

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**In Cold Blood**

by Truman Capote

written by Eva Richardson

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# In Cold Blood

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the characteristics of non-fiction.
2. trace and analyze the theme of sexuality throughout the text.
3. analyze the narrative chapter structure and varying viewpoints throughout the text.
4. discuss the novel as a critical commentary on the American Dream.
5. study how tone and level of language create meaning and reinforce Capote's themes.
6. examine the text as a reflection on 1950s middle-class America.
7. analyze and discuss the role of author and narrator.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. offer a close reading of *In Cold Blood* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

## **Background Information**

### AMERICA IN THE 1950S

1950s American society was marked by an expanding middle class, confident consumer spending, and the early development of American suburbia. Having emerged from its involvement in World War II, America was eager to focus on the proliferation of an affluent middle class at home. The popularization of the automobile and new product advertising through television and magazines revolutionized American households. Most middle class homes quickly came to be equipped with television sets, microwave ovens, and washing machines. A booming construction industry helped develop the earliest American suburbs, and the first enclosed shopping malls appeared and soon drastically changed the American landscape. As Americans migrated to comfortable communities on the outskirts of cities, those cities entered a period of deterioration and social and economic decline that, in many instances, has lasted well into the twenty-first century.

While the American economy was prosperous and progressive throughout the 1950s, American society was marked by social conservatism and conformity. America's ongoing involvement in the Cold War, which lasted from 1945 through 1991, presented an ideological clash between the capitalist consumer culture of the United States and the Western world on the one hand and the Communist regime of the Soviet Union and its allies on the other hand. Cold War tensions brought about a widespread fear of Communism and even escalated into irrational and unfounded persecution of individuals suspected to be Communist allies. The proliferation of anti-Communist propaganda that accompanied US Senator Joseph McCarthy's "Communist Witch Hunts" created an atmosphere of social compliance, fear, and intolerance.

### HISTORIC REFERENCE: THE CLUTTER MURDERS

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* is based on the true events surrounding the murders of the Clutters, a prominent Kansas farming family. On November 15, 1959, Herbert Clutter, his wife Bonnie, the couple's sixteen-year-old daughter Nancy, and their fifteen-year-old son Kenyon were brutally murdered in their farmhouse in Holcomb, Kansas. The perpetrators were Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, two ex-cons who had learned from a former farmhand that Herb Clutter was a wealthy man. They falsely believed that Mr. Clutter kept a safe stocked with large sums of cash in his study. Hickock and Smith, both petty criminals and social outcasts, planned to steal the cash and start new lives in Mexico. Once inside the Clutter home, Hickock and Smith quickly realized that Herb Clutter did not, in fact, have a safe or any cash in his house. Having agreed not to leave any witnesses to their crime, the two perpetrators bound Mr. Clutter and locked him into the upstairs bathroom along with the other members of the family. Then, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith killed all members of the Clutter family one by one. First, they led Mrs. Bonnie Clutter into her bedroom and shot her through the head. Then, they executed young Nancy, also in her bedroom. The killers then led Kenyon into the basement where they shot him. Finally Hickock and Smith forced Mr. Clutter into the basement as well. In the boiler room of his farmhouse, they hanged Mr. Clutter, slashed his throat, and shot him. The two left the farm with less than fifty dollars.

Within months of the murders, Hickock and Smith were apprehended by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation. In a much-publicized trial, the two men were found guilty and sentenced to death. After years of appeals, Hickock and Smith were eventually hanged on April 14, 1965.

Truman Capote learned about the Clutter murders when the *New York Times* reported the killings in their November 16, 1959 issue. Capote was immediately fascinated by the case, particularly because such a brutal slaying was extremely uncommon in a quiet, rural, middle-class town like Holcomb, Kansas. Once in Kansas, Capote carefully researched the case, frequently talking to police and investigators and interviewing the residents of Holcomb. Capote personally interrogated Hickock and Smith in their prison cells several times prior to their executions. Capote was at the Kansas State Penitentiary when Hickock and Smith were put to death. His first edition of *In Cold Blood* was released in 1966, just months after the executions.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

*In Cold Blood* presents a conflicted image of the notion of the American Dream. The text portrays a prosperous, homogenous, middle-class community, Holcomb, Kansas, that is forced to question its values and its sense of safety and security when the Clutter family is murdered.

Capote's text was among a growing number of novels and plays written in the early part of the twentieth century that questioned the validity of the promises made by the American Dream. Texts such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, among many others, simultaneously celebrate and criticize the concept of an American Dream. These texts warn Americans not to take the Dream for granted and encourage readers to recognize that the American Dream is available only to a small group of individuals while excluding a vast majority of people from its promises.

In *In Cold Blood*, the city of Holcomb and surrounding Finney County are portrayed as a prosperous community:

The last seven years have been years of doubtless beneficence. The farm ranchers in Finney County, of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators.

The Clutter family in particular is among the most affluent citizens in the Holcomb community. Herb Clutter is considered to be "the community's most widely known citizen, prominent both there and in Garden City." Having expanded his River Valley Farm into a lucrative operation with several employees, Herb Clutter is able to provide a comfortable life for his family, providing a modern lifestyle that includes automobiles and televisions: "Always certain of what he wanted from the world, Mr. Clutter had in large measure obtained it." For families like the Clutters, the American Dream has been realized.

But *In Cold Blood* also portrays the **failure of the American Dream**. For Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, a modern, comfortable middle-class lifestyle is unattainable. Raised in a dysfunctional family, Perry Smith considers himself to be misunderstood and, like Richard Hickock, falls into a life of petty crime. Unable to create a stable existence, the two ex-cons accept their roles as society outsiders and survive by stealing and writing false checks. Perry Smith dreams of a better life in Mexico, where he hopes to find a hidden treasure buried deep in the ocean. The attack on the Clutter family is designed to provide the two men with the financial means to relocate. Capote outlines their dreams of a better life: “Still no sign of Dick. But he was sure to show up; after all, the purpose of their meeting was Dick’s idea, his ‘score’. And when it was settled –Mexico.”

But the American Dream not only fails Dick Hickock and Perry Smith because they come from lower-class families and drift into a life of crime. The two men, particularly Perry Smith, are also haunted by **psychological challenges**. Richard Hickock chases women, but is secretly struggling with his sexual attraction to children. Perry Smith is physically handicapped as a result of a car accident. He is depressed and feels misunderstood. He suffers from feelings of shame due to his physical deformity. Considering himself to be a creative and artistic genius, Perry cannot fit into a world that does not share or recognize his vision. Perry’s wish of becoming an artist remains confined to his daydreams:

Singing, and the thought of doing so in front of an audience, was another mesmeric way of whittling hours. He always used the same mental scenery—a night club in Las Vegas, which happened to be his home town. It was an elegant room filled with celebrities excitedly focused on the sensational new star.

Both criminals eventually undergo psychiatric evaluations as they await their trial, and although the court system finds both of them to be mentally stable, Capote leaves his readers with the suggestion that the system at large has failed these two young men, ignored their psychiatric needs, and ultimately turned them into social outcasts and criminals.

