

Honors American Literature - SUMMER READING DIRECTIONS FOR ANNOTATING A TEXT

From *How to Read a Book* (Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren)

If you have the habit of asking a book questions as you read, you are a better reader than if you do not. But . . . merely asking questions is not enough. You have to try to answer them. And although that could be done, theoretically, in your mind only, it is easier to do it with a pencil in your hand. The pencil then becomes the sign of your alertness while you read.

When you buy a book, you establish a property right in it, just as you do in clothes or furniture when you buy and pay for them. But the act of purchase is actually only the prelude to possession in the case of a book. Full ownership of a book only comes when you have made it a part of yourself, and the best way to make yourself a part of it -- which comes to the same thing -- is by writing in it. Why is marking a book indispensable to reading it?

- First, it keeps you awake -- not merely conscious, but wide awake.
- Second, reading, if it is active, is thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written. The person who says he knows what he thinks but cannot express it usually does not know what he thinks.
- Third, writing your reactions down helps you to remember the thoughts of the author.

For this course and for these reasons among others, you will be asked to annotate the major novels that we will be reading and that you will be purchasing. Your copies of the novels will be collected and graded at the end of each novel unit.

Note: Reading assignments should be read *and* annotated before class. It is perfectly okay to add to your markings (in fact I encourage you to do so) while we discuss in class or after you finish the book and are working on an essay, but the bulk of the job should be done in conjunction with your reading for class preparation.

Note: If you find annotating while you read to be annoying and awkward, do it after you read. Go back after a chapter or assignment and then mark it carefully. You should be reading assignments twice anyway, so this isn't any less efficient than marking as you read and then rereading the material.

For the sake of standardization of annotating for class and for grading purposes, your book notes should follow this format:

Inside Front Cover: Character list with small space for character summary and for page references for key scenes, moments of character development, etc.

Inside Back Cover: Themes, allusions, images, motifs, key scenes, plot line, epiphanies, etc. List and add page references and/or notes as you read.

Bottom and Side Page Margins: Interpretive notes, questions, and/or remarks that refer to meaning of the page. Markings or notes to tie in with information on the inside back cover.

Top Margins: Plot notes -- a quick few words or phrases which summarize what happens here (useful for quick location of passages in discussion and for writing assignments).

Additional Markings:

underlining: done while or after reading to help locate passages for discussion, essays, or questions.

brackets: done while or after reading to highlight key speeches, descriptions, etc. that are too long to underline easily.

Marking and Notetaking tips (optional):

- ⇒ Use one color ink to do initial marking while reading; then go back with another color or colors to mark more thoroughly once you have finished a larger section, have had time to think about it and are able to see development of images, etc. more clearly.
- ⇒ At chapter or section ends, stop to index page numbers on your front cover list of character information and traits as well as on your back cover list of themes, images, allusions, etc.
- ⇒ Do underlining as you read and side margin notes as you finish a page or two.
- ⇒ Add to side margin notes during class discussion also.

Grading:

Since everyone's notes will be similar in format yet somewhat different in content (there is obviously no one correct phrase to have at the top of page 112 of *The Scarlet Letter*, for example), book grades will be based on thoroughness, clarity, neatness, and apparent effort ("apparent effort" because I will obviously not read all the notes on every page of everyone's book).

In addition, books may be collected in mid-reading, especially early on in the year, to see how the notetaking is going.

Reading Assignment #1

In Cold Blood, by Truman Capote

As you read the novel *In Cold Blood* this summer, consider the questions provided. Make sure you read all the questions BEFORE you begin reading because many of the questions require that you take notes on character behavior or comments while reading in order to answer them.

Take notes IN your book. This process is called annotation. You'll find directions for annotation attached. Be sure that you are comfortable with and can access your annotations easily and quickly for our discussions in the fall. I will expect to see proof of your notes ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS – and YES, this means you will leave your book with me for grading over night! You can expect discussion, at least one detailed quiz, and a timed-writing essay on the novel.

Here's to pleasant summer reading!

Study Guide – *In Cold Blood*

In Cold Blood, published in 1965, was an instant critical and commercial success. Truman Capote received literary recognition that led to his celebrity status as an author. Capote stated that he had invented a new genre of literature which he called the “nonfiction novel.” He used documentary methods to merge journalism and fiction to create a new style of writing that he referred to as “reportage.”

