

STUDY GUIDE For *THE MEASURE OF EVERYTHING*

1. Immediately the reader is presented with a journey. Of all the places Billy could “escape to,” why do you think he, more or less consciously, has chosen his grandfather’s West Virginia farm as a place to hide out after leaving Shawnee Springs, Ohio?
2. Why does Billy seem attracted to Seth Abel? In what important ways does she compare or contrast to Bonnie Gershowitz? What does Billy’s pursuit of Seth and virtual abandonment of Bonnie say about him?
3. What is the role of Machiavellian politics in the novel? Who else besides Billy aligns himself with “the ends justify the means” political thinking? Who, besides Seth, believes that Machiavelli was a “poor excuse for a political philosopher”?
4. How is Della Sizemore’s dilemma in Putnam County, West Virginia similar to Shawnee Springs’ farm fight? How is it different? Do you find yourself favoring one over the other or do you feel equally about them?
5. Is the novel fair to the other side? Consider not only those who stand to benefit the most from development of agricultural land, like developer John Schuyler, but other members of both West Virginia and Ohio communities as portrayed in the book.
6. How might Billy’s family influences and losses explain his current identity, financial and sexual problems throughout much of the novel? Can you relate, or do you find him unforgivably manipulative, selfish and/or opportunistic? If not Billy, which other character(s) would you point to as more capable of embodying the novel’s moral authority?
7. Evaluate how the following factions in the novel see the role of easements—deeds which determine how the land can or can’t be used when sold: Citizens to Save the Farm (Billy, Woody, Seth), unaligned villagers, developers like John Schuyler, the farmers in Simon Kenton Township, the media. Which group (or single character) represents best *your* opinion on agricultural land in the current climate of rapid urban development?
8. What is the role of parenting in the novel? (In addition to mother-father-child relationships, consider various types of care-taking, even government or legal intervention, which can be seen as parenting in this context.)
9. Do you find Ira’s speech to the farmers in the gym (“man is not the measure of everything, the earth is”) hopelessly naïve and idealistic, completely true or somewhere in between? How does his speech compare to Garth Erickson’s, in which he states that ownership awards the right to do with the land whatever you want, as with a tractor or a horse?

10. Billy, Seth and Ira have made serious mistakes, personal and political, affecting their lives as well as the lives of those who love them. Are you willing to understand, even forgive, them equally? Which of these characters is most flawed? Which the least? Who is most redeemed by novel's end? Least? Who speaks/acts for you?
11. In what ways do the values of most people of Shawnee Springs, Ohio, a politically conservative state, seem to differ with mainstream America's in the new millenium? Given what you come to know about the town, to what do you attribute those non-mainstream values? Do they seem out-of-touch or still relevant in today's morally, socially and politically complex world?
12. Did the novel's conclusion provide satisfying resolutions to the major themes and conflicts? Can you predict what the main characters' lives will be like a year later? Five years? Ten? What the village of Shawnee Springs will be like?
13. How did the novel affect your knowledge or opinion of urban sprawl, rural development (exurbs vs. suburbs), land trusts and easements? Are you convinced land use is a major issue facing America today? How do you predict it will be resolved in coming years?