## THE THEME OF HOMOSEXUALITY

*In Cold Blood* complicates notions of traditional sexuality, blending ideas of heterosexuality and homosexuality, platonic love and eroticism. Perry Smith’s feelings of admiration for Richard Hickock, for example, border on erotic attraction. Capote explains:

Dick was very literal-minded, very –he had no understanding of music, poetry—and yet when you got right down to it, Dick’s literalness; his pragmatic approach to every subject, was the primary reason Perry had been attracted to him, for it made Dick seem, compared to himself, so authentically tough, invulnerable, ‘totally masculine.’

Following the publication of Capote's novel, national interest in the case soared, and speculations about a sexual relationship between Dick and Perry surfaced. Critics even suggested that Capote himself, while he researched the case and interviewed the two criminals in prison, engaged in a sexual relationship with Perry Smith. Capote has denied those allegations, and no evidence exists to support them.

The novel never explicitly references a homosexual encounter between Perry and Dick, but the text is rife with references to Perry's attraction to his partner in crime. Some investigators even suggested that Perry started shooting in the Clutter house when he feared that Dick was about to sexually molest young Nancy Clutter.

Ultimately, the "threat" of homosexuality serves to further alienate Dick Hickock and Perry Smith from conventional middle-class society. It functions as another indicator marking the two men as social outcasts who are excluded from the promises of middle-class life and the American Dream.

## Literary and Narrative Techniques:

### THE NON-FICTION NOVEL

With the publication of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote debuted a new literary genre: the non-fiction novel. The non-fiction novel presents real events through the use of literary techniques generally associated with fiction narratives. In the case of *In Cold Blood*, Capote used newspaper accounts, investigative reports, letters, and interviews to piece together the story of the Clutter murders and the subsequent hunt for and eventual execution of Richard Hickock and Perry Smith. Capote traveled to the Holcomb area just months after the murders, and he spent six years collecting information, interviewing residents, and observing the work of the Kansas Bureau of Investigations under the leadership of Al Dewey. Yet, like a novel, the story is presented in vivid sentences and filled with evocative descriptions, poignant word choice, and lyrical images.

As a non-fiction novel, the text does not present the voice of the author or a specific narrator but, instead, relates the events and presents details from the points of view of different characters. The genre is closely associated with the **journalistic novel** and is generally considered to be a forerunner of the **True Crime** genre. True Crime has since evolved into one of the most popular literary genres, often exploiting highly sensationalized crimes. True Crime most frequently presents real, often well-publicized, murder cases and focuses on investigative strategies and criminal psychology, including psychological profiling of perpetrators and victims.

### CHAPTER DIVISION

*In Cold Blood* is divided into four sections: “The Last to See Them Alive,” “Persons Unknown,” “Answer,” and “The Corner.” Each section focuses specifically on one part of the case. The first section presents the murder. The reader knows right from the start who the perpetrators are and what their motivation for killing was. Yet, the story is able to capture the reader’s attention and remains suspenseful; rather than presenting a traditional murder mystery, Capote’s text is dedicated to bringing the characters alive and casting them as genuine human beings in front of the readers’ eyes.

The first section, “The Last to See Them Alive,” introduces the individual members of the Clutter family. Herb Clutter is depicted as a successful and likeable farmer who came from humble beginnings and—with dedication and hard work—turned River Valley Farm into a profitable operation. His wife, Bonnie Clutter, lives a quiet and withdrawn lifestyle, due to her frequent bouts with mental disease. Her “spells” and “nervousness” have sent her to seek medical attention several times over the years since her children were born. Capote explains that “everyone knew she had been an on-and-off psychiatric patient the last half-dozen years.” Yet, Bonnie Clutter is not depicted as an outcast of society. She “had a relaxing quality, as is generally true of defenseless persons who present no threat.”

The eldest Clutter daughters have already left the farm and started their own families. Sixteen-year old Nancy is revealed to be a popular and intelligent young girl. She is successful in school, well liked by friends and neighbors, and generally of a cheerful disposition:

Where she found the time, and still managed to ‘practically run that big house’ and be a straight-A student, the president of her class, a leader in the 4-H program and the Young Methodists League, a skilled rider, and excellent musician (piano, clarinet), and annual winner at the county fair (pastry, preserves, needlework, flower arrangement)—how a girl not yet seventeen could haul such a wagonload, and do so without ‘brag,’ with rather, merely, a radiant jauntiness, was an enigma to the community.

Nancy’s younger brother Kenyon, on the other hand, is a shy and reserved boy of fifteen. He is a skilled craftsman and works on his project in the basement of the family farm. He is not interested in sports or dating, but he is respected and thought to “live in a world of his own.”

The second and third sections of *In Cold Blood*, “Persons Unknown” and “Answer,” are dedicated largely to Richard Hickock and Perry Smith. Readers learn about the difficult upbringing both men experienced, about their drift into a world of petty crime, and about the psychological challenges both men struggled with throughout their lives without social or medical intervention or aid. Eerily, Capote’s text not only presents the Clutter family members in an extremely sympathetic light, but it also manages to humanize the two murderers, focusing on their blighted childhoods and their roles as societal outcasts.

## NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW

Within each section of the text, the narrative viewpoint shifts between presenting events and details from the perspective of the Clutter family, the citizens of Holcomb, and the Kansas Bureau of Investigations investigators to the perspectives of Richard Hickock and Perry Smith. Capote himself never interjects the narrative with his authorial voice. Instead, he relies on the voice of his characters, including letters, interviews, newspaper accounts, etc., to present the events.

Whenever Capote presents the perspective of the Clutters and their neighbors, his sentences are well-developed, complex, with vivid, descriptive diction. Whenever the perspective shifts toward the points of view of Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, the sentence structure tends to be shorter and frequently interfused with fragments. Additionally, sections presenting Perry and Dick’s world often utilize colloquialisms and slang. The shift in narrative tone helps reinforce the social discrepancy between the comfortable middle-class world of the Clutters and the lower-class, poverty-stricken world of Dick and Perry.



### **Questions for Essay and Discussion**

1. What is the significance of the American Dream in the novel?
2. What attitudes toward the murderers are expressed by the citizens of Holcomb before and after Richard Hickock and Perry Smith are caught?
3. What are the motivations behind the murder of the Clutter family?
4. Why does the text discuss the murders and reveal the identities of the perpetrators right in the beginning of the narrative?
5. What roles do mental disease and psychological disorders play in the novel?
6. How does the novel portray American middle-class life?
7. What is the role of the author/narrator in *In Cold Blood*?
8. Why is Perry Smith unable to relate to society?
9. How does the novel address the question of responsibility regarding the Clutter murders?
10. How does life in prison influence the thoughts, behaviors, and actions of Dick Hickock and Perry Smith?
11. What characterizes the relationship between Perry Smith and Richard Hickock?
12. How does the novel describe the investigative process of the Kansas Bureau of Investigations?
13. How does the text present the individual members of the Clutter family?
14. How does the novel represent the notion of guilt for Perry Smith and Richard Hickock?
15. What are the characteristics of the non-fiction novel? How does Capote realize the principles of the non-fiction novel?
16. What role does sexuality play within the novel?

