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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Stranger

by Albert Camus

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



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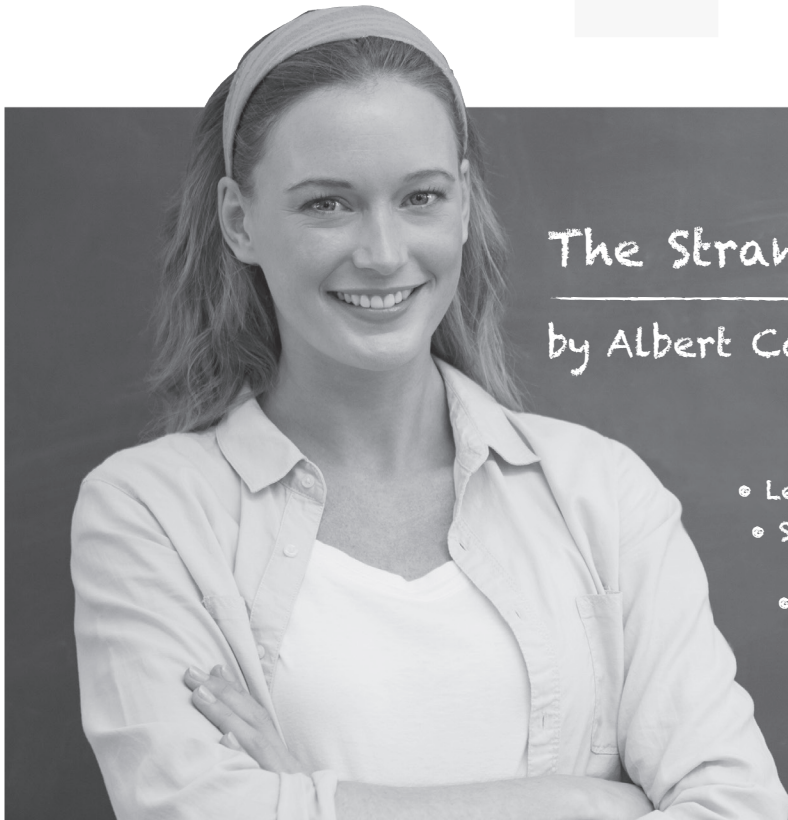
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The Stranger

Background Notes

The Stranger, by Albert Camus, was written during World War II, in French and published in 1942. The setting of the novel is the north African country of Algeria and its capital, Algiers, which is near where the author was born and raised.

The Stranger has been called an “existential” or “nihilistic” novel. Existentialism is a philosophy professing the belief that the universe is indifferent to mankind and that most of life is futile, absurd, and incomprehensible. Existentialism sees the individual as existing in a meaningless universe where events are beyond his or her control. Nihilism is not unlike existentialism, but nihilism goes further: it rejects all positive values, and its followers believe in nothing. There are elements of both of these philosophies in *The Stranger*. Camus himself was said to believe that individuals are seeking beliefs or value systems, but the world offers them none, forcing human beings into an absurdist or meaningless life.

The Stranger has been a successful novel since its publication. Its appeal to readers throughout the world has been enduring, and it is now considered a literary classic.

All references come from the Vintage Books edition of *The Stranger*, copyright 1988.

The Stranger

Objectives

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

1. understand the following facts:
 - The setting for this novel is Algeria, a country located along the Mediterranean Sea in North Africa, in an unspecified time in the mid-twentieth century.
 - Algeria was under French rule until 1962.
 - Algiers is the capital of Algeria.
 - Arabic and French are the predominant languages.
 - The population of Algeria is religiously and ethnically mixed.
2. recognize that Meursault is the protagonist of the novel, that it is written in the first-person, and what the differences are between first and third-person point of view in a novel.
3. discuss some elements of Camus' philosophy of existentialism.
4. discuss Camus' writing style and how this style contributes to the consistently serious and somber tone of the novel.
5. distinguish between the different content of Parts One and Two, the first concentrating on Meursault's view of the world and the second showing how his immediate world views him.
6. define the terms "existentialism" and "nihilism" used to categorize *The Stranger*.
7. understand to what extent the novel is autobiographical.
8. summarize the main points of the plot of the novel sequentially.
9. define certain vocabulary words with reference to their context.
10. explain Meursault's views about love, relationships, and the world by citing examples from the novel.
11. discuss Meursault's interpersonal relationships with other characters in the novel.

