Plot Summary:

Part I: The Last to See Them Alive

Truman Capote’s book opens on November 14, 1959. Herbert Clutter has just woken up and is beginning a day of work on River Valley Farm, the farm he owns in Holcomb, a small town on the western plains of Kansas. The narrator states that this will be his last day of work. Across the state, a man named Perry Smith is smoking cigarettes and chewing aspirins waiting for his friend, Dick Hickock, to pick him up.

Back at the Clutter farm, Mr. Clutter’s daughter Nancy has woken up after a late night out with her boyfriend Bobby Rupp. She spends the morning helping a neighbor girl bake a cherry pie, chatting over the phone with her friend Susan Kidwell, and running errands for her emotionally ill mother, Bonnie Clutter. Nancy is described as a wholesome and talented girl, loved by everyone in the town. At the same time, Dick and Perry take a black Cadillac to get a tune-up, preparing for a long drive. Dick is described as small but athletic and covered in tattoos. Perry has a muscular upper-body but his small legs are damaged from a motorcycle wreck. He has only a few intricate tattoos.

As Dick and Perry drive across Kansas they stop to buy rope and rubber gloves. Perry wants to buy stocking to cover their heads but Dick reminds him that they aren’t going to leave any witnesses. Meanwhile, at River Valley Farm, Mr. Clutter puts down the first payment on a life insurance plan.

Dick and Perry sit down to a steak dinner and then continue on to Garden City where they buy a tank of gas. Perry takes a long time in the gas station bathroom and Dick thinks that his partner is having second thoughts. At the same time, Nancy Clutter makes a diary entry before bed. She writes that Bobby Rupp visited the Clutter household to watch television with Nancy and her 15-year-old brother Kenyon until 11 pm. In the black Cadillac, Dick and Perry pull up to the Clutter home.
The next morning, November 15, after waiting for the Clutters to answer their door, Susan Kidwell and another of Nancy’s friends, Nancy Ewalt, enter the Clutter home. Inside they find the bodies of Mr. Clutter, Mrs. Clutter, Nancy, and Kenyon.

The murders are announced to the town of Holcomb over Sunday church pulpits and the radio. Many people in the town meet and discuss the news in Harman’s Café where everyone begins to speculate about who the killer could be. The town begins to think that it must be someone they all know—someone in Holcomb. Across Kansas, Perry is sleeping in a hotel while Dick sits down to dinner with his family, stating that he and Perry visited Perry’s sister in Fort Scott. Exhausted, Dick falls asleep after dinner.

**Part II: Persons Unknown**

A group of Mr. Clutter’s hunting friends and fellow farmers go to clean up the Clutter home and the KBI, headed by Alvin Dewey, begins its investigation. The only clue that Dewey has is a footprint and a missing radio. Dewey suspects multiple murderers. He also suspects that the murderers were close to the Clutter family. As Dewey investigates the reader learns that Mr. Clutter was tied in the furnace room, shot in the head with his neck slit open. Kenyon was tied to the basement couch and shot in the head. Mrs. Clutter and Nancy were tied in their respective beds and also each shot in the head. Paranoia continues to spread throughout Holcomb.

In the town, Olathe, Dick and Perry eat dinner. While Dick eats massive amounts of food Perry eats very little and he expresses his worry to Dick that they will be caught. In Holcomb, over one thousand people attend the funerals of the Clutter family. Back in Olathe, Dick cheats shop owners out of cash and high-end items by writing hot checks.

As time passes, a letter appears in the local paper written by Bonnie Clutter’s brother who asks for the townspeople to forgive the murderers. Perry and Dick have made their way to Mexico with the money they stole and received from pawnshops. The reader learns that Perry once told Dick that he killed a black man for no reason—but he was lying. Back at River Valley Farm, the police catch a vagrant snooping around in Bonnie Clutter’s room. He is arrested, but is later found to have no link to the murders.

