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## Summary, Themes, Discussion Questions, and Resources for:

**Article Title: A Hotel and Its Novelist: Thomas Savage and Dillon's Andrus Hotel" by Author O. Alan Weltzien**

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The essay "A Hotel and Its Novelist: Thomas Savage and Dillon's Andrus Hotel" by O. Alan Weltzien explores the connection between Thomas Savage, an acclaimed yet underappreciated American novelist, and the Andrus Hotel in Dillon, Montana. Weltzien examines how this setting influenced Savage's life and work, particularly his sense of place and the themes of isolation, memory, and regional identity that characterize his writing.

The Andrus Hotel, a prominent fixture in Dillon, served not only as a backdrop for Savage's upbringing but also as a symbol of the complexities of small-town life in the American West. The essay contextualizes Savage's literary career, emphasizing his deep ties to Montana and the influence of the region's rugged landscapes and social dynamics on his novels. Savage's most famous work, *The Power of the Dog*, is mentioned as part of a larger exploration of the tensions between appearance and reality, familial conflict, and suppressed identities.

## Themes

- **Sense of Place:** The Andrus Hotel serves as a focal point for exploring the connection between geography and identity. The essay demonstrates how Savage's deep ties to Montana informed his narratives, giving his work a distinctive regional authenticity.
- **Isolation and Loneliness:** Savage's novels often delve into themes of personal and social isolation, reflecting his own sense of being an outsider. The essay suggests that this theme is tied to his observations of small-town life, as epitomized by the Andrus Hotel.
- **Familial Tension and Identity:** Savage's works, including *The Power of the Dog*, often explore strained family relationships and the suppression of true identities. Weltzien ties this theme back to Savage's own life experiences and the cultural norms of the time.
- **Realism vs. Myth:** Savage's writing deconstructs the myths of the American West, presenting a more nuanced and often darker portrayal of its people and landscapes. The Andrus Hotel symbolizes this tension between outward appearances and hidden truths.

## Why This Works in a Montana [9-12] History Class?

[Detail three or four reasons to use this article as a teaching tool]

**Interdisciplinary Approach:** Combining literature with history allows students to see how stories and art reflect and shape cultural understanding.

**Local Relevance:** Highlighting a Montana author and setting keeps the content regionally grounded, making history more personal for students.

**Critical Thinking:** Analyzing Savage's themes encourages students to question myths and explore nuanced historical realities.

## Classroom Activities

### 1. Exploring Place and Identity in Montana

**Objective:** Highlight how Montana's geography, architecture, and community dynamics shape personal and cultural identities.

**Activity:**

- Have students analyze how the Andrus Hotel serves as a symbol of small-town Montana life in the early-to-mid 20th century.
- Encourage students to research other historically significant landmarks in Montana and write a short essay or presentation on how these places reflect broader historical trends (e.g., mining booms, railroad expansion, or tourism).

### 2. Understanding Regional Literature as Historical Insight

**Objective:** Use Thomas Savage's novels as a lens to understand social and cultural dynamics of the American West.

**Activity:**

- Assign excerpts from *The Power of the Dog* or similar works by Savage that explore family tension, gender roles, and rural life.
- Lead a discussion about how Savage's depiction of Montana challenges or reinforces students' perceptions of the West.
- Compare Savage's themes to other Montana writers (e.g., Ivan Doig or A.B. Guthrie Jr.) to discuss how regional authors reflect different aspects of Montana history.

### 3. Small-Town Life and Social Dynamics

**Objective:** Examine the social hierarchies and tensions in small-town Montana during Savage's lifetime.

**Activity:**

- Analyze the role of the Andrus Hotel as a gathering place and microcosm of small-town life. Discuss how hotels often served as community hubs and how this mirrors societal dynamics.
- Invite students to research a local or regional small-town establishment (e.g., a hotel, general store, or post office) that has historical significance and discuss its role in the community.

#### 4. Themes of Isolation and Family Conflict in History

**Objective:** Connect Savage’s themes of isolation, family tension, and hidden identities to broader historical and cultural contexts.

**Activity:**

- Discuss how Savage’s portrayal of suppressed identities and familial conflict might reflect the pressures of small-town Montana life in the mid-20th century.
- Compare these themes to real historical figures or events in Montana that involve family conflict, social pressure, or isolation (e.g., homesteaders, miners, or ranchers facing economic challenges).

#### 5. The Myth vs. Reality of the American West

**Objective:** Deconstruct romanticized narratives of the West by contrasting them with Savage’s realistic portrayals.

**Activity:**

- Pair Savage’s work with primary sources, such as diaries or letters from Montana settlers, or with films and media that romanticize the West.
- Facilitate a debate: “Does Savage’s depiction of Montana better reflect the realities of life in the American West than traditional myths?”

### Discussion Questions

- How does the Andrus Hotel reflect the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of its time in Montana?
- In what ways does Thomas Savage’s portrayal of the West differ from the popular myths of cowboys and wide-open frontiers?
- How can we use literature like Savage’s to better understand Montana’s history and the lived experiences of its people?
- What does Savage’s exploration of suppressed identities and family tension tell us about societal expectations in mid-20th century Montana?

### Classroom Resources

**Montana Memory Project** – Historic Hotels Collection (<https://www.mtmemory.org/>)

- This digital archive provides historical photographs, maps, and documents related to historic hotels across Montana, helping students compare the Andrus Hotel to similar establishments.

**National Register of Historic Places** – Montana Listings  
(<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>)

- The Andrus Hotel may be listed in the National Register, and exploring similar listings will give students insight into the preservation of historic structures and their significance.

**Montana Historical Society – Historic Preservation Resources (<https://mhs.mt.gov/>)**

- The MHS provides extensive resources on historic preservation and architecture in Montana, which can contextualize the Andrus Hotel's significance.

**Local News Archives (Dillon Tribune or Montana Standard)**

- Historic newspaper articles may contain advertisements, reports on notable events, or guest stories related to the Andrus Hotel, offering firsthand historical perspectives.

**Economic and Social Impact of Railroads on Small-Town Montana (Journal Article or Historical Research Paper)**

- Since many historic hotels were built near railroads, understanding how rail travel shaped town economies (including Dillon) can provide context for why the Andrus Hotel was significant.