

AP Language
In Cold Blood by Truman Capote
Study and Comprehension Questions

Directions – Read the book and answer the following discussion questions. These will be turned in on the 1st day of school.

Part I: The Last to See Them Alive

Pages 1-37

1. How does Capote describe the town of Holcomb? Why might Holcomb be an attractive venue for criminals?
2. According to Capote, what is ironic about the effect the Clutter murders had on Holcomb's tight-knit community?
3. How was Mr. Clutter viewed within the Holcomb community? What was the only "cause for disquiet" (p. 7) in his life?
4. What two things might prohibit someone from approaching the Clutters' farm, and how might these things prove useless as a deterrent for criminals?
5. What "worldly belongings" does Perry keep with him, and what might these items reveal about him?
6. In what ways does Perry seem self-obsessed? Are his dreams realistic or not?
7. How do you think Truman Capote was able to recreate private conversations, such as Nancy's telephone conversations on pages 19-22 of the book and those between the Clutter family members?
8. What equipment did Dick have in his car when he picked up Perry outside the drugstore? How did he think these items would help them, and what can you infer from this?
9. What "projects" caused Mrs. Clutter despair, and why? How was she unlike her husband?
10. Prediction: Will Dick's refusal to wear stockings backfire? Why or why not?

Pages 38-74

Discussion Questions

1. Whom did Mr. Clutter meet with the day before he died, and why was this meeting both tragic and ironic?
2. Who is Willie-Jay? Explain his relationship with Perry.
3. What caused Perry to agree to "Dick's proposition" instead of following a better path?
4. Who is Bobby Rupp, and what was his impression of the last moments spent with Nancy Clutter?
5. When Perry and Dick stopped at the gas station on their way to the Clutters' farm, what did Dick consider about his partner in crime?
6. Who was the last of the Clutter family to go to sleep on the night of the murders, and what was in this person's final diary entry? How was this diary entry helpful to the investigating agents?
7. Why did Susan Kidwell call the Clutter family? What did she and Nancy Ewalt discover when they entered the Clutter house?
8. What did Sherriff Robinson, Larry Hendricks, and Clarence Ewalt discover in the Clutters' master bedroom, and what was significant about these discoveries?
9. How did Sherriff Robinson, Larry Henricks, and Clarence Ewalt find Herb Clutter, and what haunts Henricks the most about this?
10. What did Perry do immediately after the murders? What did Dick do, and why did his father find this strange? What do these actions reveal about Dick and Perry?

Part II: Persons Unknown

Pages 75-117

1. What did Alfred Stoecklein hope people would "try to understand" (p. 78)? Why was he so distraught and confused?
2. What was the first thing Agent Alvin Dewey told the press, and what facts did he make known?
3. Explain Agent Dewey's two "concepts" regarding who murdered the Clutter family. Which did he believe was true?
4. What possible motives did Agent Dewey discover in Nancy Clutter's diary, and how did he feel about each of these?
5. What made the police first believe that robbery was the motive for these murders, and what evidence was there to refute that idea?

6. Describe Dick's and Perry's attitude in the days following the murders, and how did each react to the stories in the newspaper?
7. According to Susan, how did Bobby react to the news and investigation of the murders? How did the murders affect Susan and Bobby's friendship?
8. Describe Dick's plan for raising enough money to get out of town. What role does Perry play in this scheme?
9. Why did Dick feel so bad about his fake check scheme, and how did Perry try to assuage Dick's guilt?
10. What about the murder scene weighed on Agent Dewey's mind and made him speculate about the mindset of the murderers?
11. How did Perry feel after the murders, and how did Dick respond?

Pages 117-155

Discussion Questions

1. What did Paul Helm tell Agent Dewey, and why didn't Dewey believe him?
2. Why did Dick grow to despise Mexico, and why did he want to return to the United States? How did Perry feel about his, and what did he finally decide to do?
3. Based on his letter, do you think Perry's father knows Perry's true nature? Why or why not?
4. To what does Perry attribute his bed-wetting, and why does he despise nuns?
5. How did Perry and his father waste their time and money, and how did Perry's father react to the situation?
6. What might Perry's sister mean when she writes to him, "IT IS NO SHAME TO HAVE A DIRTY FACE—THE SHAME COMES WHEN YOU KEEP IT DIRTY" (p. 140)?
7. How does Perry truly feel about his sister and her letter? Why does he keep it?
8. What did Willie-Jay say about the letter from Perry's sister? Do you agree with each of his statements? Why or why not?
9. How do the Clutter murders continue to affect Agent Dewey's life?

