

## Week 2

### 1. The author

**Truman Capote**, whose original name was **Truman Streckfus Persons**, was born in 1924 in New Orleans, Louisiana, and died in 1984 in Los Angeles, California. He was an American novelist, short-story writer, and playwright.



*Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958; film 1961), remains his best-known work. It is a novella about Holly Golightly, a young fey café society girl; it was first published in *Esquire* magazine in 1958 and then as a book, with several other stories.

Capote is best known for writing the half-true novel, *In Cold Blood*. The novel is based on a murder that happened in Kansas in the 1950s. Capote began researching the murders soon after they happened, and he spent six years interviewing the two men who were eventually executed for the crime. He became good friends with the man accused of the murder.

### 2. Read the text

#### Text B:

During the winter of 1945 I lived for several months in a rooming house in Brooklyn. It was not a shabby place, but a pleasantly furnished, elderly brownstone kept hospital-neat by its owners, two maiden sisters.

Mr. Jones lived in the room next to mine. My room was the smallest in the house, his the largest, a nice big sunshiny room, which was just as well, for Mr. Jones never left it: all his needs, meals, shopping, laundry, were attended to by the middle-aged landladies. Also, he was not without visitors; on the average, a half-dozen various persons, man and women, young, old, in-between, visited his room each day, from early morning until late in the evening. He was not a drug dealer or a fortune teller; no, they came just to talk to him and apparently they made him small gifts of money for his conversation and advice. If not, he had no obvious means of support.

I never had a conversation with Mr. Jones himself, a circumstance I've often since regretted. He was a handsome man, about forty. Slender, black-haired, and with a distinctive face: a pale, lean face, high cheekbones, and with a birthmark on his left cheek, a small scarlet defect shaped like a star. He wore gold-rimmed glasses with

pitch-black lenses: he was blind, and crippled, too - according to the sisters, the use of his legs had been denied him by a childhood accident, and he could not move without crutches. He was always dressed in a crisply pressed dark grey or blue three-piece suit and a subdued tie - as though about to set off for a Wall Street office. However, as I've said, he never left the premises. Simply sat in his cheerful room in a comfortable chair and received visitors. I had no option of why they came to see him, these rather ordinary-looking folk, or what they talked about, and I was far too concerned with my own affairs to much wonder over it. When I did, I imagined that his friends had found in him an intelligent, kindly man, a good listener in whom to confide and consult with over their troubles: a cross between a priest and a therapist.

Mr. Jones had a telephone. He was the only tenant with a private line. It rang constantly, often after midnight and as early as six in the morning.

I moved to Manhattan. Several months later I returned to the house to collect a box of books I had stored there. While the landladies offered me tea and cakes in their lace-curtained "parlor", I inquired of Mr. Jones.

The women lowered their eyes. Clearing her throat, one said: "It's in the hand of the police."

The other offered: "We've reported him as missing person."

The first added: "Last month, twenty-six days ago, my sister carried up Mr. Jones's breakfast, as usual. He wasn't there. All his belongings were there. But he was gone.

"It's odd-" "-how a man totally blind, a helpless crippled-"

Ten years pass. Now it is a zero-cold December afternoon, and I am in Moscow. I am riding in a subway car. There are only a few other passengers. One of them is a man sitting opposite to me, a man wearing boots, a thick long coat and a Russian-style fur cap. He has bright eyes, blue as a peacock's. After a doubtful instant, I simply stared, for even without the black glasses, there was no mistaking that lean distinctive face, those high cheekbones with the single scarlet star-shaped birthmark.

I was just about to cross the aisle and speak to him when the train pulled into a station, and Mr. Jones, on a pair of fine sturdy legs, stood up and strode out of the car. Swiftly, the train door closed behind him.

Truman Capote, *Music for the Chameleons*, 1980.

## 3. Cultural Background

**The Cold War** was a long period of tension between the democracies of the Western World and the communist countries of Eastern Europe. The West was led by the United States and Eastern Europe was led by the Soviet Union. These two countries became known as superpowers. Although the two superpowers never officially declared war on each other, they fought indirectly in proxy wars, the arms race, and the space race.

### Time Period (1945 - 1991)

The Cold War began not too long after World War II ended in 1945. Although, the Soviet Union was an important member of the Allied Powers, there was great distrust between the Soviet Union and the rest of the Allies. The Allies were concerned with the brutal leadership of Joseph Stalin as well as the spread of communism. The Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

### Proxy Wars

The Cold War was often fought between the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union in something called a proxy war. These were wars fought between other countries, but with each side getting support from a different superpower. Examples of proxy wars include the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Yom Kippur War, and the Soviet Afghanistan War.

### Arms Race and Space Race

The United States and the Soviet Union also tried to fight the Cold War by demonstrating their power and technology. One example of this was the Arms Race where each side tried to have the best weapons and the most nuclear bombs. The idea was that a large stockpile of weapons would deter the other side from ever attacking. Another example was the Space Race, where each side tried to show that it had the better scientists and technology by accomplishing certain space missions first.

## 4. Answer these questions

1. What is the literary genre of the text?
2. In how many parts can you divide the text?

**From line 1 to 26. Quote the text to justify your answers.**

1. Where does the scene take place?
2. Who are the main characters?

3. In what way does Mr Jones differ from the other clients?
4. Quote two words that express what Mr Jones does for a living.
5. Why can't he leave his room?

**From line 27 to 35. Quote the text to justify your answers.**

6. Mr Jones has gone. Something mysterious and illegal must have happened because the landlady says "it's in the hands of the police." He no longer lives in the house.
7. What is the narrator's reaction?

**From line 36 to the end.**

8. True or false. Quote from the text.
  - *The narrator recognised Mr Jones instantly.*
  - *The narrator recognised Mr Jones thanks to a specific detail.*
  - *The narrator has just enough time to speak to Mr Jones.*
9. Analyse and explain the narrator's reaction when he saw Mr Jones.
10. Use all the elements in the text to imagine who Mr Jones could be.
11. Explain the twist in the end.

## 5. Vocabulary

Find the equivalent in the text for:

1. He always stayed in his room.
2. Nobody knew what he did for a living.
3. He wasn't lonely.
4. I wish I had talked to him.
5. He looked as though he worked in business.
6. The door closed quickly.

## 6. Translation

Translate this paragraph:

I never had a conversation with Mr. Jones himself, a circumstance I've often since regretted. He was a handsome man, about forty. Slender, black-haired, and with a distinctive face: a pale, lean face, high cheekbones, and with a birthmark on his left cheek, a small scarlet defect shaped like a star. He wore gold-rimmed glasses with pitch-black lenses: he was blind, and crippled, too - according to the sisters, the use of his legs had been denied him by a childhood accident, and he could not move without crutches. He was always dressed in a crisply pressed dark grey or blue three-piece suit and a subdued tie - as though about to set off for a Wall Street office. However, as I've said, he never left the premises. Simply sat in his cheerful room in a comfortable chair and received visitors. I had no option of why they came to see him, these rather ordinary-looking folk, or what they talked about, and I was far too concerned with my own affairs to much wonder over it. When I did, I imagined that his friends had found in him an intelligent, kindly man, a good listener in whom to confide and consult with over their troubles: a cross between a priest and a therapist.

## 7. Essay

The narrator manages to follow Mr Jones and talks to him. Imagine the scene and their conversation.

## 8. Follow up

From Truman Capote, watch *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and read *In Cold Blood*. (1966).



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