The Stranger

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Even though Madame Meursault is not alive in the novel, what impression does Camus give about her relationship with her son, Mr. Perez, and the other persons at the retirement home?
2. How do the many descriptions of the natural world add to or subtract from the tone of the novel and the character of Meursault?
3. Both Salamano and Raymond are violent toward those they profess to care about. Discuss the ways each is violent and what the possible reasons for this violence may be.
4. Camus writes about two other murders in *The Stranger* besides the one that Meursault commits. Describe them and discuss how Meursault views the one he reads about on the scrap of newspaper in his cell.
5. To outward appearances, Meursault does not seem to be a person who has set himself outside of society. Discuss some ways in which Meursault seems normal and in conformity with society and also ways in which he seems to be outside of society and a non-conformist.
6. Describe the behavior of the Arab man on the beach after Meursault arrives to confront him. Would you describe his reaction to Meursault as violent, pacifying, passive, or frightened or something else? Compare the behavior of the two men before the shooting. Are the two men more alike than different?
7. Write a one-page essay about Marie Cardona. This could include any of her characteristics such as, her physical appearance, the type of nature she has, her attitude toward life, her emotions before and after Meursault is arrested, and what qualities she shows throughout Meursault's imprisonment and trial.
8. Write a one page essay which discusses various ways in which Meursault demonstrates his rejection of the prevailing social rules in his world.
9. Explain at least two episodes in *The Stranger* which exemplify the philosophy of existentialism or nihilism. Cite portions from the book which substantiate your answer.
10. Existential philosophy holds that nothing really matters, not even death. Discuss the examples of death in *The Stranger* and how Meursault reacts to them. Would these reactions confirm or refute the opinion that Meursault is an existentialist character?

The Stranger

Part One

Chapter 1

Vocabulary

abscess – an infection where pus collects
acolyte – an assistant to a priest
atheist – person who does not believe in God
censer – incense container used at religious ceremonies
condolences – expressions of sympathy
destitute – without any means of support
hacking – a harsh, dry cough
kilometer – a distance equal to 0.6 of a mile
Legion of Honor – a French medal for some meritorious service
Moorish – of the Muslim faith
mortuary – where dead bodies are kept
pallor – paleness
vigil – a purposeful watch

1. In what country is this novel set and which country governs it? Name one language spoken there. What two facts would give a clue to the setting and one of the languages?

2. What is a protagonist? Who might that be in this novel?

3. Is *The Stranger* written in first-person or the third-person narration?

Chapter 3

Vocabulary

blood sausage – sausage of pork and pig's blood
franc – French money
landing – hallway floor at the top of a set of stairs
“marking” – deliberate injury, which sends a message
quay – a pier
underworld – criminals and their associates

1. What would explain Meursault not knowing his mother's exact age?

2. Does Meursault's boss treat him less antagonistically when he returns to work after the funeral? Give an example of this.

3. What is Emmanuel's last name? What is his job?

4. What sentence continues to convey Meursault's lack of emotion about his mother's death and his preoccupation with satisfying his own desires?

Chapter 6

Vocabulary

asphodel – plant with white and yellow flowers
butt – to strike a blow with the head; the handle of a gun
oilcloth – waterproof material
promontory – high point of land jutting out into the sea
tamarisk – tree with slender branches and colorful flowers
trawler – a fishing boat
veranda – a porch

1. On what day of the week does the chapter begin? What is the weather like? How is Meursault feeling physically?

2. Why are Meursault, Marie, and Raymond spending the day together at the beach house of a friend of Raymond?

3. What worries Raymond when the three of them are on their way to the bus? Why does this bother him?
