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## Literature Teaching Unit

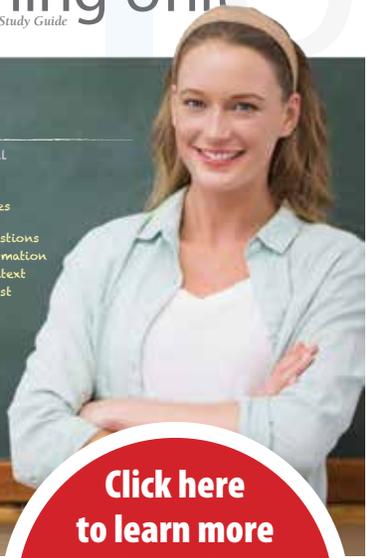
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



### Outliers

by Malcolm Gladwell

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



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# Literature Teaching Unit

*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



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# Outliers

## Note to the Teacher

*Outliers* is a nonfiction book that encourages readers to reevaluate how they view successful people in terms of intelligence, ambition, and personality traits. By providing insights about cultural and social opportunities, Gladwell offers an alternate perspective to the traditional explanation of how people from humble circumstances succeed through sheer talent and determination. *Outliers* examines a wide range of topics: the birth months of star hockey players, a commonality between Bill Gates and the Beatles, how the cultural background of pilots has a role in plane crashes, and why Asian students tend to score better in math than Western students do. All these subjects help illustrate how success is a confluence of luck, opportunity, effort, and cultural heritage.

Malcolm Gladwell was born in the United Kingdom in 1963 and grew up in Ontario, Canada. After receiving a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Toronto, Trinity College, Gladwell moved to the United States where he began working as a reporter. He has been a staff writer with *The New Yorker* magazine since 1996. During his time at *The New Yorker*, Gladwell has written a number of articles that analyze research phenomena and society, offering new, often unexpected perspectives. Some of his articles have been expanded into nonfiction books, including his first, *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell's works have been popular bestsellers—*Tipping Point* has sold millions of copies and has been translated into twenty-five different languages. In 2005, *Time Magazine* named Gladwell one of its 100 most influential people.

All references come from the Back Bay Books edition of *Outliers*, copyright 2008.

## Terms and Definitions

*Allusion* – a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize; **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

*Anaphora* – repetition of a word or group of words within a short section of writing; **Example:** “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” – Ecclesiastes 3:2

*Anecdote* – a brief story that is usually illustrative or humorous, similar to a vignette.

*Black Humor* – grotesque subjects like death, disease, war, insanity, etc. are presented humorously in order to point out their absurdity. **Example:** Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*

*Culture* – the ideas, customs, beliefs, skills, etc., of a given people at a given period of time

*Epigraph* – a short quotation that appears in front of a poem, a book, or a chapter, explaining something about what follows; **Example:** T.S. Eliot places a quotation from Dante’s *Inferno* before the poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, which gives the reader an additional method of understanding that Eliot’s poem deals with a person in Hell.

*Irony* – a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context; **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- *Dramatic Irony* – The audience or reader knows more about a character’s situation than the character does and knows that the character’s understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, “What atrocities could she commit in one day?” The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon’s by day’s end.
- *Structural Irony* – the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader’s correct ones; **Example:** Huck Finn
- *Verbal Irony* – a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm; **Example:** a large man whose nickname is “Tiny”

*Jargon* – the speech or language used by a specific group of people based upon region or occupation

