

Discussion Questions for "The Ballad of Frankie Silver" by Sharyn McCrumb

(Questions compiled by Sharyn McCrumb)

1. Why did the author choose to tell the story from the point of view of Burgess Gaither instead of using Frankie Silver herself as narrator?
2. In Frankie Silver's time, Burke County stretched all the way to the Tennessee line, with Morganton as county seat for all of it. Today the Silvers' home is located in Mitchell County (a county founded in 1861), whose county seat Bakersville is less than 10 miles from their home. Would a trial conducted by mountain people in Bakersville instead of by the planter class in Morganton have had any effect on the outcome?
3. Twenty-seven years after the execution of Frankie Silver, the Civil War began, and North Carolina seceded from the Union. The flatland part of the state was devoutly Confederate, but the mountain part of North Carolina favored the Union. Can you see that political split between flatland and mountain foreshadowed in the circumstances of the case of Frankie Silver?
4. How does the case of Fate Harkryder parallel the case of Frankie Silver? Why was it included in the novel?
5. If you were defending Frankie Silver in court, how would you have handled the case and what evidence would you have presented?
6. How does this case change Burgess Gaither?
7. Both John Sevier and Frankie Silver escaped from the Morganton jail. Find out what became of John Sevier. How do you explain the difference in their fates?
8. Talk about Miss Mary. Was she born ahead of her time? What would she be like today?
9. Why did Isaiah Stewart tell Frankie to die without speaking?
10. Why did the governor refuse to pardon Frankie Silver even though half the original jury signed the petition requesting it?