## **Practice Free Response Questions**

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1:

The theme of American middle-class life is central to Capote's text.

Read the passage from the section "The Last to See Them Alive" from Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* that begins, "The master of River Valley Farm, Herbert William Clutter..." and ends several pages later with, "...had small reason to complain." Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Capote uses the Clutter family to represent the rising middle-class in 1950s America. Be certain to ground all of your assertions firmly in the text.

Do not merely summarize the passage.

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2:

While attention to character development, narrative structure, and relationships are essential elements in most works of literary merit, Capote, even more than other writers, tends to value character over other literary elements.

Study the passage from the "Persons Unknown" section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, beginning, "Mountains. Hawks wheeling in a white sky," and ending approximately three pages later with, "We sure splattered him." Then, write a coherent, well-written essay in which you analyze how Capote manages to effectively create a complete impression of the character of Perry Smith.

Do not merely describe the character or summarize the passage.

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3:

Carefully read the passage from the "Persons Unknown" section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, beginning, "On Monday, at midday, Dewey held a press conference..." and ending, "the Clutters were the least likely to be murdered." Then, write a well-organized essay in which you explain how the press conference marks this novel as an early example of "True Crime" literature.

Do not merely summarize the passage.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4:

Carefully read the passage from “The Corner” section of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, beginning, “But had Mr. Jones been permitted to discourse,” and ending several pages later with, “the amateur analyst reached conclusions not dissimilar.” Then, write a well-organized essay in which you evaluate the effectiveness of Capote’s including the report in his book. Be certain to justify your stance with evidence from the text

Do not merely summarize the plot.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5:

Average characters or everyday objects or activities are often portrayed in a work of literature in such a way that they come to symbolize a society’s or culture’s values and ideals. What these iconic characters or objects do, or what happens to them, is implicitly done by or to the society they represent. Choose an iconic character, object, or activity in Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, and write a well-organized and –supported essay in which you analyze Capote’s use of this icon and its contribution to the meaning of the overall work.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6:

While the concept of *genre* once assumed a fairly definitive distinction between forms, especially between fiction and nonfiction, modern writers and works frequently combine elements of different *genres*, thus making the distinctions less obvious. Consider such film genres as the “docudrama” and the “mockumentary.” In print, we now have “narrative nonfiction,” the “fictional memoir,” and the “true crime narrative.” Consider Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* as an early example—arguably even the prototype—of a new, hybrid *genre* and write a thoughtful and well-supported essay in which you analyze the techniques Capote uses from both fiction and nonfiction *genres* in order to create his new form: the nonfiction novel.

### Practice Multiple-choice Questions

#### PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-5:

Read the passage from the section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* titled "The Last to See Them Alive," starting with, "Like Mr. Clutter, " and ending, "became the gentle romantic." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

1. Perry uses the term "score" to refer to
  - A. a recent drug deal.
  - B. a robbery he was involved in.
  - C. his murder of a former roommate.
  - D. the murder of the Clutter family.
  - E. his collection of maps, songs, and letters.
2. The use of the sentence fragment "Still no sign of Dick" helps emphasize Perry's
  - A. restlessness.
  - B. fear of detection.
  - C. eagerness to make Dick's acquaintance.
  - D. guilty conscience.
  - E. frustration with Dick's habitual lateness.
3. The word choice in the phrase "conceiver of voyages" indicates that Perry
  - A. has visited many countries.
  - B. plans to retire in Canada.
  - C. has never visited another country.
  - D. knows little about foreign countries.
  - E. is an expert travel planner.
4. Comparing Perry's physique to that of a "weightlifter" and a "jockey" reinforces that Perry is
  - A. an avid sportsman.
  - B. attractive in Dick's eyes.
  - C. extraordinarily strong.
  - D. agile on his feet.
  - E. slightly deformed.
5. Perry's face is described as a "changeling's face" because he
  - A. has practiced controlling his facial expressions.
  - B. often behaves unpredictably and erratically.
  - C. was abandoned as a baby by his birth parents.
  - D. has a facial deformity.
  - E. can hide his emotions well.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6-10:

Read the passage from the section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* entitled "The Last to See Them Alive," starting with, "Nancy's bedroom was the smallest" and ending with, "Left at eleven." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below:

6. The simile used to describe Nancy's bedroom in the first sentence of the passage emphasizes that Nancy's bedroom is
  - A. cluttered with toys and collectibles.
  - B. clearly a "girl's room."
  - C. where she practices her dancing.
  - D. in need of redecoration.
  - E. to be the scene of the murders.
7. Descriptions of Nancy's bedroom help portray Nancy as a
  - A. "selfish and vain" girl.
  - B. spoiled and overindulged teenager.
  - C. typical American middle-class teenager.
  - D. "mirthful" young girl.
  - E. precocious child.
8. Nancy's nightly routine always includes all of the following except
  - A. washing her hair.
  - B. washing her face.
  - C. reciting a prayer.
  - D. writing in her diary.
  - E. thinking about herself.
9. Nancy experiments with different handwriting styles in order to
  - A. distinguish her diaries from year to year.
  - B. confuse her English teacher.
  - C. find out which style best suits her.
  - D. keep her thoughts private.
  - E. polish her penmanship.
10. Based on the passage describing Nancy's bedroom and nightly rituals, Nancy's character can best be characterized as
  - A. content.
  - B. apprehensive.
  - C. introverted.
  - D. boisterous.
  - E. unusual.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-15:

Read the passage from the section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* titled "Persons Unknown," starting with, "The car was parked on a promontory," and ending with, "A thing like that." Then choose the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

11. The short, incomplete sentences at the beginning of the passage suggest the
  - A. quality of life in Mexico.
  - B. strangeness of the foreign country.
  - C. restlessness of the travelers.
  - D. welcoming atmosphere of the place.
  - E. inherent danger of the place.
12. Perry's initial question to Dick in this passage indicates Perry's
  - A. fear of being arrested.
  - B. pride in the successful "score."
  - C. dissatisfaction with Mexico.
  - D. decision to give up crime.
  - E. growing sense of guilt.
13. The reference to the binoculars leather case "initialed H.W.C." serves as a literary device to
  - A. exaggerate Perry's guilt.
  - B. symbolize the death of Herb Clutter.
  - C. personify the leather case.
  - D. foreshadow the murderers' apprehension.
  - E. emphasizes Perry's interest in collectibles.
14. Dick is beginning to be afraid of Perry for all the following reasons except because Perry
  - A. has become strange and unpredictable.
  - B. appears to be capable of killing Dick.
  - C. has severe psychological problems.
  - D. has threatened to kill Dick.
  - E. can be secretive and difficult to understand.
15. The alliteration "serene and slightly sleepy" helps to emphasize
  - A. Perry's feelings of superiority toward Dick.
  - B. the disconnect between Perry's interior and exterior.
  - C. Perry's addiction to painkillers, particularly aspirin.
  - D. the new, relaxed lifestyle in Mexico.
  - E. Perry's disregard for his own criminal actions.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16-20:

Read the passage from the section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* titled "Answer," starting with, "Nye was right," and ending with, "She would have been seventeen." Then choose the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

16. Perry's statement "The Sunflower State. I cried my eyes out" can be considered an instance of
  - A. irony.
  - B. hyperbole.
  - C. allusion.
  - D. metaphor.
  - E. personification.
17. Perry's body language following Dewey's claim that he had never been in Fort Scott can be characterized as
  - A. disrespectful.
  - B. confused.
  - C. unwavering.
  - D. uneasy.
  - E. diffident.
18. When investigator Dewey claims that Perry and Dick were never in Fort Scott, Perry responds by
  - A. insisting again that he was there.
  - B. providing evidence that he was there.
  - C. evading a response to the claim.
  - D. accusing Dewey of lying.
  - E. asking for legal assistance.
19. Descriptions of investigator Duntz indicate that he was chosen to accuse Perry of murder because of all the following reasons except that he
  - A. is physically imposing.
  - B. speaks slowly and with authority.
  - C. appears intimidating.
  - D. shows compassion to Perry.
  - E. doesn't waver in his accusations.
20. According to police investigators, Perry's most incriminating behavior is his
  - A. consistent denial.
  - B. emotional breakdown.
  - C. failure to ask questions.
  - D. inability to offer the names of the prostitutes.
  - E. failure to provide an alibi.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21-25:

Read the passage from the section of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* titled "The Corner," starting with, "Two years passed," and ending with, "giving candy to kids." Then select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

21. The simile used to describe Dick and Perry's prison cells in the second paragraph of the section indicates that
  - A. the cells are generally calm and noiseless.
  - B. Dick and Perry are slowly losing their minds.
  - C. Dick and Perry never see any visitors.
  - D. the cells frequently resound with noise from other parts of the building.
  - E. prison has forced Dick and Perry to listen to their consciences.
22. Capote's choice of the word *condemned* when describing Dick and Perry not only refers to their criminal conviction, but also implies that
  - A. Dick and Perry have no chance of being granted a retrial.
  - B. Dick and Perry are "sinners" in the eyes of God.
  - C. the state of Kansas will not honor their request for an appeal.
  - D. prison life has turned Dick and Perry into hardened criminals.
  - E. American society has failed Dick and Perry and turned them into outcasts.
23. Perry's reaction to the sweltering summer days shows that he
  - A. wants to escape reality.
  - B. wants to learn about the legal system.
  - C. has accepted his fate.
  - D. is plagued by feelings of anger.
  - E. wishes he could go outside.
24. By likening the death penalty to candy for kids, Dick expresses his belief that
  - A. the Kansas court system is too eager to impose the death penalty.
  - B. the treatment of prisoners within the Kansas court system is unacceptable.
  - C. death will be a welcomed end to a long ordeal for Dick.
  - D. Kansas society has treated Dick and Perry like children.
  - E. prisoners are treated exceptionally well.
25. Perry's reaction to the books Dick gives him reveals that Perry is
  - A. physically attracted to men.
  - B. uncomfortable about sex.
  - C. ashamed of his sexuality.
  - D. absolutely not interested in sex.
  - E. shocked by Dick's literary choices.



### **Multiple-choice Answers With Explanations**

1. Although Perry and Dick have a history of drug abuse (A) and robberies (B), they use the term “score” to **refer to the murder of the Clutter family (D)**. Although Perry has told Dick that he has killed a man (C), the text later reveals that Perry lied about the murder. Perry’s books, maps, and letters (E) are considered by him to be treasures, but he never uses the term “score” to refer to them.
2. The use of the sentence fragment “Still no sign of Dick” does not indicate Perry’s fear of detection (B) or guilty conscience (D) since the murder has not yet taken place. Dick and Perry have known each other for a while, so (C) is illogical. Instead, the short sentence shows that Perry is **restless (A), since Dick is late for a meeting**. However, nothing indicates that Dick has a tendency to be habitually late (E).
3. Perry is not lacking in knowledge about foreign countries (D). In fact, Perry has studied maps and travel guides for several countries. He plans to retire to Mexico, not to Canada (B). Perry’s knowledge of other countries comes from travel guides and maps, not from his own visits (A). His experience in actually planning a realistic trip (E) is non-existent. In fact, Perry only “conceives” or “dreams” of foreign places but **has not actually visited another country (C)**.
4. Perry’s physical deformity prevents him from being an avid sportsman (A), extraordinarily strong (C), or agile (D). **His larger upper body (like a weightlifter) and his smaller lower body (like a jockey) (E)** make up Perry’s deformed appearance. Dick does not display any homosexual tendencies toward Perry (B). In fact, he is a womanizer and attracted to young girls.
5. Although Perry had a difficult childhood, he was not abandoned by his parents until he was older (C). The passage does not reveal any information about his unpredictable behavior (B), and his deformity is limited to his body and does not extend to his face (D). Perry has, however, managed to **control his facial expressions (A)** by practicing to manipulate his face in front of the mirror. That does, however, not mean that he can hide his emotions well (E), since he is prone to sudden mood swings.
6. Nancy’s bedroom is neat and tidy, not cluttered with toys and collectibles (A). It is a modern, not outdated room (D). While the text does not discuss Nancy’s dancing (C), it clearly indicates that the room is **colored like “ballerina’s tutu” in pink, white, and blue (B)**. Although the murder of Nancy will eventually take place inside her bedroom, there is no textual indication that the description of her room serves as a foreshadowing of the murders (E).

7. Although Nancy describes her late evenings as her “selfish time,” descriptions of her bedroom indicate that Nancy is not selfish, but giving and caring (A). She is a modest girl (B) who is generally cheerful (D). All in all, descriptions of Nancy’s room reveal her to be **the quintessential American middle-class teenager (D)**, not a girl who has developed prematurely (E).
8. Nancy’s nightly routine always includes washing her face (B), praying (C), focusing on her personal needs and herself (E), and writing in her diary (D). **She washes her hair, however, only on Saturdays, not nightly (A).**
9. Nancy is a good student who does not intentionally confuse her English teacher (B). She uses different bands of color, not handwriting to keep her diaries separate from year to year (A), and she does not express any concern about her diary’s privacy (D) or her penmanship (E). Nancy is a teenager trying to find herself and **experimenting with different styles that help express the “real” Nancy (C).**
10. Nancy is confident, not apprehensive (B). She is an outgoing girl (C), while always being modest and quiet instead of boisterous (D). Nancy is a typical teenager, not unusual in any way (E). Overall, Nancy **seems to be very content with her life (A).**
11. Perry and Dick have not yet had a chance to find out what life in Mexico will be like (A). They are no longer restless (C) but glad to be in a new place. The short, incomplete sentences are too stark to evoke a warm, welcoming tone (D). Instead, they describe a place that is **strange and unfamiliar (B)**, though not necessarily dangerous (E).
12. Perry no longer experiences pride (B) over the murder. Although he is happy with his decision to move to Mexico (C), Perry has no intention to mend his criminal ways (D) and does not yet fear that his arrest is imminent (A) because he believes the escape to Mexico will ensure his safety. However, **he cannot escape a growing feeling of guilt (E).**
13. The reference to the binoculars’ leather case “initialed H.W.C.” serves as a literary device that **foreshadows the successful outcome of the police investigation since police will locate the stolen goods and trace them to the Clutter home (D).** An exaggeration presents an idea or action as more intense than it really is (A). A symbol is an object or idea that represents something else (B). A personification endows inanimate objects with human characteristics (C). Perry’s collectibles are limited to maps, songs, and letters (E).
14. Dick is beginning to be afraid of Perry because Perry’s demeanor is strange and unpredictable (A). He appears to be capable of killing anyone, including Dick (B), and it becomes more apparent that he has severe psychological problems (C), making it difficult to figure him out at times (E). **He has not, however, threatened Dick personally (D).**

