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Catch-22
Joseph Heller

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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.

1

The Texan

1. In the beginning of the novel, Captain John Yossarian is in the hospital because he says his liver is sore and he's running a temperature of 101°. Yossarian always has a temperature of 101° and he feels fine. The doctors can't find out what's wrong with his liver so they keep him in the hospital to figure out the problem.

Write a journal entry discussing a time when you used a physical ailment to avoid a particular responsibility or engagement. Was the fact that you misled someone justifiable? Is Yossarian justified in avoiding his bombing missions in the war by feigning illness and staying in the hospital?

4

Doc Daneeka

6. Colonel Korn devises a rule governing the asking of questions. “Colonel Korn’s rule was a stroke of genius.” In essay form, explain Colonel Korn’s rule governing the asking of questions and explain how it’s an example of a paradox (something which appears to contradict itself).
7. Clevinger considers Dunbar’s theory about a long life, and says, “Maybe a long life does have to be filled with many unpleasant conditions if it’s to seem long.” He continues, “But in that event, who wants one?” Dunbar says he does, because “what else is there?” List as many reasons you can think of explaining why unpleasant conditions may be useful or even positive in a person’s overall lifetime.

5

Chief White Halfoat

8. Chief White Halfoat is a Native American who tells Yossarian how difficult it is to be treated differently because of race. “Racial prejudice is a terrible thing, Yossarian. It really is. It’s a terrible thing to treat a decent, loyal Indian like a nigger, kike, wop, or spic.”

Do you think the type of hypocrisy exhibited by Chief White Halfout exists today? Write an essay expressing your view. Do you believe people of a particular race, sex, religion, or group expect to be treated a certain way yet fail to extend that same courtesy to others, or do you think they treat others the way they hope to be treated? Be specific and use examples.

9. In this chapter, we learn what “Catch-22” truly is. Imagine you must explain this concept to a group of people. Write a speech explaining, in your own words, what Catch-22 is, and why you think it has become part of our American vocabulary.

24

Milo

36. "...one day Milo contracted with the American military authorities to bomb the German-held highway bridge at Orvieto and with the German military authorities to defend the highway bridge at Orvieto with anti-aircraft fire against his own attack." This ironic scenario shows that, to Milo, everything is simply business. He takes no sides and doesn't care about winning or about good and evil. All he cares about is money and what's good for the syndicate.

As a newspaper editor, choose a controversial issue (child labor, false advertising, weapons manufacturing, medical procedures, or anything else where ethical choices could come into play, and money ceases to be the only issue). Do you believe money ceases to matter in these situations or is morality more important? Why?

37. Milo buys Egypt's entire cotton crop. He has no idea how he is going to sell it, use it, or get rid of it—he's really in a bind. His best idea so far is to cover the cotton in chocolate and try to pawn it off as cotton candy. On a sheet of paper, brainstorm any ideas you can come up with to assist Milo in easily selling or making use of an entire country's cotton crop.
38. Based on what you know up to this point, describe the event that lands Yossarian naked, in a tree, at a cemetery. In a journal entry, describe what has happened to make him do this. Finally, do you think that being naked in a tree, near a funeral, is a sign that he is crazy or is this an understandable response to the absurdity of the military? Explain your reasoning.

37

General Scheisskopf

(No Prompts)

38

Kid Sister

57. Who appears outside the men's room, then later on Pianosa, and even back in Rome, waiting to murder Yossarian? Come up with a possible explanation of why this person seems so obsessed with killing Yossarian. Explain your theory in two paragraphs.

39

The Eternal City

58. Unlike the rest of the book, this chapter becomes very serious. Yossarian wanders through Rome destroyed by war. Heller may have named this chapter "The Eternal City" to suggest that this demolished city also represents the fate of the world.

Choose One Prompt:

You are directing the play for this book. Using the sights Yossarian sees, write out the stage directions setting the scene.

Or...

Create a dialogue between two characters discussing this annihilated city (in essence, the world). Does either character find this city redeemable; will the world be able to recover from the devastation? The characters should have opposing views to make the conversation interesting and dramatic.