In a hotel room in Mexico City, Dick and Perry have run out of money and have decided to return to the states. Perry sorts through a box, deciding what to carry with him—he selects a letter written by his father, Tex John Smith, detailing Perry’s own troubled childhood and an interpretation (of a letter, written by a sister that he despises) written by Willie Jay. In the same hotel room, Dick is making love to a prostitute, Inez, whom he has promised to marry.

Dewey continues to work on the case to the point of exhaustion. Part II then ends as Dick and Perry hitchhike in the Mojave Desert waiting for a car that they can rob.

**Part III: The Answer**

Reclining in his jail cell, Floyd Wells hears news of the Clutter murders over the radio. After several weeks, Wells reports information to the authorities—he was the one who told Dick Hickock about the Clutter home. He never thought that Dick, his former cellmate, would actually kill them.

Dewey is very excited about this breakthrough in the case. Harold Nye, another KBI agent travels across Kansas to visit the Hickock family and then travels to Las Vegas to speak to an old landlord of Perry’s. Finally he travels to San Francisco to visit Barbara (the sister that Perry despises).
After an unsuccessful attempt at stealing a car Dick tells Perry that he wants to return to Kansas City. Perry reluctantly agrees and the two are lucky to find an abandoned car with the ignition running. After writing more bad checks, Dick and Perry end up on a beach in Miami, Florida at Christmastime. On Christmas morning, Bobby Rupp remembers past Christmases partially spent at the Clutter household.

Running out of money again, Dick and Perry travel westward. On December 30, Dewey receives a phone call stating that both Hickock and Smith had been apprehended. In a Las Vegas police station, four KBI agents question Dick and Perry. Dick is cocky and describes his check-writing spree in great detail. He denies any involvement in a murder. Perry, unlike Dick, is visibly upset during the questioning. The following day, Dick admits to the crime but he blames the actual killing on Perry. Over the radio in Hartman’s Café, Holcomb citizens receive news that two suspects have been arrested.

Once Perry learns that Dick confessed he also gives a full confession. Perry describes the hours that they spent in the Clutter household: Dick believed that the Clutter’s had a large safe with a lot of money in it. When they didn’t find it he had Perry tie each family member up. Dick wanted to rape Nancy Clutter but Perry threatened to kill him if he did. Finally, Perry shot Mr. Clutter and Kenyon. Dick then shot Nancy, and finally Mrs. Clutter. Arriving in Garden City, a large crowd watches the criminals walk from the police cars into the jail.

Part IV: The Corner

Dick and Perry are kept separately in the jail, which is also the home of the assistant sheriff and his wife. Perry edits his earlier confession, admitting that he personally shot all four victims. He also receives a letter from an old army friend, Don Cullivan, and he enthusiastically responds. As the trial begins, Dick and Perry are asked to write a short “autobiography” that will be read to the jurors. The state presents its case—Floyd Wells testifies and the trial progresses finally ending with the testimony of Alvin Dewey. As the defense makes its case a Kansas psychologist says he is unsure whether or not Perry could tell right from wrong at the time of the crime. Capote states that the psychologist would have, if given the opportunity, diagnosed Perry as a potential paranoid schizophrenic.

Judge Tate reads the verdicts delivered by the jury—both Hickock and Perry are found guilty and sentenced to the death penalty.

The book continues with a description of Lansing Penitentiary where Dick and Perry will be hung on Death Row or “the Corner” as they refer to it, based on its location. Next to the cells of Dick and Perry is the famous Lowell Lee Andrews, a young biology student who slaughtered his family. Dick writes to various organizations requesting an appeal. Meanwhile, Perry attempts to starve himself to death. Two years go by as their executions dates continue to be rescheduled. The prisoners are eventually joined by George York and James Latham. George, James, Dick, and Perry all watch from the window as Andrews is hung in “the Corner.”