## Objectives

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

1. reevaluate success in terms of factors beyond the individual.
2. analyze how Gladwell includes and orders material so as to create a narrative that effectively delineates his argument.
3. describe how Gladwell uses rhetorical questions and direct address to create a more conversational tone.
4. explain how arbitrary systems can create barriers that inhibit some people's chances at success.
5. analyze how Gladwell uses jargon without confusing or alienating readers.
6. discuss how the inclusion of charts and graphs elucidates Gladwell's arguments.
7. analyze how Gladwell cites outside studies and experts to support his claims.
8. explain why perceived advantages, such as intelligence, contribute to success, but only to a certain point.
9. identify how Gladwell analyzes the same data in various ways in order to support different points.
10. define the following literary terms and identify examples of them within the text:
  - allusion
  - anaphora
  - anecdote
  - juxtaposition
  - parallelism
11. elucidate how cultural values and practices are acquired and preserved.
12. define the term "epigraph" and analyze the author's inclusion of epigraphs in this work.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Throughout the book, Gladwell initially withholds information when detailing people or events before providing a more complete overview. Discuss the purpose and effectiveness of this narrative technique.
2. Describe how Gladwell makes connections between multiple ideas to formulate a cohesive narrative.
3. Discuss how Gladwell uses people's personal stories to create interest and illustrate his main ideas.
4. How does society create opportunities for success, and in what ways can these chances be arbitrary or exclusionary?
5. Analyze how culture shapes people's lives but can also be overcome.
6. Write a short essay detailing how luck or arbitrary circumstances have helped or hindered your own success.
7. Why do you think American society prizes intelligence? In your opinion, what other qualities ought to be more highly valued?
8. How can existing social and cultural institutions be altered to benefit a wider range of people?
9. Gladwell discusses how family can impart values and skills or provide opportunities for advancement. Analyze whether family background predetermines success.
10. Are certain cultures inherently more likely to produce greater numbers of successful people than others are? Use textual support to explain your answer.

# Outliers

## Introduction—The Roseto Mystery

### VOCABULARY

**advent** – invention; coming into being  
**arrayed** – ordered, arranged  
**brisk** – quick; energetic; stimulating  
**compatriots** – people from the same country  
**egalitarian** – characterized by the belief in equal wealth and status for all  
**ethos** – the values that guide people  
**flanked** – placed on both sides of  
**flaunting** – showing off  
**fractious** – disagreeable; unruly; prone to anger  
**genealogies** – ancestries, lineages  
**paesani** – [Italian] villagers  
**physiological** – relating to the biological functions and physical and chemical processes of an organism  
**preliminary** – introductory; preparatory  
**terraced** – made to have level areas of land along a slope

1. What does Gladwell include at the beginning of the book? Why do you think he includes it?

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2. In what ways do the Italian immigrants bring their homeland with them?

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3. Why were residents of Roseto, Pennsylvania, almost exclusively from the same region of Italy?

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## Chapter Three—The Trouble with Geniuses, Part 1

### VOCABULARY

**abstruse** – difficult to understand  
**amply** – sufficiently; fully  
**attainments** – achievements  
**chronometry** – the science of the measurement of time  
**cognitive** – relating to thought  
**converge** – to come together  
**correlated** – mutually related, so that one variable directly affects the other  
**divergence** – a difference; a drawing apart  
**doled** – gave out; distributed  
**erudition** – knowledge acquired by studying  
**hindrance** – an obstacle; a thing that makes a situation difficult  
**libidinous** – lustful  
**mitigation** – the act of lessening the severity of something painful  
**pendular** – being like a pendulum  
**pinnacle** – the top; apex  
**poised** – composed; gracious; self-assured  
**robust** – strong and healthy; stout  
**subversive** – tending to undermine an established order  
**tabulated** – organized information so it could be analyzed  
**threshold** – the point at which something changes

1. Why does Gladwell introduce Christopher Langan by bringing up his appearance on the television show *1 vs. 100*?

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2. What information does Gladwell provide to exemplify Langan's genius?

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## Part Two: Legacy

### Chapter Six—Harlan, Kentucky

#### VOCABULARY

**acquiesced** – consented; agreed without protest  
**anarchic** – lawless  
**confederate** – an ally; an accomplice  
**contingent** – a representative group  
**convened** – assembled  
**deferential** – respectful  
**depositions** – formal statements, given under oath, to be used in court testimony  
**ethnographer** – a person who studies human culture  
**heritance** – [*archaic*] inheritance; something passed to an heir upon the owner's death  
**incredulous** – expressing disbelief; skeptical  
**irascible** – easily angered  
**jostled** – bumped, pushed  
**lattice** – a formation of thin wooden strips that cross each other  
**primeval** – ancient; primitive; from the earliest age  
**remnants** – the traces; the remaining parts  
**spawned** – produced; created; gave rise to  
**steeped** – immersed in some encompassing influence  
**subpoenaed** – obtained to be issued in court as evidence  
**unequivocal** – clear; having one interpretation  
**virulent** – violent; severe; hateful

1. Why does Gladwell provide detailed descriptions of the Cumberland Plateau?

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