In Cold Blood tells the story of the murders of the Clutter family of Holcomb, Kansas in 1959. The four parts of this nonfiction novel are told in painstaking detail. Part 1- The Last to See Them Alive describes the family, their place in the community and their last day's activities in parallel with the activities of the murderers as they close in on Holcomb. The section ends with the discovery of the bodies of the Clutter family. The second section, Part 2 – Persons Unknown, recounts the aftermath of the murders as the criminals make their getaway and the town confronts the fact that its peaceful existence is at an end. The detectives from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation are introduced as a dedicated, intense group of men, determined to solve the crime. The third division, Part 3 – The Answer, explains how the murderers chose their victims and follows the two men as they travel. In this section of the book, the KBI closes in on the murderers' identities and they are finally captured. The final section of the book, Part 4 – The Corner, tells of the trial and the murderers' executions.

In Cold Blood—Guide Questions

DIRECTIONS: Remember – you are answering these in writing in the book. Review the directions for annotation before you start.

1. Why does Capote start the book with such a detailed description of Holcomb, Kansas?
2. What kind of man is Herbert Clutter? How does Capote's description of Herb's last day of life reveal his character?
3. What aspects of the descriptions of Bonnie, Nancy and Kenyon make them sympathetic characters?
4. How does Capote build suspense in Part 1, despite the fact that the reader already knows the Clutters will be murdered?
5. The killers approach Holcomb as the Clutters go about their daily business. As Dick and Perry approach Holcomb, what information does Capote give that shows the two men intend to leave no one alive at the Clutter ranch?
6. Compare and contrast Dick and Perry. How are they similar to each other? How are they different?
7. Capote does not describe the murders. Why?
8. How does Holcomb respond to the news about the deaths of the Clutters?
9. Why is Herb Clutter's experience with the insurance agent an example of irony?
10. There is no traditional protagonist in *In Cold Blood*. Capote chooses to focus on whoever is of importance at the moment in the plot of the story. However, Alvin Dewey is, and remains, of critical importance to the plot. Who is Dewey and why does he remain an important character until the novel ends?
11. After the murders, Dick and Perry decide they must stay together. Why? How do the two men get money to continue traveling? Why can't they hold onto the money they get?
12. Perry's father: Tex John Smith writes a biography of Perry. Why does Capote reproduce the letter in full for the reader? What important insight does the reader gain from the letter from Perry's father?
13. Perry admits to Dick that he is surprised that he could actually commit the murders of the Clutters. What lie had Perry told Dick about another murder he supposedly committed?
14. It is obvious at this point in the story that Capote is sympathetic to Perry. Why might Capote sympathize with Perry? Do you feel any sympathy for him? Explain.
15. Who finally identifies Perry and Dick as the murderers? How did this person know they had committed the crimes?
16. Where are Perry and Dick when they are finally captured? Why do the two men think they are being questioned? What does this naïve attitude show about the men's characters?

17. Why is the chapter where Perry confesses the climax of the novel? What information is finally revealed about the motive for the murders and the actual events on the night the Clutters died? Which of the two men actually did the murders?
18. How is Dick planning on escaping from the prison?
19. During the trial, the judge stops the psychologist from elaborating after he states that he is not sure if Perry could tell right from wrong during the crime. Capote, as the narrator, goes on to describe Perry's psychological state. What does Capote decide is wrong with Perry? How does Capote's judgment of Perry's mental state show him to be sympathetic to Perry?
20. How does Capote feel about the death penalty?
21. Who is Lowell Lee Andrews? Why is his situation a parallel to the cases of Perry and Dick?
22. After five years, Perry and Dick are hanged. Through whose eyes does the reader experience the executions?
23. What role does "dreaming" play in the novel both figuratively and literally? Think of Perry's dreams about the parrot and finding gold in Mexico, and of Dewey's nightmares. How reliable is what Capote tells the reader about these dreams?
24. What did Dewey expect to feel when it was all over? How does his conversation with Susan Kidwell at the graveyard reveal his depression?
25. Do you think Dick and Perry were sane? Did the psychiatric analysis of them and descriptions of other cold-blooded killers surprise or frighten you? Did this book make you think differently about violent crime or the death penalty?

