

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Julie Brown	School:	Olentangy High School
Book Title:	In Cold Blood	Genre:	novel
Author:	Truman Capote	Pages:	343
Publisher:	Vintage Books	Copyright:	1965

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

Herbert Clutter inspects his ranch on the morning of November 14, 1959. That same morning, on the other side of Kansas, Perry Smith meets up with Dick Hickock. While the Clutters go about their daily business, running errands and baking apple pies, Hickock and Smith are tuning their car. After a long drive, they pull up to the Clutter home with a shotgun and knife in hand.

That morning, the bodies are discovered by Susan Kidwell and another of Nancy's friends. Initially, the police are baffled. Bobby Rupp is a suspect until he passes a lie detector test. Alvin Dewey, the KBI agent in charge of the investigation, thinks that the killer must be someone close to the family. Rumor sets the small town of Holcomb on fire. Hartman's Cafe is the center of numerous theories. Meanwhile, Perry and Dick have returned to Dick's hometown of Olathe. Dick passes some hot checks, and the two flee to Mexico. Perry has always dreamed of finding sunken treasure in Mexico. While the investigation in Kansas begins to methodically follow up dead end leads, Perry and Dick spend some time entertaining a rich German tourist before they run out of money in Mexico City. While packing to return to the states, Perry goes through his personal belongings and remembers his childhood. His mother and father rode the rodeo circuit until they had a falling out. Perry was passed from home to home as a child. Now, two of his three siblings have killed themselves.

The investigation of the Clutter murders seems to be heading nowhere. However, a man in the Kansas state prison at Lansing, Floyd Wells, hears of the murder case. Sure that Dick Hickock is responsible, he begins to think of talking to the authorities. Meanwhile, Dick and Perry are hitchhiking in the American desert. They try to steal a car, but fail. By this time, Floyd has confessed, and Dewey and his team are beginning an elaborate manhunt.

Before they are caught, Dick and Perry steal a car, return to Kansas City, pass more hot checks, and take up residence in Miami. They eventually backtrack to Las Vegas, where a policewoman recognizes their license plate number. Dick confesses after intense questioning, and Perry follows suit. The trial goes smoothly, and the two are condemned to death.

During a five-year appeals process, Dick and Perry languish in Death Row. Perry tries to starve himself while Dick writes letters to various appeals organization. They are kept company by various appalling criminals. When death comes, Dick is awkward and Perry is remorseful. (From Sparknotes.com)

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

Reading Process

4. Develop reading comprehension and critical analysis of a variety of texts.

Reading Applications Informational

5. Analyze and interpret samples of good writing, identifying and explaining an author's use of rhetorical strategies and techniques in their own writing.

Reading Applications Literary

8. Analyze and interpret samples of good writing, identifying and explaining an author's use of rhetorical strategies and techniques in their own writing.

9. Analyze the characteristics and writing styles of various authors.

10. Analyze a work's structure, style, and themes as well as the use of other literary elements.

This book illustrates exemplary author style and use of language.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be "cut and pasted" (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

Amazon.com

"Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans--in fact, few Kansans--had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there." If all Truman Capote did was invent a new genre--journalism written with the language and structure of literature--this "nonfiction novel" about the brutal slaying of the Clutter family by two would-be robbers would be remembered as a trail-blazing experiment that has influenced countless writers. But Capote achieved more than that. He wrote a true masterpiece of creative nonfiction. The images of this tale continue to resonate in our minds: 16-year-old Nancy Clutter teaching a friend how to bake a cherry pie, Dick Hickock's black '49 Chevrolet sedan, Perry Smith's Gibson guitar and his dreams of gold in a tropical paradise--the blood on the walls and the final "thud-snap" of the rope-broken necks.

Review #2

Madeleine Blais teaches Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" in journalism classes because it is compelling and beautiful, she said, a masterpiece.

She uses the book to show her students at the University of Massachusetts what journalism can be, how it can reach past the ordinary. How it can blend the reportage of fact with the writing style of fiction.

Advertisement

" 'In Cold Blood' is something miraculous," Blais said, "an alchemy that should not have been possible. (Capote) had indeed turned reality into a kind of fiction."

This is half of the legacy of Capote's great book. Published in 1965, it helped show journalists the possibility of using creative writing techniques while holding to the guidelines of journalism; something now commonly seen not only in books but also in magazines and newspapers -- where many view the style as crucial to keeping readers.

But in writing the book, Capote blurred the line between truth and untruth, despite his claims of impeccable accuracy. His embellishments -- which vary from allegedly misquoting people to making composite characters to ending the book with a scene that never happened -- have bred ill will from some in the book who felt falsely portrayed and distrust from readers who, upon learning of Capote's changes, are left to wonder where reality ends and fiction begins.

And in today's media environment, in which Jayson Blair of The New York Times and Stephen Glass of the New Republic have come under fire in recent years for falsifying portions of stories, the challenges to "In Cold Blood" are all the more relevant, said Jack Hart, a managing editor and narrative expert at The Oregonian, Portland's daily newspaper.

But, with "In Cold Blood" about to turn 40 years old, those leading the movement once known as "new journalism" agree that the book deserves to be remembered for its contributions to the genre as well as for its faults.

"Certainly it's an important book," Hart said, "to demonstrate that the literary techniques of a novel could be applied to narrative journalism."

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: 1984

Author: George Orwell

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

The book includes several references to rape: A murder takes place where the murderer thinks about raping the victim.

The book contains a violent description of a murder.

Some references to alcohol.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated Regular At Risk

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable):

Date Submitted to Department Chair: 5/23/07

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults