

# The cider house rules

Life



TITLE (supplied by the customer): " The Cider House Rules" DESCRIPTION (supplied by the customer): The Doctor offers 2 incongruous services ... how can these services coexist? Answer the following questions: What is the moral dilemma posed in the story? A Birth occurs in the story ... how does this affect the main character's view? What happens to change the main character's view? What are the Cider House Rules and what are they a metaphor for? Who broke the Cider House Rules? What is the moral of the story? What does it mean to be the hero of your own life?

What other issues arise in this story that are relevant to the reproductive and overall health? PROJECT DEVELOPED: The Cider House, an orphanage hospital at St. Cloud's, is one of the two poles or hemispheres the entire plot builds upon. The story poses quite a bit of a challenge to the unsophisticated onlooker's mindset trained primarily to distinguish between, and judge, the clear black and the clear white. Dr. Larch, one of the central protagonists, is a far more complex profile. It's not so much about his personality or character as it is about his moral stance. As a licensed physician, he assists at childbirth.

The outside world formally knows him as helping a new life happen. The other side of the man is his second practice amounting to exactly the opposite: abortions, or life taking. He takes life away from infant and totally helpless human beings having little say in their parents' decision not to grant them life. It might just be uncomfortable and awkward for these young mothers, pressed by their ambitious husbands, to grant life at this particular point. They are not prepared nor willing to pay that price for their right to have a fulfilling sexual life outside the bonds of marriage.

However, the story is less moralizing than that. The author does not seem disposed to judge the heroes very strictly, because another part of the story is that these are for the most part inexperienced young men and women. They cannot possibly know as yet what's best for them over the long haul; no wonder their vague yet potent inner drives lead them to mistakes. They have not learned to assume the full responsibility for these mistakes, and they cannot accept the lot these blunders may inflict, early in their lives. Dr. Larch is deeply convinced about his duty to offer services of both kinds.

Moreover, he chooses to hand over his skills to a young and promising disciple, Homer [17-20, 50-54, 78]. The latter has lived in the orphanage his entire life, and one would guess his moral values have largely if not solely been influenced and inspired by Dr. Larch's example. One wonders just how those polar practices could possibly be compatible, and for that matter conducive to the younger generation's upbringing. The young person shown early on that abortion is a possibility might likely stick with that option as a quick fix, never minding the longer-term good.

So far, however, we have seen a somewhat superficial picture, and it's about time we dwelled on the multifaceted truth. Dr. Larch would never actually even consider abortion a way out-if this were a perfect world [56-58, 124]. The wicked world he finds himself surrounded by rules in wicked ways, supplies ugly criteria and makes one resort to interim compromises to secure a greater boon. This world is good at sermonizing when it comes to condemning the young women making mistakes; yet it is also incredibly cynical in calling on them to pay a price they cannot afford.

Of course, we are not talking about the world that Dr. Larch had built-the Cider House. It is governed by ultimate rules that are observed strictly, not because of their tyranny, but because they are a natural moral code of integrity. All the little children living in there are orphans rejected by the wicked world, yet zealously loved by their father [80-110]. No, he is not their biological father-one other criterion of the formalist world, which permits the distorted and destroyed relationships between the native parents and children.

However, his own world's parameters identify him as their ultimate father. This cozy Cider House world is a tiny spot on earth where children love and respect each other, if only by virtue of the sense of alienation that the other world has cursed them with. Any encounter with the outside world is happy only for one of them: the rest of the kids will not be adopted that soon [84-89]. In fact, the big spotlight in the story is about the two poles or two alternatives facing the protagonists: their Cider home sweet home and the bitter world.

The same applies to the central figure, Homer who is an extremely likable person and a fast learner, soon to become as skilled as his teacher. Yet without a diploma-another anchor of the outside world stressing the form, the superficiality, the illusion over the intrinsic value. Thus far, he has lived in this paradise which has a lot of bliss to offer. Yet, this warm Eden could not possibly offer him the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge he will have to receive in the outside world. Of course, for now Homer has nothing to compare it with-but soon an episode occurs that changes his life for good.

A young lady, Candy, arrives for abortion accompanied by her boyfriend Wally, which occasion affords Homer a unique chance for exploring the 'outer space.' [172-215] He might never have unlocked his potential had he stayed 'home.' It was to be the outside world with its challenges and whims that could offer a learning environment. Homer turned out to be just as fast learner when it came to learning about himself. He proved to be good at human skills, and a fulfilling relationship soon began to evolve between him and Candy while Wally was gone delivering on his duty. [267-270, 320] Wally would come back some day, and Candy would have to choose, which was far from her forte. Indeed, she embodies the image of innocent proneness to mistakes, whereby she had to make a lot of tasting, sampling and trying before she could decide what was right for her. And yet, like the many other young ladies Larch felt sympathy for (and would rather do the abortions than let them die in the butchers hands), she was deserving of the better lot. That experience was a major turning point in Homer's life. The main development was not that he actually liked the world he saw: far from it.

Yet, when the doctor asked him to come back home where he was needed, loved and waited for (while the outside world had little to offer), it was already a different Homer to heed to those reasons [365]. He knew it was the only chance for him to learn to decide for himself and to take the responsibility. In fact, perhaps he had already long had that critical stance: he would swallow all the skills that Larch had to offer, but he was reluctant to justify abortion [131]. He therefore only had to learn or realize that he had that.

Being the hero of one's own life might thus amount to standing ready to use the benefit of doubt, reserve the right to mistakes and face up to liabilities. That is by far the only way to really learn doing the right things, which is superior to just doing right things as under a benevolent and wise dictatorship. These mistakes should properly be viewed as a cost attached, which one would eagerly incur if the expected reward were abundant. This, of course, is not to justify the try-it-all approach, though wisdom is earned by learning too.

The moral could thus pertain to the idea that this world is too complex and controversial, for a superficial judgment to suffice. The lesser evil may at times be viewed as a short-term cost or means securing the longer-term ends, provided the course is just. A cost is always attached to major decisions, though one is free to choose between the safe haven and the rough ocean. These are very different testing environments, in which people judge and are judged very differently. Our superficial and hypocritical perception of the doctor might be rather negative at first, yet we come to see another picture on closer examination ...