



THE STRANGER
ALBERT CAMUS
AP LITERATURE

Overview: Existentialism

The term "existentialism" is sometimes reserved for the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, who used it to refer to his own philosophy in the 1940's. But it is more often used as a general name for a number of thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who made the concrete individual central to their thought.

- A backlash against philosophical and scientific systems that treat all particulars, including humans, as members of a genus or instances of universal laws.
- Our own existence as unique individuals cannot be understood as mere examples of anything
- Systems such as universal laws conceal from us the highly personal task of trying to achieve self-fulfillment in our lives
- Existentialists start out with a detailed description of the self as an "existing individual", who is involved in a specific social and historical world.
- The individual can only find fulfillment in understanding what is true and valid for him rather than blindly accepting imposed societal values and norms

Existentialists hold that humans have no pre-given purpose or essence laid out for them by God or by nature; it is up to each one of us to decide who and what we are through our own actions (Sartre: "existence precedes essence"). What this means is that we first simply exist—find ourselves born into a world not of our own choosing—and it is then up to each of us to define our own identity or essential characteristics in the course of what we do in living out our lives. Thus, our essence (our set of defining traits) is chosen, not given.

Existentialists hold that people decide their own fates and are responsible for what they make of their lives. Humans have free will in the sense that, no matter what social and biological factors influence their decisions, they can reflect on those conditions, decide what they mean, and then make their own choices as to how to handle those factors in acting in the world. Because we are self-creating or self-fashioning beings in this sense, we have full responsibility for what we make of our lives.

Existentialists are concerned with identifying the most authentic and fulfilling way of life possible for individuals. In their view, most of us tend to conform to the ways of living of the "herd": we feel we are doing well if we do what "one" does in familiar social situations. In this respect, our lives are said to be "inauthentic", not really our own. To become authentic, according to this view, an individual must take over their own existence with clarity and intensity. Such a transformation is made possible by such profound emotional experiences as anxiety or the experience of existential guilt. When we face up to what is revealed in such experiences, existentialists claim, we will have a clearer grasp of what is at stake in life, and we will be able to become more committed and integrated individuals.

Existentialists start out from the assumption that it is no longer possible to believe that there is some transcendent justification or underlying ground for our existence. If God is dead, then we find ourselves "abandoned," "forlorn," "thrown" into a world, with no pre-given direction or legitimation. Though we seek some overarching meaning and purpose for our lives, we have to face the fact that there is no proper function of humans or plan in God's mind that tells us the right way to be human.

A Primer of Existentialism

"Godless" (atheistic)- Sartre, Camus, Simone de Beauvoir

Result of the collapse of France during WWII

"I can say no, therefore I exist."

"Godly" (theistic): Kierkegaard, Marcel, Maritain, etc.

Existence before Essence:

Man lives rather than "has being" (belongs to and is an example of a cosmic idea of man)

Each human life is unique: an "entire universe," the "center of infinity."

Reason is Impotent to Deal with the Depths of Human Life:

Human reason is weak and imperfect

There are dark places in human life that "reason scarcely penetrates" (a contradiction of Plato)

Uniting the "lower" (irrational) parts of the psyche with the "higher."

Man is therefore complex, difficult to define, and ambiguous

Alienation or Estrangement (Hence the novel's title):

Science and technology have resulted in man's estrangement from nature, and, therefore, from god and himself.

"Untrammelled sexuality" is one path to reconnecting with nature

Institutions like cities, mass-markets, centralized governments destroy men's individuality (his "own true self"), stifle free emotional expression such as love or passion

Anxiety:

The death of the enlightenment during WWI. Continued during the Great Depression and WWII, and emphasized during the Cold War (man cannot insulate himself with material goods; he will cease to be. "When will I blow up?"- Faulkner)

The anguish of choice (Sartre). The responsibility of choice makes each life unique

Encounter with Nothingness:

Man faces the void without hope of succor or salvation (the loss of ontological ground is therefore indicative of the absence of all meaning)

Freedom:

Atheistic Existentialism: Man must accept individual responsibility, which results in freedom (negative connotation). In choosing action, man makes a statement of what man ought to be.

