

# **In Cold Blood**

## **Truman Capote Discussion Questions**

### **Section I: The Last to See Them Alive**

1. Describe Holcomb. In what ways is it an ordinary town? In what ways is it different? Why does the author spend so much time describing the town?
2. Capote is known for his elaborate sentence structure and use of parallelism. What parallelisms can you find on pages 3-5?
3. Describe Herbert William Clutter.
4. Describe Bonnie Clutter.
5. Describe Kenyon.
6. Describe Nancy.
7. Describe what Perry's possessions tell about him.
8. Why is Nancy concerned about her father?
9. Describe Dick.
10. Compare and Contrast Dick and Perry.
11. What information about Dick and Perry's plan do we get so far?

### **Section I: The Last to See Them Alive (pages 24-48)**

12. Provide at least five adjectives to describe Bonnie Clutter and give a specific example to support each adjective you provide.
13. Contrast Bonnie Clutter to Nancy Clutter. Why do you think the mother and daughter are so different?
14. What new information do we learn about Garden City? Why is this information important?
15. Why does Capote use short sections of anonymous quotations in describing the town on page 33?
16. What do we learn about the preparations which Dick and Perry make for the crime?
17. Describe Kenyon. In what ways is he different from his peers?
18. Why is Willie Jay so important to Perry?

## **Section I: The Last to See Them Alive (pages 48-74)**

19. Describe Perry's background.
20. Describe the scene at the gas station. Why is this scene so important? Why is the gas station attendant afraid of the men?
21. Describe and explain the importance of the bicycle chain story.
22. List the facts about the murder which we have learned so far.
23. Describe the different reactions to the murder in town.
24. Explain Bob Johnson's dilemma after the murder. What decision does the company finally make?

## **Final Questions / Comments about Section I**

25. Explain the organization of the book. What is your opinion of this organization?
  26. What rhetorical strategies does Capote use in telling the story of the murder? Give examples of all strategies.
  27. What ironies can you find in Section I?
  28. What is the mood of the book?
  29. What is your reaction to both the murders and the book?
  30. What information do you now want to find out?
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## **Section II: Persons Unknown (pages 77-100)**

1. Describe Alfred's feelings. Do you think he was involved in any way? Explain. How can he convince people of his innocence?
2. Describe Alvin Dewey.
3. Why do you think Nancy was not gagged?
4. Discuss the evidence the KBI has accumulated so far.
5. Explain Dewey's major reason for believing that the murder was the work of only one individual. Do you agree?
6. What evidence exists that the murder may have been the result of a feud?
7. Discuss the evidence against John Sr. and Jr.. How is this evidence resolved?
8. Explain the irony surrounding Mrs. Myrtle Clare.
9. Explain the quotation on page 88: "Imagination, of course, can open any door - turn the key and let terror walk right in."
10. Discuss the tension between Dick and Perry after the murders.
11. Explain Perry's belief that he has ESP. What evidence does he offer to support his assertion?

12. Explain the episode about Floyd on page 91. (This will be resolved later.)
13. What promise do Perry and Dick make to each other?
14. Describe Perry's dream. Analyze this dream.
15. Describe the episodes when Dick cons people. How is he able to do this?
16. Explain why Cookie was so important to Perry. What does this tell us about Perry?
17. Why does Dick worry about his family? Why is this ironic?

## **Section II: Persons Unknown (pages 100-123)**

18. What new evidence does Mrs. Eloise Selsor provide?
19. What concerns the detectives about the mattress box, bed covers, etc?
20. What can we learn from Dick and Perry's possessions?
21. Explain Mr. Howard Fox's letter. What does this tell us about the family?
22. Describe the argument between Dick and Perry. What does this tell us about them?
23. Why is the story of Perry killing King so important?
24. Describe the memories Perry has about the murder.
25. One of the main arguments which In Cold Blood interjects is the question over which is more important: nature or nurture. What information do we learn about Perry's past? How do you think these events have changed him?
26. Describe and explain Dick's episode with the dog in the road. What do we learn about Dick from this episode?
27. What evidence exists that the killers may have been after Taylor Jones?
28. Look at the story about Mrs. Archibald William Warren-Brown on pages 114-115. What is the purpose of this story?
29. Name the people who plan to leave Holcomb and explain why each will leave.
30. What does Hideo remember about the last time she saw Herb Clutter. Explain the irony.
31. Describe Dick and Perry's visit to Mexico.
32. What information does Paul Helm remember about the day before the murders?
33. Describe the incident with Jonathan Daniel Adrian.