15. The alliteration “serene and slightly sleepy” is used figuratively to emphasize the **disconnect between Perry’s interior and exterior (B)**. It is not used in a literal sense to describe his pain killer addiction (C). Perry is haunted by feelings of guilt and does not feel superior to Dick (A). He is too uneasy to thoroughly enjoy his new life in Mexico (D) because he cannot forget his criminal past (E).
16. Perry’s statement “The Sunflower State. I cried my eyes out” can be considered an instance of **irony (A) because Perry does not really mean what he says. He was not sorry when he was ordered never to enter Kansas again.** A hyperbole (B) is an exaggeration. An allusion (C) is a reference to a historic or literary figure or event. A metaphor (D) is a comparison between two things without using “like” or “as.” A personification endows inanimate objects with human characteristics (E).
17. When Perry shifts in his chair and wets his lips, he does not show disrespect to the police officers (A). He is not confused (B) because he knows exactly why the police are interrogating him. He fails to be unwavering and evades most questions (C) but clearly lacks a sense of confidence (E). The body language clearly shows that **Perry is growing uneasy (D) because he knows that the police know about his involvement in the Clutter murders.**
18. When investigator Dewey claims that Perry and Dick were never in Fort Scott, Perry fails to insist that he was there (A), and he also cannot provide any evidence placing him in Fort Scott (B). Perry does not accuse Dewey of lying (D) and fails to ask for legal assistance (E). **Instead, he neither confirms nor denies the accusation, but evades a response to the claim (C).**
19. Investigator Duntz is described as a physically imposing “heavyweight” (A). His “cattle-country accent” causes him to speak slowly and lends importance to what he says (B), making him seem very intimidating (C). Duntz accuses Perry of murder in a straightforward manner, never **showing compassion for Perry (D)** and never wavering in his accusations (E). He is a seasoned investigator and interrogator, sure of himself.
20. Although Perry is unable to deliver the names of the prostitutes he and Dick spent time with (D), Perry does not suffer an emotional breakdown (B). Moreover, the investigators do not view his failure to provide an alibi (E) as the most incriminating evidence against Perry, since they know Perry has been leading a criminal lifestyle with prostitutes and staying in shady hotels. Perry neither confirms nor denies his involvement in the murders (A), but police investigators consider his **failure to deny anything or ask any questions (C)** to be the most incriminating behavior, since “an innocent man would ask questions.”

21. Dick and Perry's cell is only rarely noisy (D). Unless they are receiving visits from family and friends (C), the cells are **generally calm and noiseless (A)**. The passage does not indicate that the two men are losing their minds, although Capote clearly explores the psychological challenges the two experienced before they were imprisoned (B). Unlike many prisoners on death row, Dick and Perry never repent their deeds (E) and, in fact, develop a sense of anger toward the legal system for having punished them so harshly.
22. Dick and Perry were hardened criminals long before the beginning of the trial (D). They are still working the possibility to be granted a retrial (A) and appeal their case (C). The novel does not reveal any religious undertones (B), but it proposes that **society's failure to offer psychological intervention and social opportunities to Dick and Perry caused them to become outcasts and eventually murderers (E)**.
23. While Dick is trying to learn about the legal system, Perry remains uninterested in the law library (B). He does not display any signs of anger (D), but he also does not indicate that he has accepted his fate as a convicted murderer (C). Perry's tendency to sleep all day "like a baby" reveals that he **wants to escape reality (A)** rather than enjoy the beauty of the world or the warm weather (E).
24. While Dick occasionally complains about the treatment prisoners receive (B), the comparison between the death penalty and candy for kids shows that he believes **the Kansas court system is too eager to impose the death penalty, calling it "very popular" (A)** when another prisoner arrives on death row. Dick does everything possible to escape his ordeal in prison, including studying law (C), and he feels that the system is not showing him any kindness or justice and treating him like a monster (D), not exceptionally well (E).
25. Perry's physical attraction to Dick is only implied, never definitively revealed (A). In the past, Perry has shown normal interest in sex (D) and only discusses Dick's sexuality, not his own, as a shameful thing (C). Perry's refusal to read a slightly racy book and his adamant rejection of Perry's reading suggestions reveal that he is **uncomfortable with his own feelings with regard to sex (B)**. Perry is not surprised about Dick's choice of literature, since he is well familiar with his friend's sexual appetites (E); he merely refuses to address his own sexual feelings.

# In Cold Blood

## The Last to See Them Alive

1. What effect is achieved through the use of the simile comparing grain elevators to Greek temples?

*The simile likens the Holcomb grain elevators to Greek temples in order to show that Holcomb has become a very prosperous, well-to-do community over the last years. The comparison also shows that the agricultural industry in and around Holcomb must be highly valued since it ensures the wellbeing and financial security of the Holcomb community. Third, the allusion to classical Greece establishes a strong sense of both “civilization” and “tradition.” The agricultural Holcomb community is well-established and conventional.*

2. What is the purpose of the opening section of the text ending with “and as strangers”? What details are discussed and why?

*The opening section serves as the exposition for the text. It introduces the community of Holcomb, Kansas. Readers learn that Holcomb is a prosperous agricultural community. It comprises people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Holcomb is presented as a quiet, modest, and friendly middle-class community.*

3. According to the text, what is Mr. Clutter’s only reason for “disquiet” in his life?

*Mr. Clutter is a wealthy and influential farmer. His only concern is the health of his wife. Mrs. Clutter has been suffering from depression since the birth of her first daughter. Although she has periods of clarity and confidence, she spends most of her time alone in her room, avoiding society. Mrs. Clutter has been in psychiatric treatment several times over the last years.*

4. What aspect of River Valley Farm is Mr. Clutter’s pride and joy?

*Mr. Clutter takes particular pride in a grove of fruit trees that he has been able to establish despite the unfavorable climate of the region.*

5. How do the narrative voice and the sentence structure of the text change when the story shifts from descriptions of the Clutter family to descriptions of Dick Hickock and Perry Smith?

*Whenever Capote presents events and details from the viewpoint of the Clutter family or their friends and neighbors, sentences tend to be complex, well-structured, and filled with vivid and descriptive language. When the narrative viewpoint switches to the perspective of Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, sentences are frequently short or incomplete and utilize colloquialisms and slang. The shift in sentence structure echoes the disconnect between the comfortable middle-class world of the Clutters and the crime-ridden low-class world of Dick and Perry.*

6. How do comparisons between Perry's physique on the one hand and images of weightlifters and jockeys on the other hand help establish Perry's physical challenges?

