**Study Guide for *In Cold Blood***

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| **Name** | **Description (Physical/Personal Traits)** | **Relevance (role, important actions, words etc.)** |
| Herb Clutter |  |  |
| Bonnie Clutter |  |  |
| Nancy Clutter |  |  |
| Kenyon Clutter |  |  |
| Bobby Rupp |  |  |
| Susan Kidwell |  |  |
| **Name** | **Description (Physical/Personal Traits)** | **Relevance (role, important actions, words etc.)** |
| Alvin Dewey |  |  |
| Harold Nye |  |  |
| Roy Church |  |  |
| Clarence Duntz |  |  |
| Tex John Smith |  |  |
| Willie-Jay |  |  |
| Floyd Wells |  |  |
| Lowell Lee Andrews |  |  |
| Dick Hickock |  |  |
| Perry Smith |  |  |

**Discussion Questions: *These questions are designed to make you think; therefore, answers should be thoughtful and thorough and no less than 100 words. Use evidence from the text and cite page numbers for your quote. Remember, this book is one of the works you can choose for your IOP in April. Thoroughness now may pay off in the future.***

1. Holcomb, Kansas, appeared to Capote as the very embodiment of traditional American ideas. Discuss the importance of the setting in Holcomb. What does Capote reveal about the town? How does the gossip surrounding the crime reflect underlying truths about Holcomb and small town Kansas? What was the impact of the murders on the Holcomb community? How did it alter the residents' perceptions of the natural order of things, of life? How is the town a character?

2. *In Cold Blood* starts with details about the Clutter family's last day alive. What kind of family is the Clutter household? How does Capote color the opening section with a sense of impending murder and doom? Did any of the details particularly stick out to you? How did he foreshadow their deaths? Did Capote make you feel attached to the family by sharing these details? In what way does Capote create sympathy for them? Do you feel they represented the American Dream?

3. Capote carefully depicts the personalities of secondary characters, such as Al Dewey, for example. Why do you think he does this and what do these detailed portraits add to book? Which of the secondary characters do you find most memorable and why?

4. Capote recounts the story in a certain order, beginning with the day of the murder, and proceeding to the discovery of the bodies, the investigation of the crime and capture of the criminals, and the trial and execution. At what point does Capote depict the murder scene? How does he work Perry’s and Dick’s backgrounds into the narrative? Think of alternative plot structures that Capote could have used, and analyze why you think Capote structures the events as he does? Did the author make you feel attached to the family with this style? Why did he save the descriptions of the murders until the criminals’ confessions?

5*. In Cold Blood* is documentary but also literary. For example, in the beginning of the book, as Capote describes the Kansas farmland, he writes: “The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.” Capote, in this brief passage, evokes the pastoral (which suggests the themes of rural life and paradise and fall) and he also evokesthehigh seriousness of the Greek tragedy (which suggests themes of the state, such as justice, and connects the crimes of individuals to the health of the state). Discuss the relationship between the specific crime and the health of the state (meaning other citizens and our institutions).

6. Find at least four other salient examples from the text in which Capote uses literary language, and discuss the effects. Do not restrict yourself to just imagery. Diversify your examples. This exercise increases your appreciation of the text as a work of art, and also increases your sensitivity to and ability to analyze language.

*The above questions were borrowed from Study Guide: In Cold Blood from his course Literature in Film, copyright © 2006 by Jay Seller.*

7. Capote seems to paint Perry in a more sympathetic light than Dick. He seems sensitive and even kind at points; however, by the end you find out that Perry committed all four murders. Did that surprise you? Did you sympathize with Dick more than Perry at any point? Or did you not buy any of the kind characterizations?

8. Do you think Dick and Perry were sane? Did the psychiatric analysis of them and descriptions of other cold blooded killers surprise you? Scare you? Make you think differently about violent crime or the death penalty?

9. Does Capote take a stand on the death penalty? How do you know? Where do you “hear” it?

10. What role does "dreaming" play in the novel, both figuratively and literally? Think of Perry's dream of the parrot and of finding gold in Mexico, and of Dewey's nightmares. How reliable is what Capote tells us about these dreams?

11. How is montage used in *In Cold Blood*? In other words, how does the back- and-forth description of events in Holcomb and events surrounding Dick and Perry make the novel more vivid? Capote used several points of view—third person through the narrator’s eyes, third person through Alvin Dewey’s eyes, third person through Perry Smith’s eyes. Does this shifting perspective hide what Capote thought of the crime or the people involved?

12. In what ways does Capote reveal the nature of his research through the construction of the book? Is it important that Capote himself is never named? Does his absence endanger the credibility of the narrative? Look up the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle? How might it apply?

13. Capote wrote what he termed a non-fiction novel. The combination was intended to achieve historical accuracy but also use fictional devices to shed creative light on actual events. In what ways is *In Cold Blood* like a fiction novel? In what ways is it like journalism? How does Capote report the facts and allow different voices to speak without using a journalistic style?

Did Capote achieve his goal?

14. Because the Clutter family could not speak for themselves, Capote’s information about them was supplied by neighbors, friends and other people who knew the family. Capote got most of his information about the perpetrators of the crime directly from them. How does this shape readers’ opinions about the victims and about the criminals?

15. The tone of the book reveals the author’s attitude toward his subject matter. Capote intended *In Cold Blood* to be both objective (non-judgmental) and sympathetic. Is this possible? Did he achieve it?

16. Why couldn’t Capote finish the book until after the executions?

17. Chris Anderson writes, “One of the key similarities between fiction and nonfiction in Capote is his use of authorial silence…By silence I mean that throughout Capote’s narratives he remains silent about important details, avoiding explicit interpretation and commentary. He repeatedly puts himself in the position of an outside observer forced to make inferences and read meanings on the basis of external detail.” Moreover, Anderson further explains that when Capote does venture into omniscience, Capote, “enters the minds of his characters and carefully describes their feelings and attitudes – feelings and attitudes he has carefully reconstructed from extensive interviews” (“Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Rhetoric of Silence: The Art of Truman Capote,” *Midwest Quarterly*, Spring 1987).

Find specific instances where Capote maintains this “authorial silence” as well as instances when he lapses into omniscience (two examples of each should suffice). Comment on the effect of both forms of narrative within the context of the story and your chosen excerpts.

18. In Lawrence Grobel’s *Conversations with Capote* (NAL 1985), Capote once explained that he “write[s] very much with my ear. I listen to the tone of the language to a terrific extent.” Cite 5 examples where you can *hear* Capote’s language. Explain the language’s effect on the tone or mood of the passage.