## **Section II: Persons Unknown (pages 123-155)**

34. Why will Dick and Perry return to the states?
35. Explain why Perry is afraid to leave Dick.
36. List the items Perry and Dick ship to America and the things Perry leaves with Jesus. What can we learn about the two men from their possessions?
37. Why had Perry's father written "A History of My Boy's Life"? Explain the major points he makes in the letter.
38. Look back at question #28. What new information about the argument does the reader learn

from the essay?

39. Why does Perry so value this essay? What does this tell us about him?
  40. Explain why Perry and his father fought and finally separated.
  41. Explain the major points that Barbara makes in her letter to Perry.
  42. Critique Willie-Jay's synopsis of Barbara's letter.
  43. Describe the Finney County murders prior to the Clutter murder.
  44. Why does Dewey return to the Clutter home each day?
  45. Describe Marie's dream.
  46. What example of fate is found at the end of "Persons Unknown"?
  47. What example of irony is found at the end of "Persons Unknown"?
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### **Section III: Answer (pages 159-189)**

1. Why is Floyd Wells concerned when he hears the news of the Clutter murders?
2. How does fate come up again in Floyd's encounter?
3. Why doesn't Floyd want to tell his story to the KBI?
4. How does Marie, Dewey's wife, react when she sees pictures of Dick and Perry?
5. How do the Hickocks feel about their son? In what way do they "cover" for their son? In what ways do they recognize and admit his mistakes?
6. How do the views about Dick differ between the community and his family?
7. Why do you think the agent does not mention the murders in talking with Dick's parents?
8. What is the Hickocks's impression of Perry? Why is this ironic?
9. Why do you think the agent does not take the gun with him?
10. Why had Mr. Bell stopped to pick up Dick and Perry? How is he later saved? (Is this another example of fate?)
11. What news about Perry does the proprietor of the rooming house tell the detectives?
12. Describe the contents of Perry's box.
13. What information about Perry does Barbara tell the detective?
14. Back to the Nature vs. Nurture argument. What information does the reader learn about the problems in Perry's family that may relate to nature? Be specific.
15. What story about Japan does Barbara tell about Perry? Do you believe this story? Explain.
16. About what part of his childhood does Perry seem to be most upset?
17. What "crazy-man stunt" does Dick introduce? Why does he think they should do this?

### **Section III: Answer (pages 189-217)**

18. According to Dewey, what is their only physical evidence in the crime?
19. How must the detectives trick Dick and Perry?
20. What new rule does Myrt Clare declare? Why?
21. Why does Perry become so upset at the washateria?
22. What does Perry think Dick will do if he is arrested?
23. Describe Dewey's dream.
24. Explain Perry's view of the murder in Florida. Why is this ironic?
25. What do we learn about Dick and Perry from the incident with the young girl on the beach?
26. About what is Perry fascinated? Why?
27. Explain the incident with Dick and Perry and the hitchhikers. What do we learn about both men through this episode?
28. When are Perry and Dick arrested? Why do they think they have been arrested?
29. How do the detectives hope to trap the two men?

### **Section III: Answer (pages 217-248)**

30. About what things does Dick boast during his interview? What impression does he make on the detectives?
30. What story does he tell about the night the Clutters were murdered?
31. How does Dick react when the detectives broach the Clutter murder?
32. According to the detectives, what two mistakes had Perry and Dick made?
33. Before ending the interrogation, what information do the detectives give Dick to think about?
34. Look on page 224 and find the description of Perry. Compare this description to earlier descriptions of Perry.
35. How does Perry behave during his interrogation?
36. Alone in his cell, what does Dick think about for the first time?
37. What news does Dick tell the detectives the next time they meet? What does this tell us about Dick? According to the detectives, what had Dick called Perry?
38. During the car ride to Garden City, why does Perry finally decide to tell all he knows about the murders?
39. According to Perry, what had happened that night? What news do we learn for the first time? Do you trust Perry's version? Explain.
40. All along, Dewey had been troubled by the mattress box and bed covers. What does Perry tell him about these items?
41. What causes an argument between Dick and Perry during the murders?
42. According to Perry, how had each family member reacted to the intrusion?
43. How do the citizens of Garden City react when the alleged killers are brought to the courthouse?

## **Section IV: The Corner (pages 252-279)**

1. Describe the living conditions of Wendle and Josie Meier.
2. How does Mrs. Meier treat Perry?
3. What information do we read in this section to indicate that Perry has good qualities?
4. How does Perry want to change his confession? Why does he want to do this?
5. What evidence are the detectives able to retrieve?
6. What is the reaction of the lawyers who are appointed to defend Perry and Dick?
7. Describe Dick's father's reaction to his son's arrest.
8. Describe the letter which Perry receives in prison. What is Perry's response?
9. Detail the plans which Dick makes while awaiting trial. What happens to thwart these plans?
10. What document does Perry keep on his desk? Explain why he had written this document. Do you believe what Perry sees?
11. Explain how Perry's big bird dream reappears.
12. Why don't the lawyers ask for a change of venue?
13. Why do the lawyers want the trial postponed?
14. Contrast the appearance of Perry and Dick when they enter the courtroom? What does this tell us?
15. What new information about Perry do we learn from his autobiographical essay?
16. What new information about Dick do we learn from his autobiographical essay?

## **Section IV: The Corner (pages 279-310)**

17. How does Dick's father react to the judge? Why?
18. How does Floyd Wells behave in the courtroom? How does Dick react to him?
19. How do the defense attorneys attempt to discredit Floyd Wells?
20. What do we learn about Floyd's life after the trial?
21. What news does Alvin Dewey interject in the courtroom which startles Dick?
22. What information about Perry's change in testimony do we also learn in the courtroom?
23. Explain why Mrs. Hickock becomes so upset in the courtroom.
24. Describe the special dinner Perry has for Donald Cullivan? Describe and explain Perry's behavior during this dinner.
25. What startling news about the murders does Perry tell Donald?
26. How does Dick's father attempt to help him during his testimony?
27. What news does the psychiatrist tell the court about Dick? About Perry?
28. Look at page 296. Capote adds a section about what Dr. Jones WOULD have told the court

if he had been permitted. Why wasn't Dr. Jones allowed to give this testimony? Why do you think Capote includes this record?

29. Describe the closing arguments for both sides and explain how the argument affected the audience or jury.
30. From what we see in the book, what role does retribution play in the community? Explain.
31. What is ironic at the end of the trial?
32. How does Perry behave when he returns to his cell? Who tries to help him?
33. Describe the Leavenworth prison where Dick and Perry are taken.

## **Section IV: The Corner (pages 310-End)**

34. Briefly describe the changes in the capital punishment sentence in Kansas prior to the Clutter murder.
35. Explain the story of Lowell Lee Andrews. Why is this story included in the book?
36. Describe the importance of the Reverend Dameron. How do you feel about his involvement in the Andrews' case?
37. Describe the behavior of Perry while on Death Row.
38. Describe the behavior of Dick while on Death Row.
39. Explain why Perry detests Andrews. What does this tell the reader about Perry?
40. How does Perry react when he receives the postcard from his father?
41. How does Dick react to the many visits from his mother?
42. How is Dick instrumental in having the Clutter case reviewed? What is the final verdict of the committee reviewing the case?
43. Describe the two new inmates to Death Row. Why are their cases included in the book?
44. Who is the journalist referred to on page 331? (Yep, just guess.)
45. What effect does Andrews's execution have on Dick and Perry?
46. Describe how Dick approaches his execution.
47. Describe how Perry approaches his execution.
48. Describe the executioner.
49. Describe the effect the executions have on Dewey.
50. What final information do we learn in the closing scene in the graveyard?

## **Final Questions on Book**

1. What is the theme or message of the book?
2. What role does fate play in the book/
3. What evidence is there in the book to support that NATURE is more important than NURTURE?
4. What evidence is there in the book to support that NURTURE is more important than NATURE?

- 5 What role does the book play in the capital-punishment argument in America?
- 6 What symbolism can you find in the book?
- 7 Explain the double meaning of the title of the book.
- 8 Explain the epigram of the book.
- 9 What is your opinion of the book?
- 10 Why do you think the book became so famous?
- 11 Why is Capote's book considered a nonfiction novel?