(Religious Existentialism): Freedom has resulted in man's alienation from God. His job is to "heal the chasm."

In both, man must accept both the freedom to choose and the responsibility of choice.

Existentialism **is** about individualism:

Truth is open to interpretation by the individual

We experience truth as we find it.

It is our responsibility to decide for ourselves what is true

No man is more right than another

Nothing exists for the individual until the individual gives meaning to it

Fate, destiny or God do not determine what happens to men. Men determine what happens to themselves.

Existentialism does **not** support any of the following:

The good life is one of wealth, pleasure, or honor.

Social approval and social structure trump the individual.

Accept what is and that is enough in life.

Science can and will make everything better.

People are good by nature, ruined by society or external forces.

Religious Existentialism (Kierkegaard): Emphasis on faith and commitment rather than blind acceptance of truths handed down by traditions in religion. One must determine one's own faith and commitment to God, if that is what one chooses. The *objective* (only one right answer) question of whether God exists is not important. The *subjective* (many possible right answers) question of truth about God is important.

Atheistic Existentialism (Nietzsche): Religion is a crutch that weakens people because it gives them a place to put blame, rather than accepting blame for themselves.

The Life and Work of Albert Camus

Albert Camus was born in Monrovia, Algeria on November 7, 1913. His father, a soldier in World War I, died fighting for France during the first Battle of Marne in 1914. Although Camus never really knew his father, while he was growing up, and later as an adult, Camus was keenly aware of the circumstances of his father's death. At an early age Camus was made painfully aware of the tragic effects of war, experiencing the consequences of political strife on a highly personal level.

Following the publication of *The Stranger* and several other important works, Albert Camus gained wide recognition as one of the leading French writers of his day. As he continued to produce critically acclaimed and controversial novels, plays, and essays, Camus would earn a reputation equal to other preeminent French authors of the time such as Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Andre Malraux. Camus' work had a significant and lasting influence on a post-war generation concerned with political and philosophical issues that dealt with human alienation and the search for meaning in a troubled world.

After his father's death, Camus, his mother, and older brother moved to Belcourt, a suburb of Algiers where they lived in poverty for many years. In 1930, while a high school student, Camus contracted tuberculosis and barely survived. When he recovered, Camus' excellent grades in school helped get him admitted to the University of Algiers where he studied theater and wrote plays, essays, and fiction. Camus' illness, however, was another significant event in his life and it gave him a new perspective on death and awareness of his own existence. While he also began to develop the political outlook and personal philosophy that would form the basis of all of his later work, the inevitability of death would become an important theme in Camus' work, one he would explore in much of his writing.

While he was attending the University of Algiers, Camus supported himself by working at a number of odd, part-time jobs, including one with the French Algerian civil service where he processed auto registrations and driver's licenses. This dull, routine job made an impression on Camus; later he would incorporate elements of the experience in his writing of *The Stranger*.

In 1937, Camus' first book *The Wrong Side and the Right Side* (*L'Envers et l'endroit*) was published in Algiers. It described his life growing up in Belcourt. In 1938, Camus was hired by *Alge-Republicain*, an anti-colonialist newspaper, where he took on a variety of editorial tasks, wrote literary reviews, covered local meetings, and wrote articles concerning the desperate conditions of impoverished Arabs living under French rule in Algeria. Of particular note was his description of the famine in Kabylia. In his article, Camus described the devastation within some Arab families where only two out of 10 children survived.

With the outbreak of World War II, Camus joined an underground anti-Nazi group based in Paris and became editor of the group's resistance newspaper *Combat*. It was during this time that Camus wrote some of his most important work, including *The Stranger* (1942), and developed his theory of the absurd, which declared that life is essentially meaningless because of the inevitability of death. Camus, however, was never satisfied with the absurdist attitude of moral indifference. His experiences in occupied France, and other political events he witnessed, caused him to develop opinions on moral responsibility. Some of these ideas are contained in his *Letters to a German Friend* (1945), and in the essays included in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (1960).

The Stranger is a striking example of Camus' belief that "a novel is a philosophy put into images." He believed that the highest art should contain elements of diversity and complexity, while maintaining a style that is balanced, uniform, and straightforward. Sartre immediately recognized the existential quality of *The Stranger*, although his opinion about the novel and its relation to existentialism would later prove to be controversial.

Other works by Camus that explore his philosophical and political ideas include *Caligula* (1944); *The Plague* (1947), a novel; the long, controversial essay, *The Rebel* (1951); and a third novel, *The Fall* published in 1957. His famous essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, published in 1942, concerns Sisyphus, a Greek mythological figure who was condemned by the gods to spend an eternal, meaningless existence pushing a huge boulder up and over a hill, and then back again from the other side.

Following the publication of *The Fall*, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. During his career, Camus became well known for his political views and activism. Although an anti-communist,

he was an outspoken critic of capitalism, and he remained a proponent of democratic socialism and nonviolent confrontation. He believed in the principle of *le juste milieu* which recognized that the solution to human problems is not usually found in absolute strategies or ideas.

In 1960, Camus died suddenly in an automobile accident. Camus' work, and the political, religious, and ethical issues it deals with, remains controversial, but his writing endures because it expresses Camus' profound concern for human suffering and the philosophical and moral dilemmas faced by all individuals.

Historical Background

The Stranger takes place in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, a North African country located along the Mediterranean Sea. (Algiers is a port city, and the many ships that dock there bring a broad mix of people from other countries to the bustling city.) Also, because of its close proximity to Europe, the area known today as Algeria has had contact with other cultures for centuries. In 1942, when *The Stranger* was published, Algeria had been a colonial possession of France for almost a hundred years. Arabs, Europeans, and pieds-noirs—people of European descent born, as Camus was, in Algeria—all lived side by side in crowded Algiers. It was a situation that naturally gave rise to the tension and unrest that is reflected in *The Stranger*. The climate of North Africa, with its heat, sun, and beaches, also has a powerful influence on the events and characters in Camus' book.

In 1830, the French invaded Algeria and began to promote European colonization of the country. Settlers from Europe confiscated Muslim land, created a separate society, and imposed their own culture on the native population. France finally conquered the northern part of the country in 1847, and gradually extended its influence to the south despite fierce local resistance. More than a million European settlers—mostly French—owned the country's principal industrial, commercial, and agricultural enterprises. The majority of the 8.5 million Muslims had low paying jobs and often worked performing menial tasks for the Europeans. The native Muslim population had little political influence and lived in relative poverty compared to their wealthy colonial rulers.

The French created Algeria's current boundaries in 1902. While most of the people living in Algeria today are Arabs or Berbers, in the nineteenth century, Europeans comprised almost 10 percent of the total population. The European impact on Algeria was enormous, with large European-style cities standing alongside ancient villages and tiny farms.

By the early 1900s, economic conditions in Algeria began to decline steadily as its growing population became increasingly restless and resentful of foreign rule. In addition, World War I had a devastating effect on all of the countries in the region. The political and economic impact of the war was great, and the psychological repercussions were equally traumatic. New technology, developed in the war, had greatly expanded the military's ability to kill. The aftermath was horrendous. France alone lost over one million soldiers on the battlefield, with many more wounded and maimed. Adding to France's political troubles after the war ended, Algerian nationalist movements began to fight for independence against the French. European settlers, now firmly established in the country, bitterly resisted any efforts to grant political rights to the Algerians.

It was into this highly charged atmosphere of racial tension and political unrest that Albert Camus was born. He would spend the first half of his life in this uneasy and difficult environment. Camus' father had died fighting for France and Camus grew up acutely aware of the wholesale slaughter that took place during the war. By the time *The Stranger* was published, France and the world were engaged in another costly war, this time against Germany and the Axis powers. World War II was a conflict that would exact an enormous death toll and again have a significant influence on Camus' thinking. The certainty of death would become a major theme in all of his work.

With the publication of *The Stranger*, Camus received instant recognition for his achievement, although reaction to the book was controversial and opinions were divided. Some, like Jean-Paul Sartre, would embrace its existential quality, while others considered it a political work addressing the problems of French colonialism in Algeria. Many critics felt the novel dealt with atheism and religion. In discussing Camus' writing style in *The Stranger*, Sartre noted that "each sentence is a present instant...sharp, distinct, and self-contained. It is separated by a void from the following one." Sartre goes on to explain his view of the philosophical significance of Camus' style: "The world is destroyed and reborn from sentence

to sentence...We bounce from sentence to sentence, from void to void.” Camus, however, would dispute much of what was said about his novel. Ultimately, *The Stranger* has become an enduring work of fiction because it is concerned not only with politics and racism, but also with universal philosophical themes and the basic dilemmas of the human condition.

Absurdity

Absurdity is a philosophical view at which one arrives when one is forced out of a very repetitive existence. As Camus says in “An Absurd Reasoning” from his essay collection *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.

This description characterizes Meursault perfectly. The essay collection explained the philosophy of the absurd, and the novel demonstrated the theory.

Meursault’s repetitive life runs smoothly. Then, little by little, Meursault’s happy stasis is pulled apart by the rest of the world’s movement and collapse begins. His mother dies, and with her, a sense of stability he has had his whole life. He becomes involved with Marie, who asks him whether he cares for her and in asking nearly breaches his safe isolation. Raymond insists upon being his friend. Salamano’s dog just disappears, thus disrupting a parallel repetitive rhythm. He shoots a man, and the law demands that he die. Each subtle disruption of Meursault’s desire to be indifferently static brings him to a mental crisis. This crisis is resolved when he comes to understand the utter meaninglessness of his individual life within the mystery of the collective society. The events of his story only make sense that way. Any other explanation leads him to theology—represented by the priest—or fate.

In an expression of Camus’s humanist logic, neither theology nor fate can offer men of intelligence (men like Meursault, willing to use only bare logic to consider the question of life) an explanation for the absolutely senseless things that humans do—war, murder, and other heinous acts. The alternative, therefore, is absurdity. Meursault recognizes the “truth” that life is meaningless. That means life is just what one makes of it while being conscious of two certainties—life and death. In doing so, Camus argues, one would uphold traditional human values because they safeguard one’s life. In other words, human values (what we understand today as “human rights”) lead to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. When one is truly willing to face this Truth, one can be happy. Unfortunately, Meursault is executed before he can live in this fashion.

Absurdism

Camus developed his philosophy that life is absurd: The knowledge that death is inevitable makes life meaningless. This philosophy was developed through his early life of poverty, his illness, and later experiences as a resistance fighter against the Nazis in France.

Absurdism is a philosophy stating that the efforts of humanity to find meaning in the universe will ultimately fail because no such meaning exists (at least in relation to humanity).

Absurdism is related to Existentialism, though should not be confused with it. Absurdism has its roots in the 19th century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. The aftermath of World War II provided the social environment that stimulated absurdist views and allowed for their popular development, especially in the devastated country of France.

Absurdity characterizes a world that no longer makes sense to its inhabitants, in which rational decisions are impossible and all action is meaningless and futile.

There is an element of cruelty.

The futility of all human endeavor characterizes many absurdist works. Individuals are powerless to direct their own lives. Characters who choose different paths ultimately experience the same outcomes. This suggests that human effort is meaningless and leads to nothing in the end.

The failure of language to convey meaning is an important theme in the literature of Absurdism. Language is either detached from any interpretation that can be agreed to by all characters, or it is reduced to complete gibberish.

Many absurdist works illustrate the loneliness and isolation of individuals, resulting from the nature of modern life and, in some cases, from the impossibility of effective communication between humans.

Materialism is criticized; even relationships between family members are subject to the terms of profit and loss statements. Meaning ultimately cannot be found in anything outside the self.

Any search for order by men will bring them into direct conflict with this meaningless universe.

Colonialism

There are no hints which suggest that the novel takes place in a colonized country. There are, however, hints that racial tensions exist between French-Algerians and “Arabs.” From the first page the reader knows that the novel is set in Algeria and that the date of publication is 1942. Therefore, it can be guessed that the novel occurs in a colonized setting. In addition, the narrator hints at the racial tension by telling the story as if it took place solely among some French people who happened to live in Algeria. Meursault only associates with French-Algerians, and the only people he names are French-Algerians. Then, for no apparent reason, he shoots an Arab.

While it could be argued, and usually is, that the issue of race and colonialism is not an important theme to the novel (because the novel is about the larger concern of absurd individuality), it is still important to note its existence. First, none of the Arabs in the book, including the murder victim, receive a name. In fact, the nurse at the nursing home is given no other attribute aside from having an abscess that requires her to wear bandaging on her face. The reader sees her as marked by this condition, and she is described as an “Arab.” The reader gains little information about her. Another Arab woman is Raymond’s girlfriend. She accuses him of being a pimp, and he beats her. She has no name. In fact, Meursault comments on her name, saying, “[W]hen he told me the woman’s name I realized she was Moorish.” It does not bother him that his “friend” is having relations with an “Arab,” nor does it bother him that Raymond wants to mark her for cheating on him. He wants to cut her nose off in the traditional manner of marking a prostitute. Finally, her brothers and his friends begin to follow Raymond. It is this nameless group of Arabs who Meursault, Masson, and Raymond encounter at the beach. One member of the group is found by Meursault alone and is shot.

The issue of race is the most troubling and unresolved issue of the novel. If one reads the novel solely in terms of the theme of absurdity, the action of the story makes sense—in a meaningless sort of way. However, read in terms of a lesson on human morality and the ethics of the Western tradition wherein a white man goes through a struggle— or agon—in the land of the “Other,” then the story is very contradictory and highly problematic. Meursault certainly does arrive at a “truth,” but that arrival was at the cost of a man’s life as well as a ruined love.

Free Will

Though the possession of a free will is taken for granted by most people, the presentation of its “freeness” in *The Stranger* is rather unsettling. Meursault consistently expresses his awareness of his own will as free. In some instances, this might be interpreted as indifference, but Meursault is decidedly, perhaps starkly, free. He does not feel the temptation to encumber his reasoning with considerations or dogmas. For example, he is never worried and is repeatedly doing a systems check on his body—he declares states of hunger, whether he feels well, and that the temperature is good or the sun is too hot. These are important considerations to Meursault, and they pass the time. Conversely, the magistrate is frustrated, tired, and clings to his belief in God. Meursault discerns that the magistrate finds life’s meaning only through this belief. But when the magistrate asks if Meursault is suggesting he should be without belief, Meursault replies that it has nothing to do with him one way or the other. This is because the only things that should concern Meursault, he decides, are elemental factors, such as keeping his body comfortably cool.

Narrative

Psychological self-examinations are common in French first-person narratives, but Camus’s *The Stranger* gave the technique of psychological depth a new twist at the time it was published. Instead of allowing the protagonist to detail a static psychology for the reader, the action and behavior were given to the reader to decipher. Camus did this because he felt that “psychology is action, not thinking about oneself.” The protagonist, along with a failure to explain everything to the reader, refuses to justify himself to other characters. He tells only what he is thinking and perceiving, he does not interrupt with commentary. By narrating the story this way, through the most indifferent person, the reader is also drawn into Meursault’s perspective. The audience feels the absurdity of the events. However, other characters, who do not even have the benefit of hearing the whole of Meursault’s story as the book’s readers do, prefer their ideas of him. They are only too ready to make their judgments at the trial. Moreover, they readily condemn him to death as a heartless killer without regret.

Structure and Language

Camus’s narration was immediately recognized as extremely innovative. His language, while recognized as similar to the American “Hemingway style,” was seen as so appropriate to the task as to be hardly borrowed. The style that Camus uses is one of direct speech that does not allow much description. He chose that style because it backed up his narrative technique. The reader is focused on the characters’ reactions and behavior as they are related through Meursault.

Camus also divided the story at the murder. Part one opens with the death of Maman and ends with the murder of the Arab. In part two of the novel, Meursault is in prison and at the end is awaiting his execution. The division reinforces the importance of Meursault in the universe of the story. Normality is jarred throughout the first part until it dissolves into chaos because of the murder. The second half shows the force of law entering to reestablish meaning and therefore bring back order through the death of Meursault. The structure and the language, then, are technically at one with the greater theme of absurdity.

Setting

Environment is a very important element to Meursault. He reports the heat of rooms, the way that the sun affects him, and all the other conditions of the habitat he lives in. The story itself is set around the city of Algiers and the beach. It is always daytime and the sun is always out. Curiously, in the universe of *The Stranger* there is no night, no darkness outside of mental obscurity. Things happen overnight, but no plot action occurs in the dark. The only moment when darkness does threaten is at the start of the vigil, but the caretaker dispels the darkness with the electric light. Other things that happen overnight include private encounters with Marie (we assume) and the verdict, which is read at eight o’clock at night. However, the novel’s events occur during the day, long days that are hardly differentiated from each other. Such facts of

time emphasize the absurdity of Meursault; everything is meaningless except for the current state of the body in the environment.

Foreshadowing

This technique is used to indicate a happening before it occurs, and this foretelling can be foreboding. A disturbing moment for Meursault, as well as the unsuspecting reader, occurs while Meursault is sitting near his Maman's coffin. "It was then that I realized they were all sitting across from me, nodding their heads, grouped around the caretaker. For a second I had the ridiculous feeling that they were there to judge me." Later, in part two, it is precisely his behavior at this funeral with which the state prosecution is concerned. The way in which Meursault honors his mother has everything to do with his guilt. In other words, the sense of judgement he felt from those sitting across from him at the funeral vigil foreshadowed the solitary condemnation at the trial.

Algeria

Resuming a policy of imperialist expansion after the Napoleonic era, France invaded Algeria in 1830. The French soon controlled the city of Algiers and some coastal areas, but not until 1857 did they subdue the whole region. France sent settlers to colonize the conquered region, but even as late as 1940 the French in Algeria were outnumbered 9 to 1. During World War II the Algerians fought on the side of Germany, which occupied France. However, they were not too keen on resisting the Americans, and when General Eisenhower landed in November of 1942, he met little resistance. That invasion prevented Camus from leaving France and joining his wife in Algeria until the liberation of France in 1944. Throughout the rest of the war, the Algerian independence movement grew due to contact with other Westerners—British and American soldiers.

The independence movement continued to grow after the war but was violently put down by French troops. The struggle escalated when the National Liberation Front (FLN) wrote a new constitution in 1947. Unable to deliver on the promise of the new constitution, the FLN began a war of independence with France in 1954. By 1962, Charles de Gaulle agreed to grant the country independence.

World War II

World War II was in full swing in 1942, since America had declared war on Japan and Germany in response to the Pearl Harbor attack. However, the Allied cause did not look good. France had fallen to the Germans, and British troops were pushed from their holdings in the Pacific to India by the Japanese. On the Russian front, the Germans seemed to be on the verge of capturing Stalingrad when they attacked in February. This attack took the form of a gruesome siege. There was still hope, however, because both the British and the Russians refused to give in. Geography aided the Russians and the superiority of the Royal Air Force made the siege of Britain hazardous.

Summer began and the Allies started to gain against the Axis Powers. American troops were more successful than not in flooding the Allies with needed supplies through their base in Iceland. June brought real progress when the American Navy met the Japanese in the Battle of Midway. This decisive victory ended Japanese expansion in the Pacific and irreparably crippled their naval strength. In November, Eisenhower led a joint British-U.S. force in a landing in Algeria. In Russia, the Germans were still unable to claim victory since the Russian army was refusing to give way. In the end Russia lost 750,000 soldiers throughout the year. The Germans gained against the Russians only to lose all but eighty thousand men, who survived by cannibalism, and surrendered by February of 1943. Slowly the tide was turning against the Germans.