*Due to a car accident several years before, Perry is physically handicapped. He has a strong upper body (like a weightlifter) but a malformed and weak lower body (like a jockey). Throughout the text, it becomes clear that Perry feels inadequate, often embarrassed, due to his unusual physical appearance.*

7. How does Perry's obsession with foreign countries and sunken treasures symbolize his social status as an outcast?

*Perry Smith dreams of escaping to Mexico, diving into deep oceans, and finding sunken treasures that will ensure a comfortable life in a tropical getaway. Perry's obsession with foreign countries shows him to be an outsider to middle-class American society. He has no chance to succeed in American society, since he does not have access to what the Dream promises or what is believed to be necessary to achieve it. Instead, Perry must look elsewhere for his dream of an ideal life.*

8. What is the purpose of introducing the Ashida family and their relationship to the Clutters?

*On the one hand, introducing the Ashida family shows that Holcomb is indeed a diverse community, proud of its democratic principles and welcoming neighbors. Moreover, the introduction of the Ashida family allows Capote to paint a positive, humble, and giving impression of Mr. Clutter. Not only does Mr. Clutter offer Mrs. Ashida a ride into town whenever necessary, but he is also considered by her to be a friend, a reliable authority, a man she can ask for advice on any subject.*

9. What is the most significant element of Perry and Dick's big "score"? What does their agreement on this element foreshadow?

*Perry and Dick agree early on that their big "score" can be successful only if they leave no witnesses behind when they burglarize the Clutter home and steal Mr. Clutter's money. Again and again, the two men reinforce one another when it comes to this one important point—not leaving anyone behind who may testify about the robbery. The insistence not to leave witnesses behind foreshadows the deaths of the entire Clutter family. Readers will already know that no one in the Clutter household will survive the attack.*

10. What do Holcomb citizens mean when they describe Kenyon as a boy who "lives in a world of his own"?

*Kenyon is an introverted adolescent. He is not interested in sports or girls. Instead, he prefers to focus on his carpentry projects, working long hours in the basement. He is shy, kind, and more interested in domestic happiness than youthful adventures.*



11. What is the biggest challenge to the friendship between Perry Smith and Willie-Jay?

*Perry Smith idolizes Willie-Jay. He considers Willie-Jay to be “way above average intellectually.” However, Perry disagrees with Willie-Jay’s religious beliefs. He considers Willie-Jay to be hypocritical—a criminal and a religious fanatic at the same time. Perry greatly values Willie-Jay’s friendship but clearly states that he will consider himself “deceived” and their friendship “false” if Willie-Jay insists on Perry’s accepting his religious beliefs as true.*

12. What is the primary motivation behind Perry’s decision to meet with Dick and become a part of the big “score”?

*Perry is hugely disappointed when he is unable to reconnect with his friend Willie-Jay after being paroled from prison. Perry buys a Greyhound bus ticket to meet with Willie-Jay only to learn that Willie-Jay has left town. Consequently, Perry sees no other option than to “consider Dick’s proposition” and agree to help him with the big “score.”*

13. What is Dick’s number one motivation for persuading Perry to become part of his plan to rob the Clutter home?

*Dick has already gathered all the information he needs to invade and burglarize River Valley Farm. He is convinced that Mr. Clutter has a safe in his office in which he stores large sums of money. However, he is convinced that he will need an assistant to help him successfully rob Mr. Clutter without leaving any witnesses. Dick has heard that Perry Smith once murdered a man, and he believes Perry to be “a natural killer.” Dick hopes that Perry’s ruthlessness and desire to kill will help him realize his plans.*

14. As the Holcomb community gathers at Hartman’s Café, what is the initial speculation about the killer or killers?

*Immediately following the murders, citizens of Holcomb gather at Hartman’s Café and exchange their fears, speculations, and suspicions. Most citizens believe that the Clutter killer must be a person who was closely acquainted with the family and was familiar with the layout of the farmhouse.*

15. How does initial speculation about the murders change the atmosphere within the Holcomb community?

*Most citizens of Holcomb believe that the murderer was someone intimately acquainted with the Clutter family and farmhouse. Since the grown Clutter children live out of town, they believe they that they are not responsible for the attacks. Instead, the Holcomb community begins to suspect that the perpetrator is one of their own citizens. Quickly, the warm, easy-going atmosphere in Holcomb changes into an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. Women no longer dare to be at home alone, and citizens begin locking their doors at night. Neighbors begin suspecting neighbors of being the attackers, and widespread fear settles within the community.*

### Persons Unknown

1. What aspects of the crime scene as observed by Al Dewey examining photographs foreshadow the eventual capture of the suspects?

*As Al Dewey looks over the crime scene photographs, he notices a diamond-shaped foot print. Later, the footprint will be matched to one of Perry Smith's shoes, leading to the capture and conviction of the suspects.*

2. How do the opening pages of this section serve to establish *In Cold Blood* as an important forerunner of the True Crime genre?

*True Crime literature focuses on real, usually well-publicized, murder cases and describes investigative strategies and criminal psychology, including psychological profiling of perpetrators and victims. In the opening pages of the section "Persons Unknown," Al Dewey gives a press conference, studies crime scene photographs, develops theories about the suspects, and focuses on forensic evidence, such as footprints. Dewey also speculates about the psychological motivations and state of mind of the perpetrators, an important characteristic of True Crime literature.*

3. What effect is achieved through the simile that likens Dick's confidence to a "kite that needed reeling in"?

*Dick is convinced that he has pulled off the perfect crime. Unlike Perry, he is not troubled by newspaper accounts of the murders. He believes that his decision "not to leave any witnesses" has ensured that he will remain undetected. Perry, however, fears that the police will eventually catch up with him and Perry. He views Dick's confidence as boisterous and exaggerated. Consequently, Perry reminds Dick that Floyd, the jailhouse informant, is in essence a witness who has to be considered a threat, thus attempting to deflate Dick's overblown confidence.*

4. What does Susan Kidwell find most disturbing about her visit to the funeral parlor? Why?

*When Susan views the bodies, she is shocked to see that each family member's head is encased in a large bale of cotton that has been sprayed with a sparkling substance. Susan is shocked to see the Clutters in that manner because the cotton encasement is a reminder of the horrific injuries the Clutters sustained to their faces when they were killed.*

5. What is significant about the way Dick gains the store clerk's confidence when he attempts to pay with a check? How is this ironic?

*Dick's lie about Perry's being a friend who is about to get married, makes the two ex-cons seem like normal, middle-class citizens, thus assuaging the middle-class store clerk's fears of outsiders. It is ironic because part of Dick's and Perry's psychological profiles is that they have been excluded from middle-class America and its benefits.*



6. What conclusion does Alvin Dewey draw about the murderers when he studies the crime scene photos once again? What leads him to his conclusion?

