

## Wallace Stegner's Short Stories

During the eight sessions of this class, we will read and discuss the short stories of Pulitzer prize-winning American author, Wallace Stegner, often considered to be one of the masters of the American short story during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The themes and subjects of the stories are amazingly varied, as are the settings. Although often categorized as a “regionalist” (Western) writer, the settings of the stories range from the plains West at the turn of the century to the California West of post-World War II, but also the Midwest of the prewar and postwar periods, Vermont, Florida, Salt Lake City, Santa Barbara, and Los Angeles, as well as several foreign locations, including the Philippines, Mexico, France, and Egypt.

Stegner is well known as a teacher of writers, founding the creative writing program at Stanford University shortly after World War II. Stegner biographer and critic, Jackson J. Benson, notes: “In large part his success came not only from knowledge of the form and its possibilities, from talent and writing skill, but from the fact that he wrote out of belief and conviction, from a fire in his belly, from a passion for telling the truth in a clear, direct, believable way. When we read Stegner, we feel that here is a writer who cares deeply about what he is saying—he is not playing games or showing off. His art was, as he has said about the writers he admired, ‘a real probe of troubling human confusions.’ ”

In his monograph, *Teaching the Short Story*, Stegner writes that the short story is “the most artful of prose forms . . . and at its very best, as in Chekhov, the light it casts on one man or woman in one brief fragment of experience can seem to illuminate the world.” We will together, as a class, unpack and explore the artfully-rendered “illuminations” in his stories, sometimes troubling and confusing, but always rich and compelling.

Class format will be class discussion of two or three stories each session. We will use the Penguin paperback text, *Wallace Stegner, Collected Stories*, which is available through local book stores or on Amazon.com. During the first class, we will view and discuss a documentary film on Wallace Stegner, the man and writer.

**LEADER:** Barbara and Gerrit Bleeker are retired university English professors.

**WEDNESDAYS:** 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., 8 weeks: February 26 to April 22 (no class on 4/8)

**LOCATION:** The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, Maximum 20