Assignment #2

***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey**

As you read the novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* this summer, consider the questions provided. Make sure you read all the questions BEFORE you begin reading because many of the questions require that you take notes on character behavior or comments while reading in order to answer them.

Take notes IN your book. This process is called annotation. You'll find directions for annotation attached. Be sure that you are comfortable with and can access your annotations easily and quickly for our discussions in the fall. I will expect to see proof of your notes ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS – and YES, this means you will leave your book with me for grading over night! You can expect discussion, at least one detailed quiz, and a timed-writing essay on the novel.

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STUDY GUIDE -- *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

The book appeared in 1962, and it was a huge hit. Kesey himself drew on his personal experiences as an aide in a California mental hospital, and everything that is described here - the therapeutic community notion, the lobotomy, electroshock - really happened. This really is how mental hospitals worked.

Kesey himself went on to be a pioneer of the hippie phenomenon, and was described at length in Tom Wolfe's book THE ELECTRIC KOOL AID ACID TEST. (Both Wolfe and Kesey are discussed at length in ACID DREAMS).

Several questions to respond to IN WRITING and to think about when reading the book, all of which we will discuss in class:

1. Focus initially on the book's attitude to women: note how the hippie and beatnik attitude to women is often hostile, in the sense that dominant or authoritarian women are seen as evil and threatening. Thee hippie revolt is an assertion of free masculinity. Note how personal liberation is defined in the book in traditional male/Hemingway terms. Is the book anti-woman? In Kesey's terms, what are the "good" female characters like? What prospects does this book offer a woman as opposed to a man?
2. Tell me about the name of Nurse Ratched.
3. Note how repression is identified as the suppression of masculinity, with "castration" a common image. In what sense was America in this era a "matriarchy"?
4. Is the book racist and/or anti-black? Why?
5. Throughout the book, McMurphy is presented as a Christ-symbol, often in quite heavy-handed ways - why and how? Think about this carefully - there are quite a few examples to draw on. How does Candy fit in all this? And how does the "Christ" treatment compare to that of Valentine Michael Smith?
6. Why is the fishing trip such a central episode of the book? What does it all mean?
7. The mental hospital is clearly meant as a microcosm of America in the early 1960s, a picture of the world the hippies and others are rebelling against. In what ways? What does this tell us about the nature and shape of that revolt?
8. Why do we hear so much about McMurphy's record in resisting the Communists in Korea? What parallels are suggested between the communist enemy and American liberalism? What aspect of Communist misbehavior is being recalled throughout the book?
9. Tell me about Chief Broom. Is he a reliable narrator? Why is it significant that he is an Indian? Tell me about his idea of the Combine? What form does his liberation take?
10. How is the book influenced by Freudian thought? If you don't recognize the term, do a quick google search to help you answer this question.
11. Much of the book concerns the evils of approved official drugs. What does this tell us about the use of other pleasurable drugs by hippies and other 1960s dissidents?
12. Why do you think the book become such an influential manifesto for 1960s dissidents and rebels?
13. The "therapeutic community" is saturated with mutual informing and betrayal, the culture of denunciation. What other great political satires of the 20th century does this recall? Why is this so powerful a theme for an author writing in this period? For Kesey, what has gone wrong with modern America?
14. How does the book criticize political liberalism of the sort that would become dominant under the Great Society and related eras? To use a phrase of the 1970s, is liberalism any more than "friendly fascism"?

15. The book is very cynical indeed about democracy. Why and how?
16. The book glorifies criminals and lunatics. What does this tell us about how 1960s radicalism is likely to go wrong?
17. Why is gambling so significant to McMurphy's character? Why is this so unpopular with the authorities?
18. What or who might be symbolized by Big Nurse?
19. How does the book imagine or portray liberation? How does this differ from traditional political solutions? Note that liberation does NOT mean healing from insanity.
20. Kesey was making heavy use of LSD and other drugs when writing this book. When does this fact become particularly apparent in the text?
21. Why is laughter such a theme of the book? What does it mean for Kesey?
22. In the book, the argument is clearly that the "loonies" are much healthier than the sane. Why and how? Is insanity the only sane response to a crazy world? What does this tell us about the labeling of other problems, like crime? How would this affect social policy in the 1960s and beyond?
23. If you believe the arguments that Kesey is putting forward - and many people would - what would that suggest about how best to reform society?