After a total of five years Dick and Perry are hanged on April 15, 1965. Dewey attends the execution—Dick even shakes his hand and Perry winks at him “mischievously.” Dick states that he has no hard feelings against the state. Perry states that he is sorry for his actions. As Dewey leaves, instead of feeling relieved he recalls a recent trip he made to a graveyard. There he met Susan Kidwell, visiting the grave of Nancy Clutter. Susan has grown up and she explains that Bobby Rupp had recently married a nice girl. The book ends with the winds blowing over the Kansas grass.
Organizational Patterns:

This edition of *In Cold Blood* is 343 pages divided into four parts. Each part includes short, unnumbered chapters that shift back and forth examining different characters—it is particularly divided by visiting the citizens of Holcomb and then jumping back to Dick and/or Perry.

It is also important to recognize that *In Cold Blood* was one of America’s first non-fiction novels, incorporating both journalism and elements of fiction writing within its pages.

The Central Question:

**What is the American Dream?**

Before and during reading, student should become familiar (if they are not already) with the idea of the American Dream. The American Dream is the idea that all Americans have an equal right to happiness, prosperity, and success regardless of their race, social class, or circumstances of birth. How the American Dream relates to *In Cold Blood* can be read below under “Themes.”

By understanding that not all Americans achieve the American Dream, as is made evident in *In Cold Blood*, students will be able to explore why this is and what this means. Smaller questions that fit under this central question include: How do people achieve the American Dream? Who has a right to the American Dream? Is the American Dream truly for all Americans? What could keep a person from achieving the American Dream?

Related Issues:

Themes:

**Perversion of the American Dream:**

The American Dream becomes perverted throughout *In Cold Blood*. Originally, the Clutter family is the epitome of the American Dream with Mr. Clutter achieving great success and riches through the sweat of his own brow. He has a humble beginning but is able to work hard and ultimately purchase a farm, raise a beautiful family, and spend his days running his own life of both responsibility and privilege. Despite the Clutters’ achievement of the American Dream, such success provides no protection as they are murdered and robbed of their own safety, security, and control of fate.

Perversion of the American Dream continues as Dick and Perry attempt to gain the
American Dream through murder and robbery—they perhaps even succeed at this goal, for a
time. Dick and Perry visit the Clutter home with the plan to steal at least $10,000 kept in Mr.
Clutter’s safe. Here, the reader learns that Dick and Perry expect to achieve the American
Dream without having to work for it. Although they do not leave with any money from a safe
they do succeed at robbing the Clutters of the American Dream by murdering them. Later,
Dick and Perry spend their time conning storeowners out of money. This allows them to go to
Mexico and later to spend Christmas lounging on the beach in Florida. For a time, Dick and
Perry are able to gain the American Dream through cheating and stealing rather than hard and
honest work.

The Dynamics of Family Life:

There are extreme differences when it comes to the family life of the Clutters and the
family life that Perry Smith was exposed to. The Clutters seem to symbolize all that is honest
and hardworking. They maintain the utmost integrity and virtue when it comes to family life
and this is reflected in Mr. and Mrs. Clutter’s kind, giving, and somewhat perfect children.

Unlike the Clutter children, Perry Smith grew up in a home where integrity and virtue
were not upheld. At a very young age, Perry witnessed his parent’s divorce, and his mother’s
alcoholism. The Smith children often went hungry and uncared for which led to Perry’s early
introduction to theft and a life of crime. Later, Perry developed a relationship with his father,
Tex John Smith, but even that eventually results in loss and unhappiness as they fight and
Perry decides to leave.

Ultimately, it appears throughout the book that family life is directly related to the
individual character of a person. The exception to this rule would be Dick who was raised by
loving and caring parents—parents whom he respects and admires. Despite this, Dick still
chooses to become a criminal.