*Alvin Dewey believes that “at least one of the murderers was emotionally involved with the victims.” The pillow that had been placed under Kenyon’s head as well as the box spring that had been laid out for Mr. Clutter to lie on both suggest that the murderers tried to make their victims “comfortable” before killing them.*

7. What does Perry’s behavior at the beach and swimming pool reveal about his character?

*Perry and Dick are finally in Mexico, spending time with a rich German named Otto. But Perry is unable to relax fully, since he is self-conscious with regard to his physical malformity. At the beach or pool, he refuses to remove his pants, ashamed to reveal his legs. Perry’s behavior shows that, even while living his lifelong dream, he cannot escape the insecurities and inadequacies that made him an outcast in the United States. Perry’s problem do not lie only in American society; they lie also in his own self concept.*

8. Why does Capote include the lengthy letter written by Perry’s father? What theme does the letter reinforce?

*The inclusion of the letter by Perry Smith’s father enables Capote to establish his thematic suggestion that society at large has failed Perry Smith. Even before becoming a small-time crook and eventually a murderer, Perry did not have access to a normal, middle-class childhood. He grew up in a dysfunctional household, and he was plagued by psychological challenges from an early age. Yet, Perry never received any help or intervention. Clearly, Capote suggests that American society needs to do a better job of offering the promises of the American Dream to everyone, not only to a select minority.*

9. What is Perry’s sister’s motivation for suggesting that “we all were very adaptable” in her letter?

*Perry’s sister feels that she was the only one in the family who escaped the sub-par living standards provided by the Smith household. She left home, got married, and lives a modest middle-class life with her husband and children. Perry’s sister wants Perry to know that it is up to him to change his destiny. She states that “none of us have anyone to blame for whatever we have done with our own personal lives,” in essence blaming Perry for his bad choices and criminal background. Perry’s sister champions personal accountability over the influence of environment, and she wants Perry to begin taking his life into his own hands and turning his criminal past around.*

10. How are police investigators able to determine the order in which the Clutter family members were murdered?

*The coroner is able to determine a difference in body temperatures between the victims, thus being able to tell the police that the first Clutter murdered was Mrs. Clutter, then Nancy, then Kenyon, then Mr. Clutter.*

11. How are Dick and Perry planning to return to the United States? What does their plan reveal about their state of mind following the Clutter murders?

*Dick and Perry plan to hitchhike, then strangle the driver and take his car back to the United States. Clearly, Dick and Perry are severely overconfident, and they have developed an appetite for murder. They believe that they were able to get away with the perfect crime, and they don't shy away from committing additional murders.*

### Answer

1. What event in the opening pages of the section “Answer” turns the investigation around?

*Floyd Wells, the informant who had originally told Dick Hickock about the wealthy Clutter family, finally talks to investigators.*

2. Why might Dick’s father propose that Dick “wasn’t the same boy” after he injured his head in a car accident?

*Dick’s father suggests that Dick’s actions—his false check writing, womanizing, thieving etc.—are, in large part, influenced by the injuries he sustained as a result of a car accident. In essence, Mr. Hickock blames Dick’s actions on the injury to avoid taking responsibility for his son’s anti-social behavior. He is afraid that investigator Nye will think badly of him for having allowed his son to become a criminal, and he refuses to acknowledge any role he might have played in raising a son who is a social outcast.*

3. According to Mr. Hickock, what was unusual about Dick when he returned from his alleged trip to Fort Scott? Why is this observation significant?

*Mr. Hickock recalls that Dick fell asleep right after dinner while the family was watching a basketball game. Apparently, it was unusual for Dick to fall asleep so early. Apparently, Dick’s father is unaware of the fact that his son has actually traveled to Kansas to murder the Clutter family, and not to Fort Scott as he had told his parents.*

4. What incident occurs on the road from Mexico to the United States that Perry calls a “goddam miracle”?

*Just as Dick and Perry get ready to assault the man who has agreed to give them a lift to the United States, a third hitchhiker appears on the side of the road. The generous driver of the car decides to stop and take on another hitchhiker, thereby destroying Dick and Perry’s plan to strangle the driver and steal his car.*

5. What does the nickname Perry has given himself reveal about his character and his self image?

*Perry has adopted the nickname “Lone Wolf” for himself, even using the nickname to label boxes he intends to mail to himself. The nickname reveals Perry’s awareness of his status as a social outcast. It also indicates that he considers himself to be misunderstood by society, underestimated, and ahead of his time. Perry believes himself to be an artist and intellectual, ahead of his peers in critical and creative thinking and, therefore, marked as an outsider and a dreamer.*

6. According to Mrs. Johnson, what paradox exists in Perry's character?

*Mrs. Johnson reports that Perry can be a warm, sensitive man who "cries so easily." He got along well with the Johnson children and was genuinely pleasant to be around. On the other hand, Mrs. Johnson confesses that she is, in fact, afraid of Perry. Mrs. Johnson considers Perry to be conceited, unpredictable, and arrogant, a man capable of murder.*

7. How is investigator Dewey able to conceal a possible breakthrough in the case from the general public? Why does he consider it to be so important to keep new details of the case hidden?

*In order to prevent a possible breakthrough in the investigation from becoming public, Dewey confides in the editors of the area's biggest newspapers, asking them to hold the story in order to preserve the integrity of the investigation. First, he is not completely certain that Dick and Perry are the murderers, and he does not want the public misled. More important, he knows that, if Dick and Perry are the murderers, he needs their confession in order to get a warrant for their arrest and a conviction in court. He therefore believes that he must allow Dick and Perry to feel secure and not suspect detection if he wants any chance of apprehending them.*

8. Why is Perry disturbed by a newspaper account he reads when he and Dick arrive in Miami, Florida?

*When Dick and Perry arrive in Miami, Florida, Perry comes across a newspaper account detailing the murder of a family in Tallahassee. Perry is concerned to read the story because he knows that he and Dick were in Tallahassee on the day of the murders, and he is concerned that authorities will draw a connection between the Clutter and the Tallahassee slayings. Consequently, Perry is concerned about their stay in Miami for fear of becoming suspects.*

9. To what extent does Dick's sexuality contribute to his status as a societal outsider? What is Perry's reaction to Dick's sexuality?

*Although Dick has been married twice and is a womanizer, he has an uncontrollable attraction to young girls. He admits that he has acted on his aberrant sexual appetite several times. While in Miami with Perry, Dick approaches a young girl on the beach. Perry disapproves of Dick's sexual behavior toward young children. He finds it sickening and does anything in his power to stop Dick from indulging his urges.*

10. What tone characterizes Perry's attitude when he is being interrogated by police after being apprehended in Las Vegas?

*Dick's tone is arrogant and over-confident. He presents himself as a criminal mind who can outsmart his victims. He boasts of his conquests with prostitutes and openly confesses that he has stolen several cars. Initially, he seems to be completely unaware of the fact that the police know about his involvement with the Clutter murders.*

11. According to Perry, what is his only regret about the night of the murders?

*Perry believes that it was a mistake to leave a witness—Dick—after the shooting. He tells the police investigators that he “should’ve done it. Shot him dead.”*

### The Corner

1. What is Mrs. Meier's first impression of Perry Smith?

*Mrs. Meier feels compassion for Perry. She views him as a quiet, frightened, gentle, young man. Consequently, Mrs. Meier attempts to ease Perry's suffering by cooking him his favorite meal, Spanish rice.*

2. What changes does Perry want to make to his initial statement to police? What is his motivation for making the changes? What does this suggest about his character?

