1. How does violence—whether toward nature, animal, or human—epitomize, continue, critique, and/or break with historical Hollywood “Indian” stereotypes? Think of Baird’s comment, “we have here [at Dances’ rescue] the same cheer for the good guys; the skillful and precise application of violence in order to right the world.”

2. Why the ending violence (murder?) against the buffalo, Cisco, and Two Socks? How do these animal deaths factor into stereotyping or critiquing of stereotyping?

3. How do the animal-human relationships mirror and/or diverge from stereotypes?

4. Is Two Socks (maybe even Cisco?) Dunbar’s “Spirit Guide?” How does Two Socks factor into Dunbar’s evolution toward Native-ness? What does Two Socks’ death symbolize and/or suggest?

5. Is Dunbar “super-human? Why? (note: he seems to calm/talk to animals, he quickly adapts to Native ways, he calms the wild, “renounces” race?)

6. Compare and contrast the Lakota and Pawnee? Do (or how might) the tribes symbolize the division between “bad Indian” and “good Indian,” and that “good Indians” help whites?

7. Through the Lakota/Pawnee relationship, what do we learn (according to the movie) about Native relations and how does this knowledge continue or break with Hollywood?

8. Does Dunbar legitimately (authentically?) renounce his name (race?) after the Pawnee defeat? He says, “I gradually began to look at it [the Pawnee fight] in a new way. I felt a pride I'd never felt before. I'd never really known who John Dunbar was. Perhaps the name itself had no meaning. But as I heard my Sioux name being called over and over, I knew for the first time who I really was.” Does he cement the renunciation when he defies Calvary orders and speaks in Lakota and refers to himself as “Dances with Wolves?” Can he even do this?

9. How do (if at all) ‘reverse stereotypes’ factor into the movie, i.e. how do “positive” stereotypes possibly overgeneralize, exaggerate, or redefine Native sensibilities, mores, rituals, etc.? (Example: saying “Most African Americans like rap and hip/hip,” can function as a reverse stereotype, so too can “All Natives are spiritual and profound” act in the same manner. Both seem to be ‘positive’ statements, glorifications of talent or creativity, but they nonetheless ‘pigeon hole.’)

10. How is the good-guy/bad-guy dichotomy realized and, perhaps, stereotyped or simplified? (hint: Calvary vs Lakota, Lakota vs Pawnee, etc.)

11. What is the purpose of Major Fambrough’s presence (the ‘crazy’ major that kills himself)? Does it conform to Hollywood conventions…to Indian stereotypes…to frontier myths?

12. Why does Black Shawl (Kicking Bird’s wife), in reference to Dances with Wolves’ and Stands with a Fist’s romance say, “They [the tribe] like the
match. It makes sense. They’re both white.” How does this statement reiterate (resurrect?) the old Western stereotypes? Thinking back on Pye’s miscegenation article (and The Searchers) why is this statement significant?

13. Why is Stands with a Fist’s hair ALWAYS seemingly messed and tangled? All other Native women are shown with tightly braided hair (e.g. Black Shawl) or combed unbound hair (e.g. old woman who hits Pawnee attacker). Is this merely an image directed toward character/plot development (period of mourning?) or perhaps symptomatic (white women can’t truly function in the ‘wild’)?

14. How does the cinematography (the wide, sweeping scenes, the almost sublime landscape, the bright colors and vivid images, the quick and slow shots, etc.) contribute to our sensibilities as an audience aware of Native stereotypes in film? I.e. how do we, as students of this very class, interpret the beauty of the film with the descriptive/normative statements/suggestions made therein?

15. There is one striking image and color in the victory dance after the scalping (remember, Dunbar stands aloof, seeing the scalps, the wagon, the blood and then sleeps alone, separate from the tribe)...what is it, and why does the camera (or at least Dunbar’s own eye) seem to linger on it? How does this scene ‘destroy’ the positive progress the film had established previously?

16. Considered an ‘epic western,” according to Baird, how does this movie, in actuality, perpetuate the mythic, the supernatural, the magical (think magical realism), and the surreal, the epic? Are these aesthetic or narrative elements? How do these contribute to our viewing of Dunbar? The Lakota? The Pawnee? The Calvary?

17. How does “the trade,” as a general concept, figure into the film? (hint: think Dances trading coat with Wind in His Hair, trading pipes, trading knowledge, etc.).

18. How does the concept of “paradise” figure into the film both in image and in narrative? How does it disseminate or destroy repeated Hollywood images of Natives and their landscapes (compare with the same types of ‘images’ in Powwow Highway and The Searchers)?

19. When Dunbar first comes upon Fort Sedgewick he sees abandonment, death, and ruin, caves etched in the hillside, carcasses in the pond, etc. What does all this imagery (don’t think of the prior scenes when the original fort soldiers deserted) suggest about the frontier, the US military, and, perhaps, white determination and exploration?

20. How is the Calvary and the white person (perhaps) stereotyped and how might those stereotypes suggest, indirectly, normative claims about the Natives? (ex. White men are ignorant thieves [illiterate guy steals journal], Natives are thieves with reasons [boys steal Cisco to gain fame]??).

21. We can justify Stands with a Fist’s Massacre memory as mere character development/back story, but how does it (think of Baird’s discussion of “The Massacre”), whether meaning to or not, contribute to the old, repeated stereotypes?