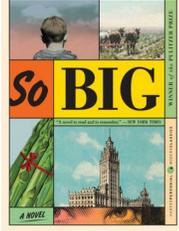


Books by the Stack

EDNA FERBER *So Big* by Edna Ferber



A rollicking panorama of Chicago's high and low life, this stunning novel follows the travails of gambler's daughter Salina Peake DeJong as she struggles to maintain her dignity, her family, and her sanity in the face of monumental challenges.

Why you'll like it: *Modern classic. Overcoming hardship. Strong female character.*

About the Author: Edna Ferber was born in Michigan in 1885. She spent her early career as a reporter. In 1910, Everybody's Magazine published her short story, The Homely Heroine. Ferber's novel, Dawn O'Hara, the story of a newspaperwoman in Milwaukee, followed in 1911. She gained national attention for her series of Emma McChesney stories, tales of a traveling underskirt saleswoman. A play based on the stories, Our Mrs. McChesney, was produced in 1915. With collaborator George S. Kaufman, Ferber wrote acclaimed plays Dinner at Eight and The Royal Family. Ferber won the Pulitzer Prize in 1925 for *So Big*, the story of a woman raising a child on a truck farm outside of Chicago. Her best known books include *Show Boat*, *Cimarron*, *Giant* and *Ice Palace*. Ferber wrote two autobiographies, *A Peculiar Treasure* published in 1939 and *A Kind of Magic* in 1963. She died of cancer in 1968.

Questions for Discussion

1. The book title's obvious reference is to Dirk DeJong's childhood nickname. What else, in the larger scope of the novel, might it signify?
2. Describe Salina Peake DeJong. What kind of character is she? Is she believable? What do you think of the following remark...?

I want you to realize that this whole thing is just a grand adventure...Living. All mixed up. The more kinds of people you see, and the more things you do, and the more things that happen to you, the richer you are. Even if they're not pleasant things.

Is this philosophy an indication of Salina's inner strength or her unguarded naivete? Does she hold true to her vision throughout the novel?

3. When Salina arrives in High Prairie, she is struck by the beauty of things. In what sense does she find cabbages beautiful? What does this suggest about her sense of aesthetics? Is it a heightened sensitivity to beauty...or an indiscriminate one? What is meant by the sentence describing Salina: "Life has no weapon against a woman like that"?
4. What do you think of Pervus DeJong? What kind of man is he? Why does Salina marry him – a decision that yokes her to the monotonous, racking life led by the very farm women she once pitied? How would you describe their marriage?
5. Ferber offers readers an insight into rural life as exemplified by those in High Prairie. Talk about the hardships of those lives, especially in the absence of modern conveniences, even basic plumbing?

6. How does Ferber portray Chicago in *So Big*? In what way does August Hempel exemplify urban society and its values, as opposed to life in High Prairie? What comparison is Ferber attempting to draw for her readers?
7. What are the societal values that Dirk represents? Is he a sympathetic character? Does Salina sacrifice too much for him? Why does he turn away from what the teachings she attempted to instill in him? By the end of the novel, what, if anything, does Dirk come to understand?
8. Talk about the difference between the two types of students at Mid-Western University: Classified and Unclassified. What is the irony here? And what is Ferber satirizing?
9. What kind of character is Dallas O'Mara? How does she represent what is antithetical to August Hempel and his peers?
10. Is the ending of *So Big* satisfying to you? Do characters get what they want...or deserve?

(Questions provided by litlovers.com)



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