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Reflections: A Student Response Journal



Siddhartha
Hermann Hesse

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Hermann Hesse



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

INTRODUCTION

The Author

1. Learning to summarize information in a fact-filled paragraph is a skill that will benefit all students. Try practicing your skill at doing this. After reading the section called “The Author,” write a paragraph which includes the following information:
 - A. Who Herman Hesse’s parents were, his birth date, and birthplace.
 - B. What kind of education he had and what work he did when he was young.
 - C. What his successful novel *Demian* represented.
 - D. What caused his death and the year in which he died.
 - E. What year he received the Nobel Prize in Literature and the name of the novel for which he received it.

The Novel

2. For such a short novel, you probably will find that *Siddhartha* is philosophically powerful. The great Eastern religions and their unfamiliar words are a vital part of the novel. Imagine you are asked to write a definition for the following words needed to understand the novel. Copy down the following list and write the meanings beside the words.
 1. Brahmanism
 2. Brahman
 3. Hinduism
 4. Polytheistic
 5. Vedic
 6. Upanishads
 7. Vishnu
 8. Siddhartha Gautama

Siddhartha

5. As you will recall, in the section about Hermann Hesse, the written style of *Siddhartha* is described as “a highly poetic style reminiscent of ancient scriptures.” Leaf through the present chapter, “The Son of the Brahman” looking for sentences or phrases that sound poetic to you. Although they will not be written in poetic form, they can be poetic nevertheless. Jot down at least six sentences or phrases, and put the page number beside each one. Below is an example that might be considered poetic:

“with his gleaming brow, with his kindly eyes, with his narrow hips.”

6. Siddhartha is a young person from a fairly rich family living in India in 500 B.C. You are a young person living in the United States in 2004 A.D. Fill in the chart below with similarities and differences between your lives.

Siddhartha

Me

Friendship:

Religious feelings:

Obedying parent:

Contentment:

Stubbornness:

Siddhartha

26. Even Kamala, the pleasure loving courtesan, is enchanted by the person of the Buddha she is learning about from Siddhartha. One almost feels that the Buddha is a celebrity more than a holy teacher. It has been said that in our times we live among “the cult of the celebrity.” John Lennon once said that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Think about how much time you spend thinking about the news of some star in the music, film, television, sports or political field. You may think all of the notoriety is just hype, or you may be truly interested in the lives of various celebrities. Choose either one of those opinions and complete the paragraph below to describe your feelings about stardom in modern times:

Stardom is a fact of today’s life whether we like it or not. I feel that...

27. One of the ways writers have to keep the reader’s attention and enjoyment in reading their work is through the writing style. Leaf back through the previous sections of the novel. You will see that Hermann Hesse varies the length of his paragraphs and sections of *Siddhartha*. He also uses a fair amount of dialogue as one aspect of his writing style. Look carefully at this section. Compare the length of the paragraphs and the proportion of dialogue to prose in the chapter. Then look again at the section titled “Gotama.” Imagine you are a literary critic and preparing to write an article for a magazine or newspaper about Hermann Hesse’s writing style. Write a comparison between the two sections named that you would use as part of that article.

Siddhartha

35. Beyond just ferrying Siddhartha across the river, Vasudeva takes Siddhartha on as an apprentice to teach him all the skills involved with learning to live and work on the river as a ferryman. He also becomes, as you have read, Siddhartha's spiritual advisor, sharing as he shares his ancient wisdom with the younger man. Today we would call such a person a "mentor." Imagine that you have had some questions regarding your life that you would like help with and imagine you feel that a teacher you have had in the past might be a good mentor to help you with your questions. Write a letter to that teacher asking that he or she meet with you to give you some advice about things you feel you need answers to. Please use a fictitious name for the teacher.

36. The years of Siddhartha's living with Vasudeva go by peacefully as they become brotherly ferrymen together. We learn that the Buddha is dying. Kamala, traveling to see the Buddha before his death, is dying also. When they accidentally meet, Siddhartha learns that he has a child by her, a son, also named Siddhartha. You will notice that when Kamala tells Siddhartha about his son, Siddhartha does not comment at all. This is a good opportunity for you to write a few sentences of dialogue that could be inserted after Kamala's words, "Did you recognize him, too? He is your son." In the dialogue you write, give what you think would be an appropriate reaction by Siddhartha upon learning that he is a father. In that dialogue, also have Siddhartha express his deep feelings for Kamala.

37. Kamala is a powerful character in this novel. She has led a full, rich life and has had friendships with powerful people. If there were newspapers during the time in which the novel is set, one would carry a long obituary about her life. After refreshing your memory about her by leafing back through the novel, write Kamala's obituary with as many details as you can. Check in your library for the Obituary section of a newspaper or look on an Internet search engine for a detailed obituary that you could use as a model for Kamala's obituary.