Hawkeye their main goal is to recover the sisters, not fight Hurons), while Uncas waits to be called upon by the older men.

9. Answers will vary. Students should display understanding and proper usage of the two words or phrases they choose.

Dig Deeper:

10. Uncas waits because he has been trained to respect his elders. Hawkeye tells him that with book learning, young people may feel smarter than their parents, but when decisions depend upon experience, the young must respect those that are older with more experience. These verses teach us that those who are older are wise, children should be proud of their parents, gray hair is a mark of honor, and children should honor their parents.

11. In Galatians, we read there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks (any race), male and female, slave or free; we are all children of God through Christ. John tells us that any who believe in Christ and receive him are given the right to become sons of God. The verses indicate that any race, anyone at all, has equal access to God through Christ, and anyone—no matter their color or circumstances—who believes in him can become a child of God and live eternally with God in heaven.

Chapters 22–24

Vocabulary:

1. emotional, stoic; 2. cottage, edifice; 3. minstrel, buffoon; 4. documented, venerable; 5. mechanical, ingenuity; 6. combustion, volition; 7. edging, harangue; 8. musical, amity; 9. entangled, implicit; 10. expressive, masquerade; 11. thinker, auditor; 12. fascinating, recreant; 13. provincial, culprit; 14. construct, admonish; 15. straight, impel; 16. convoluted, vindictive; 17. visionary, impetuous.

Questions:

1. Answers may vary but may mention that they believe he is insane because he sings all the time. They also may believe he is controlled or affected by his great Spirit (God), and may find him harmless and helpless and less than a warrior, so not to be feared.

2. A tribe that is split from the Delaware is holding Cora. Chingachgook is the great chief of the Tortoises and has the same tortoise tattoo as David saw on one of their warriors.

3. Hawkeye admires Duncan's courage and does not know how to combat Duncan's resolution, so he agrees and has Chingachgook paint Duncan's face as that of a buffoon. Hawkeye openly admires Heyward and shakes his hand, wishing him well. He walks away shaking his head, though, and does not seem to think Heyward will be successful. He even tells Duncan that he and the Mohicans will avenge his death if need be. Heyward hesitates before actually going into the camp with David, seemingly to gather his courage and energy for the task. He is not sure if he will be successful, but states he will either save Alice or die trying.

4. a. Montcalm considers all of them his children, red, black, and white, and speaks to him as to a child in French, so he too speaks French. b. Montcalm was looking back to watch for enemies, not turning away from the Hurons. c. Montcalm will not listen to the Delaware; he has even sent Heyward, who can heal the sick, to see if they need any help. d. Just like the Indian who wears a shirt when he meets with the whites, Heyward wore the paint given him when he came to meet with the Indians to honor them.