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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Siddhartha

by Hermann Hesse

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Siddhartha

Background Information

HINDUISM AND THE ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM

Hinduism is based on the *Vedas*, an ancient group of prayers and hymns brought to India by the Aryans in about 1500 B.C. Later, a system of social classes or castes was added. These castes are very strict and hereditary. People are born into a caste and remain there throughout their lives. There are five castes:

- Brahman – priests who guard the traditions and rites of Hinduism
- The nobility
- Those who engage in commerce
- Servants
- The untouchables – the lowest class who do dirty jobs like cleaning up human waste

This religion of castes is called **Brahmanism**. The **Upanishads** is an ancient text that explicates the **Vedas** and explains individualism; it teaches about the existence of a universal soul. Individuals must follow their **Karma** (fate) through many lives or reincarnations until they can be united with the universal soul. To do this, they must understand the **Maya** (illusion of time and space). The Hindu religion teaches that the beauty of nature must be ignored because it is an illusion. The Hindu religion is very strict; its practice includes prayers, sacrifices, pilgrimages to sacred places, and bathing in sacred rivers.

Buddhism first appeared in the fifth century B.C., when a wealthy young man (later to be known as Gotama) left his family and their wealth to look for a way to end human suffering.* Through meditation, he learned that the path to **Nirvana** (“nothingness” or the escape from the cycle of endless rebirths) is through breaking away from all ties of love and desire. His followers called him **Buddha**, the Enlightened One. Buddhism differs from Hinduism because it offers its followers a code for living, as well as the promise of eternal salvation.

* Gotama’s family name was Prince Siddhartha

Buddha teaches four Noble Truths:

- Existence is suffering.
- Suffering arises from desire.
- Suffering ends when desire ends.
- The way to end desire is to follow the Eight-Fold Path.

Siddhartha

Objectives

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

1. infer ideas about characters and events when those ideas are not explicitly stated.
2. comment on the author's use of predictions of future events as a way of foreshadowing and maintaining the reader's interest.
3. cite examples of epithets in the story and discuss how they help to remind the reader of significant character traits.
4. understand the impact the Hindu religion has on the protagonist's early life and be able to define the following terms:
 - Brahmins
 - caste system
 - Samanas
5. define the following elements of Buddhism and discuss how the structure of the book follows these twelve steps to salvation:
 - The Four Noble Truths
 - The Eight-Fold Path
6. support the elements of allegory in this novel:
 - the structure of the novel, which parallels The Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path taught by Buddha
 - the names of the characters, which stand for ideas
 - the underlying religious, political, social, or satirical meaning.
7. cite an example of irony in the story by illustrating how the main character becomes seduced by the lure of materialism.
8. define "quest" and prove that this story is an example of a quest narrative.
9. discuss how the author employs the techniques of oral tradition to review the protagonist's progress on his quest for salvation.

Siddhartha

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Define allegory. How do the structure of the story and the names of the characters give evidence that this novel is an example of an allegory?
2. What do the Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian religions teach about the importance of love, teachers, and physical pleasure?
3. How did Hesse's confinement to a sanitarium and his strict Lutheran childhood influence his work?
4. Define "reincarnation" and explain the caste system. Do you think Siddhartha believes that one of the untouchables is just as worthy of love as a Brahman? Why or why not?
5. Why does Siddhartha become addicted to gambling? What is ironic about this addiction?
6. Compare Govinda's life with Siddhartha's life. Support the statement that Govinda deserves the epithet "the shadow" at the beginning of the story, but not at the end.
7. Which of the Four Noble Truths does Siddhartha experience when he meets Gotama?
8. In what way does Siddhartha's doctrine of love stem from the principles of Christianity?
9. Give two examples of Siddhartha's extreme self confidence, which borders on arrogance.
10. Give examples which support that, although Siddhartha is not in love with Kamala, she helps him learn to love.
11. List the three accomplishments Siddhartha gains from his time as a Samana.
12. How is Siddhartha's relationship with his son similar to Siddhartha's relationship with his own father?
13. What is the significance of the river to Siddhartha's life in the following instances?
 - when he first crosses and meets Kamala
 - when he awakens after contemplating suicide to see Govinda again
 - when he lets Govinda kiss his forehead
14. Why does Kamala release her song bird from its cage and close her house after Siddhartha leaves? Why does she not try to find him?

1. Define Brahmanism. In which activities related to Hinduism does Siddhartha engage while living at home with his father?

2. What does the name Siddhartha mean? Why is Siddhartha popular with his father, mother, and friend Govinda?

3. Hesse is considered by many German critics to be one of the finest poets of his day. Find an example of this poetic style utilizing rhyming or repetitive phrases in the descriptions of Siddhartha's lack of joy in his life.

4. Define ascetics. Who are the Samanas, and why does Siddhartha join their group?

Gotama

Vocabulary

abated – ended
abode – home, residence
adhere – support or cling
alms – items or money given to the poor
anew – over again
benediction – a blessing at the end of a religious service
emitting – giving off
enlightened – having great spiritual insight
entice – tempt, lure
equanimity – composure
inscrutable – mysterious
irrefutably – in a manner which is impossible to prove false
monastic – relating to monasteries, monks, or nuns
parables – simple stories which illustrate a moral truth
refrain – to hold back from
renounced – refused to follow or obey
reproach – criticize
rudimentary – basic or elementary
sublime – exalted, glorious, or at the height of excellence
supplication – in a manner of earnestness and humility
tranquilly – quietly, peacefully
unassailable – not liable to attack or questioning

NOTE: Read this chapter with the Third Noble Truth in mind: Suffering ends when desire ends.

1. Briefly describe the Buddha. How does his appearance testify to the fact that he has reached total peace?

3. What do you think is the significance of Govinda's re-emergence in Siddhartha's life at this point in the story?

4. State a generalization about life found in the following passage:

“Today, however, you've met a pilgrim just like this, wearing such shoes and such garments. Remember, my good man: the world of appearances is not external, and our garments, hairstyle, even our hair and bodies are anything but eternal.”

5. Why does Siddhartha believe he is “starting as a child again at the beginning”? What does he think about becoming a child again when he is old enough to have gray hair?

6. One of the characteristics of oral tradition is the repetition of stories and ideas to help the listener remember important details. Find an example of repetition in this chapter which supports the fact that the novel *Siddhartha* is written with the same techniques used in ancient storytelling.