Journal Assignment

Part I:

1. List, chapter by chapter, major events and settings.
2. Record Mersault's emotions (apathy, indifference, guilt, e.g.) in his interactions with other characters in those events and settings. Cite text and page #s.
3. Write a detailed analysis of one of the following passages, paying careful attention to stylistic and thematic development: A. "We got off in the outskirts of Algiers...across the dazzling sea" (49) B. "We walked on the beach...with the low gurgling from the spring and the three notes"(55) C. "But as I got closer...on the door of unhappiness" (57 – 59).
4. Examine Mersault's references to the passage of time.
5. Trace one of the following motifs throughout Part I. Draw conclusions about character and theme as revealed through the motif: light, heat, sound, eyes, sleep, colors, the sky, water, the sun.
6. Revisit the first paragraph of the novel and comment on its significance to Part I.

Part II:

1. Discuss freedom and imprisonment as paradox.
2. Discuss the novel as a violent satire of justice.
3. Analyze the following passage at the end of the novel: "With him gone... cries of hate" (122-123).
4. Speculate on Mersault's reaction to the prison chaplain. What does this interaction reveal about Mersault?
5. Speculate on the structure of the novel as a whole, considering carefully the relationship between the two parts as well as shift in narrative techniques.

Post-reading Analytical Questions:

1. How is Camus' chosen title significant as a characterization of Meursault? How is Meursault a stranger (estranged)? To whom is he a stranger?
2. One of the primary elements within Existentialism is man's need to rely on experience for truth. How is this element presented through the course of the novel? (Start with the first chapter specifically.)
3. Sartre, in "Existentialism," poses the following: "What proof is there that I have been appointed to impose my choice and my conception of man on humanity?" (1). He answers, "I'll never find any proof or sign to convince me of that" (1). In the final chapters of the novel, Meursault fumbles over just this question and the answer offered by Sartre in that he debates within his own consciousness whether he deserves to die, will die, etc. Explore this fumbling and the decision, if it can be called such, Meursault comes to regarding his fatal action and eminent death.
4. Why does Meursault shoot the Arab? Does the death of his mother (Maman) have any bearing on his later action? Does the notion or idea of death in general have any bearing? In discussing possible reasons, also consider Sartre's claim that "the feeling is formed by the act one performs; so, I cannot refer to it in order to act upon it" (3). Can Meursault know why he shoots or even that he will shoot the Arab until he does it?
5. Explore the natural environments in the novel and how and why the characters, specifically Meursault, come into contact with them. Is man estranged from nature?
6. In what ways does Camus' novel (maybe specifically Meursault) present or represent "The Myth of Sisyphus"?
7. In Camus' "On Tragedy," tragedy is defined as "first and foremost tension, since it is the conflict, in a frenzied immobility, between two powers, each of which wears the double mask of good and evil (302). [...] Tragedy is born between light and darkness and rises from the struggle between them" (303). Meursault's dealings with the priest, with his sentence, and with himself represent the validity of this statement. Prove. You will first want to identify the powers. (There may be more than one opposition).
8. Again, dealing with the last chapters of the novel, and specifically the final chapter, discuss the validity of Camus' characterization that "tragedy swings between the two poles of extreme nihilism and unlimited hope. [...] The hero denies the order that strikes him down, and the divine order strikes because it is denied. Both assert their existences at the very moment when this existence is called into question" ("On Tragedy" 304 – 305). (Remember that divine does not always mean the traditional Godly/godly.)

9. Camus claims, "Man is alone, and thus confronted with nothing but himself" ("On Tragedy" 306). Discuss the presence /significance of this claim in terms of Meursault.
10. Camus wrote, "Live to the point of tears." Discuss this in terms of Meursault and the novel.
11. Camus believed that psychology is action, not thinking about oneself. Meursault, along with failure to explain everything to the reader, refuses to justify himself to other characters. He tells only what he is thinking and what he perceives; he does not interrupt with commentary. Does Camus' belief, as it is manifest in the novel as a whole, speak to existential thought? Explain.
12. What role does Meursault's relationship with Marie play in Camus' characterization of Meursault?
13. Overall, is Meursault mentally sound? Do you see him as an unstable character/person? Explain.