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Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Demian

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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P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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Objectives

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

1. provide details to support this statement of theme: there is a relationship between the spiritual rebirth of the individual and the spiritual renewal of society.
2. consider whether or not civilization can survive if man fails to understand his true nature.
3. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the extent to which Sinclair follows the path to humanism as defined by Hesse: innocence to guilt, guilt to despair, despair to either destruction or salvation.
4. discuss the ways in which the structure of this novel mirrors the biblical story of Adam and Eve.
5. discuss the significance of the “mark of Cain” in this story; trace its recurring presence and point out its radical departure from its traditional roots.
6. discuss the following biblical stories as metaphors in this novel that illustrate the qualities a man must develop within himself to reach self-awareness.
 - the thieves on the crosses next to Jesus
 - Jacob’s fight with the Angel
 - Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
7. understand some of Carl Jung’s theories of the mind and of dream interpretation; cite incidents from the story illustrating that Hesse’s work is influenced by these ideas.
8. point out examples of the way Hesse uses descriptions of nature to illustrate the feelings of his characters and his own philosophical principles.
9. discuss the extent to which Sinclair’s mother is an archetype representing the ideal mother.
10. recognize why Sinclair’s decision to steal the money from his mother is ironic.
11. discuss whether or not Kromer is Sinclair’s alter ego and what Kromer’s whistle might represent in the story.
12. discuss the ways that both Beatrice and Lady Eve guide Sinclair on his path to humanness; comment on whether or not Lady Eve and Sinclair are lovers.
13. relate how the symbol of the bird over the door represents both Sinclair’s path to self-awareness and the world’s impending rebirth after the war.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What is Carl Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious"? Find an incident in this story that illustrates the theory.
2. Why does Sinclair fail to tell his parents about Kromer and allow himself to be blackmailed? In what way is it ironic that Sinclair steals from the money box to pay Kromer?
3. Which incident in the story marks the point when Sinclair first begins to separate himself from his family so he can become his own person?
4. In what sense might Kromer be referred to as Sinclair's alter ego? What might Kromer's whistle represent in this story?
5. How is Demian different from the other students? Why does he strike up a conversation with Sinclair?
6. Why does Sinclair describe his first discussion with Demian about the story of Cain and Abel as though, "A stone had fallen into the well, and the well was my young soul"?
7. Jung believes that certain symbols in dreams and myths are residues of ancestral memory. Select any three dreams in the novel and attempt to interpret the dreams using Jung's theory.
8. Why do you think this novel was popular with the younger generation in Germany after the First World War? What is Hesse's opinion of nationalism?
9. Discuss Demian as being a Christ-like figure in this story. In what ways might he also be thought of as Sinclair's alter ego?
10. How does Sinclair's love for Beatrice change his life?
11. Discuss Demian's opinions concerning "free will." Do you think Hesse advocates people doing exactly as they wish at all times regardless of the consequences to others?
12. Relate Demian's dream about his mother. In what sense is she an archetype for a good mother?
13. Why is Sinclair attracted to Pistorius' music? In what ways does Pistorius help Sinclair move along his path to humanness? What is Pistorius' definition of a human being?
14. Demian says, "Nature's intentions for man are inscribed in individuals." In what way does this statement give the reader hope that the world will be reborn even after it is destroyed by war?

Demian

Forward

1. Hesse believed in Carl Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious." This can be defined as the residue of ancestral memory for the whole human race, which is inherited and preserved. Find a passage on the first page that illustrates Hesse's belief in this idea.

2. Some critics believe that the structure of this story mirrors the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in paradise, their fall, and mankind's redemption through Christianity. Find a passage in this section that illustrates that Hesse believes an individual's spirit has form, suffers, and then is redeemed.

3. In what way is this story connected to the political atmosphere in Germany after the First World War?

4. Critics describe this story as a spiritual guide that shows one young man's journey beyond the everyday world to what Hesse refers to as a "path to humanism." Hesse defines this path as:

Innocence – leads to guilt; guilt to despair; despair to either salvation or destruction.

Find a passage in this section to support this idea.

Chapter Two: Cain

Vocabulary

abject – of the lowest misery
amicably – friendly, showing good will
ardently – warm or intense in feeling; passionately
disconsolately – so unhappy that nothing will comfort; inconsolably
keystone – the central, most important part
lamented – mourned for
timorous – subject to fear; timid

1. What distinguishes Max Demian from the other students in Sinclair's grammar school?

2. Why is Demian interested in Sinclair's house?

3. Review the story of Cain and Abel as it is told in *Demian*. What aspects of this story does Max think are better explained in a different way?

4. At what point in Sinclair's life does he believe that he was like Cain in Demian's version of the story?

10. Demian says:

...each of us must discover for himself what is permitted and what is forbidden—bidden to him. It's possible for someone never to do any forbidden thing, and yet be a thorough scoundrel. And vice versa.—Actually, its merely a question of convenience! Whoever is too comfort-loving to do his own thinking and be his own judge simply adapts to the pre-existing negative commandments. It's easy for him. Others feel commandments of their own within themselves; for them things are forbidden which every respectable man does daily, and other things are permissible for them which are normally tabooed. Everyone must stand on his own feet.

Some readers interpret this passage as giving man the freedom to do exactly as he wishes to do, regardless of the consequences to others. What is your opinion?

11. Define “nationalism.” Reread the passage in question 10. In what sense might this passage support a movement away from nationalism and toward a belief in the importance of the individual?

12. How does Sinclair feel about his upcoming confirmation?

13. Find a metaphor in this chapter illustrating how Sinclair feels about his life and his family as he enters adolescence.