*Perry initially claimed that he shot two people, and Dick shot two people during the night of the murders. He then changes his mind and claims that he himself killed all four members of the Clutter family. Perry wants to spare Mrs. Hickock the pain of knowing that her son is a murderer. He himself does not have any family that visits during the trial, but Dick's family visits frequently, and Perry feels sorry for the pain Mrs. Hickock must endure. This suggests that Perry does, indeed, on some level, have something resembling compassion.*

3. What is significant about Perry's reaction to the letter written by Don Cullivan?

*Although Perry does not recall Don Cullivan from their time together in the military, he is delighted to see that Cullivan considers himself to be his "friend" and offers to help in any way he can. For Perry, an offer of friendship, even from an unlikely source, is a welcome change to his experiences with human beings in general. For a moment, he is able to pretend that he is not a social outcast.*

4. What is the symbolic significance of the big yellow bird?

*To Perry, the image of the big yellow bird has carried a lot of weight ever since his childhood. He always dreamed of an avenger and liberator in the shape of a big yellow bird who would come and save him from this world. While in prison awaiting trial, Perry dreams that the big yellow bird—possibly the prospect of death—will relieve him from his worries and liberate him to a better life.*

5. According to Dick's written statement composed in prison for his psychiatrist, what ultimately was Dick's motivation for invading the Clutter place?

*In a rare moment of openness, Dick reveals his attraction to young girls. He states that he knew that a young girl lived on the Clutter farm, and he states that "the main reason I went there was not to rob them but to rape the girl."*

6. For what purpose does Capote include Dr. Jones's lengthy report, even though it was not admitted into evidence during the trial?

*Capote's decision to include Dr. Jones's deposition indicates the fact that he considered the psychiatrist's findings to be extremely significant. Capote wants his readers to have a clear, complete image of the two defendants, and he believes that knowledge of their states of mind is necessary in order to understand their motivations and actions. The inclusion of the psychiatric evaluation in the text suggests that Capote offers the possibility that Perry and Dick may not have received a fair trial and that their psychiatric evaluations should have played a larger role within the criminal proceedings.*

7. Why does Perry go on a hunger strike? Why does he eventually change his mind and end his hunger strike?

*Perry initially goes on a hunger strike in order to take the power out of the hands of the police and court system. He believes that he should kill himself before giving the state of Kansas the right to kill him. However, after finding a postcard from his father addressed to the warden, Perry changes his mind. His "love and hatred" toward the world reawaken, and he decides to end his hunger strike, hanging on to his life for as long as he can.*

8. What strategy does Dick pursue in order to appeal his conviction?

*Dick begins studying law by reading as many books in the prison's law library as he possibly can. He writes numerous letters to legislators and advocacy groups, claiming that he did not receive a fair trial and demanding his appeal to be heard.*

9. What effect is achieved by the alliteration in the closing sentence?

*The alliteration in the phrase "the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat" almost imitate the prairie wind that is the subject of the sentence. Whatever one hears in the wind of the prairie is evoked—peace and closure, loneliness, the indifference of nature to the sufferings of humans. For a closing paragraph, the alliteration contributes a sense of something ongoing, like the wind—some kind of continuation beyond the end of this episode.*

# In Cold Blood

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6. What conclusion does Alvin Dewey draw about the murderers when he studies the crime scene photos once again? What leads him to his conclusion?  

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7. What does Perry's behavior at the beach and swimming pool reveal about his character?  

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8. Why does Capote include the lengthy letter written by Perry's father? What theme does the letter reinforce?  

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9. What is Perry's sister's motivation for suggesting that "we all were very adaptable" in her letter?  

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10. How are police investigators able to determine the order in which the Clutter family members were murdered?  

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11. How are Dick and Perry planning to return to the United States? What does their plan reveal about their state of mind following the Clutter murders?  

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### Answer

1. What event in the opening pages of the section “Answer” turns the investigation around?

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2. Why might Dick’s father propose that Dick “wasn’t the same boy” after he injured his head in a car accident?

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3. According to Mr. Hickock, what was unusual about Dick when he returned from his alleged trip to Fort Scott? Why is this observation significant?

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4. What incident occurs on the road from Mexico to the United States that Perry calls a “goddam miracle”?

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5. What does the nickname Perry has given himself reveal about his character and his self image?

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6. According to Mrs. Johnson, what paradox exists in Perry's character?

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7. How is investigator Dewey able to conceal a possible breakthrough in the case from the general public? Why does he consider it to be so important to keep new details of the case hidden?

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8. Why is Perry disturbed by a newspaper account he reads when he and Dick arrive in Miami, Florida?

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9. To what extent does Dick's sexuality contribute to his status as a societal outsider? What is Perry's reaction to Dick's sexuality?

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10. What tone characterizes Perry's attitude when he is being interrogated by police after being apprehended in Las Vegas?

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11. According to Perry, what is his only regret about the night of the murders?

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### The Corner

1. What is Mrs. Meier's first impression of Perry Smith?

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2. What changes does Perry want to make to his initial statement to police? What is his motivation for making the changes? What does this suggest about his character?

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3. What is significant about Perry's reaction to the letter written by Don Cullivan?

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4. What is the symbolic significance of the big yellow bird?

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5. According to Dick's written statement composed in prison for his psychiatrist, what ultimately was Dick's motivation for invading the Clutter place?

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6. For what purpose does Capote include Dr. Jones's lengthy report, even though it was not admitted into evidence during the trial?

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7. Why does Perry go on a hunger strike? Why does he eventually change his mind and end his hunger strike?

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8. What strategy does Dick pursue in order to appeal his conviction?

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9. What effect is achieved by the alliteration in the closing sentence?

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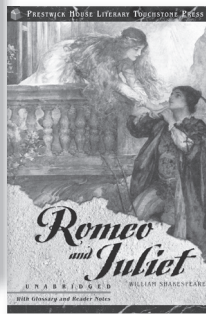
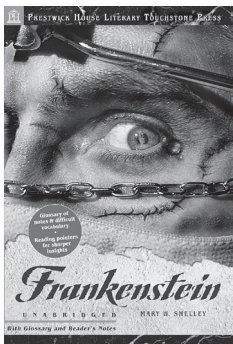
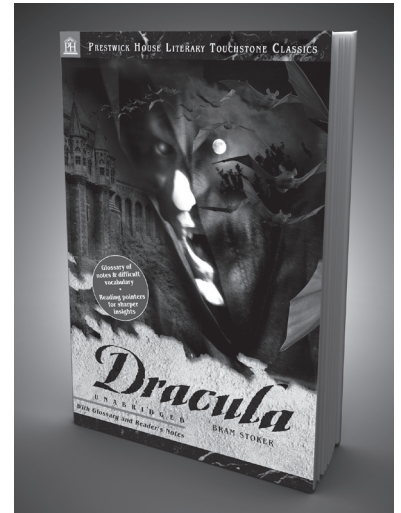
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