

## **The Glorification of War: A Debate on Willa Cather's *One of Ours***

I will present on whether Willa Cather's *One of Ours* glorifies war, using a critical literary analysis framed in a traditional debate format. Both positions will be examined, breaking down key elements of the novel to support each side.

The presentation begins with a brief summary of Claude Wheeler's journey (from rural Nebraska to the battlefields of World War I) providing context for those unfamiliar with the novel. An overview of the historical context will follow, highlighting WWI's impact on the United States. The critical reception the novel garnered, with figures like Stanley Cooperman and other critics dismissing its second half as sentimental and romanticized, will introduce the core debate: "Does *One of Ours* glorify war?"

For the affirmative, the analysis will focus on Claude's fulfillment through the war effort, suggesting Cather portrays war as a means of self-realization. Passages highlighting Claude's transformation and his relationships with characters like David Gerhardt will be used to argue that the novel idealizes war and the experiences of American soldiers. An analysis of the other soldiers Wheeler interacts with in France will also be examined as examples of Cather's flawed writing on the Great War. To support this, the affirmative will highlight Cather's inexperience with the war, her writing coming from second-hand knowledge.

For the negative, the presentation will counter by emphasizing Cather's use of irony, portraying Wheeler's pursuit of meaning, especially through war, as futile and destructive. Key literary devices such as Wheeler's internal monologue, its contrast with his external environment emphasized through frequent imagery, and the symbolic characterization of Wheeler will be explored. Additionally, the negative will argue that, through this lens, *One of Ours* can be seen as humanizing America's soldiers, rather than glorifying their untimely deaths. Aspects of the historical context will be brought in to support this, along with Cather's reasons for writing the novel.

The presentation will conclude with the author's own opinion following a live audience poll to encourage reflection on Cather's portrayal of war and its relevance today.

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**Biography:** Aya Desie is a dedicated sophomore at the International School of Kigali Rwanda. As secretary of her school's NEHS chapter, she loved her time collaborating with her chapter President, Nora Diarrousouba, in organizing their first event to spread literacy and community through literacy in their community and is excited for the year ahead, and the chance to plan more. Aya also has experience in service learning, writing, and public speaking, having been published by the World Council on Intercultural Competence in their June 2024 issue her freshman year and choosing to read out poetry in an ISK fundraising event she participated in. A devoted cat lover, she can usually be found with her cat, reading, studying, working on an English assignment or sending out her 12th email of the day.