Part III: Answer

Pages 157-198

1. Who is Floyd Wells, and what did he tell Dick? Why did he take so long to speak to the police after hearing about the Clutter murders? Do you think the police should believe Floyd's story? Why or why not?
2. What did Dick's parents tell Agent Nye regarding all of their son's troubles? What do they think of Perry?
3. What did Dick and Perry plan to do once they found a ride to Nebraska, and why was Perry bothered by this plan? How was their plan foiled?
4. What did the landlady tell Agent Nye about Perry, and what did Nye find in Perry's box?
5. According to her discussion with Agent Nye, how does Perry's sister feel about him, and why did she write him so often when he was in prison? What is important about the fact that Perry's sister never lived in Fort Scott, Kansas?
6. How does Perry feel about all of his siblings? What eventually happened to them?
7. What was Dick's ultimate plan, and how did Perry feel about it? What was Perry's biggest concern?
8. Why didn't Agent Dewey wish to reveal his suspects to the media or to the public?
9. Why is news about the Clutter case spreading faster in Garden City than in Holcomb?
10. What did Perry worry about while he waited for Dick at the washateria? Describe Perry's level of trust in Dick.

Pages 199-248

1. What elements about Dick's personality bothers Perry, particularly while they hid in Florida? How does Dick feel about this part of his personality?
2. How did Perry and Dick initially feel about the hitchhikers? How did the hitchhikers prove their "value" along the way?
3. What concerns does Agent Dewey have even after apprehending Dick and Perry?
4. What was Dick's plan in Las Vegas, and why didn't it work?
5. What did the investigators think about Dick when they first met him? How does Dick initially react to his interrogation?
6. How does Dick react when the agents mention the Clutter family? How do the police finally pressure Dick to confess?
7. How does Perry behave throughout his interrogation? How is he convinced that Dick has confessed?

8. Just Dick and Perry approached the Clutter house, what happened that almost saved the Clutters' lives? What ultimately convinced Dick to proceed?
9. How does Agent Dewey feel after Perry tells the story of how he helped murder the Clutter family?
10. What is the only discrepancy in Perry and Dick's stories? Whom do you believe, and why?

Part IV: The Corner
Pages 249-292

1. What is unique about the fourth floor of the courthouse and about Perry's cell in particular?
2. What part of his story does Perry eventually change, and why?
3. How do the two court-appointed lawyers feel about defending Perry and Dick? How do you think this will affect the case?
4. While Dick and Perry wait for the trial to begin, what does each of them think about in his cell?
5. Who writes to Perry, and what does this person wish to do?
6. Why do Dick and Perry's lawyers want the trial postponed? Do you think their reasons are valid? Why or why not?
7. In Dick's autobiographical statement, what does he reveal about his true intentions the night of the Clutter murders? How does he feel about this in retrospect, and how were his intentions thwarted?
8. Who is the prosecution's "most damaging witness" (p. 286), and what effect does this witness' testimony have on Dick's parents?
9. Describe Don Cullivan's visit with Perry. Why does he visit, and how does Perry react?

Pages 292-343

1. What are Dr. W. Mitchell Jones' assessments of Dick and Perry? Why is he unable to testify to this in court?
2. Analyze Perry's statement: "I thought [Mr. Clutter] was very nice gentleman...I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat...[The Clutters] never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it" (p. 302).
3. What do you think most influenced the jury's verdict? What is the verdict, and how do Perry and Dick react?
4. Who is Lowell Lee Andrews? Why is he on Death Row, and how do Dick and Perry feel about him?
5. Why do you suppose Perry feels the way he does about Lowell Lee Andrews?
6. Describe Perry and Dick's experiences on Death Row.
7. Who are George York and James Latham, and why are they on Death Row? Examine the significance of Dick's statement upon the boy's arrival: "Yessir...[the death penalty is] very popular in Kansas. Juries hand it out like they were giving candy to kids" (p. 322).
8. How does Dick feel about capital punishment? Why do you think he feels this way?
9. How does Agent Dewey feel about Dick and Perry's deaths? Why do you suppose he feels the way he does about Perry?