The Influence of Socioeconomic Status:

A theme emerges as the reader compares the middle-class, predominantly white
citizens of Holcomb, Kansas with the working-class, mixed-race (Perry) killers of the Clutter
family. As mentioned earlier, theft is the means through which Dick and Perry gain any sort of
financial stability. This is largely due to neither being able to receive higher education—Perry
is removed from school in the third grade (although he does go on to gain a high school degree
in prison) and Dick, although above average in intelligence, is unable to attend college due to
his family’s financial situation. Money is the largest motivating factor that drives Dick to plan
a break-in at the Clutter home and it is writing bad checks that later helps the police to track the
killers.

Epic Storytelling and Mythology:

In Cold Blood deals with many of the same universal themes visited in Greek dramas:
murder, vengeance, justice, etc. Here, the nonfiction novel becomes the perfect medium
through which to elevate true world events to those of epic proportions. This sort of elevation
allows Capote’s audience to view a true tragedy that occurred in late 1950s Kansas and,
through it, to learn broader truths about life and the nature of man.

Finally, In Cold Blood incorporates many American ideals within its pages, some of
which may be considered myth (such as the American Dream.) By showing the audience what
happens when all Americans attempt to reach these ideals Capote is able to tangibly reshape
modern mythology—at least for those who would choose to believe such myths.
Setting:

*In Cold Blood* is set largely in Holcomb, a small farming town on the western plains of Kansas. At various points the book also jumps: across Kansas, to Mexico, to Florida, to Las Vegas, to Alaska, and even to the inside of various prisons. The small-town feel of Holcomb provides a great juxtaposition to the fear and anxiety that the, once very trusting, community experiences after the Clutter family is murdered. During reading, it would be useful to have a map available so that students can tangibly see the various locations mentioned throughout the book. Students would also benefit from an understanding of the basic look and feel of a small, rural farming town in the late 1950s.

Because this is a true story, Truman Capote was left with little choice when it came to the setting of the book. In spite of this, Capote is able to use the setting to further the tone and themes he wishes to establish within his writing. The setting seems to become particularly important during points where Capote really pauses and allows the reader to really soak up their surroundings.

This happens specifically when Bobby Rupp visits the River Valley Farm after his girlfriend Nancy’s murder. Here, the novel seems to pause, as Bobby smells the rotting fruit in the orchard further emphasizing the loss he is feeling and the change that has come over the community. The final sentence of the book has the same effect as Capote pauses and allows the reader to experience, “[T]he whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat,” just before Alvin Dewey leaves the Clutters’ gravesite.
Point of View/Narrator Voice:

*In Cold Blood* is narrated by Truman Capote. Capote conducted many interviews with not only citizens and detectives of Holcomb, Kansas following the murders of the Clutter family but he also extensively interviewed Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. Capote even befriended Dick and Perry and eventually attended their hangings.

This unique access to the town of Holcomb allowed Capote to share the thoughts and feelings of many people within the book. It also leads the reader to be suspicious of Capote’s motive and personal feelings throughout the book. And even if Dick and Perry share their thoughts and feelings with Capote—they are still criminals. The reader has to be aware that there may be lies or biases within the text.

In spite of these problems that are likely to arise within a non-fiction novel, Capote appears to be very objective and candid throughout the entire book. Never once does he introduce himself or share his connection to the case. Instead, Capote presents the case as a sort of third person omniscient narrator—but with limits. He can see and explain events and listen to character’s thoughts—but only to the extent that they allow him to. The narration that occurs in this book is truly a large part of the appeal of *In Cold Blood*. Capote presents setting, conflict, characters, events, etc. and allows the reader to make their own conclusions.

**Literary Terms:**

**Character Sketch**

*In Cold Blood* contains many interesting and real characters. This book would be an incredible tool to use when teaching students about character sketches or about how to write character sketches. There are many interesting projects that could come from the observations of characters throughout this book.

**Dialogue**

Because students often have a hard time remembering the grammatical rules of dialogue, this book would be a great tool to use when discussing dialogue or when having students write their own dialogue. The dialogue within *In Cold Blood* is often interesting, continually changing, and it tells the reader a lot about the different characters. Due to this, students would have a really fun time writing character sketches—particularly based on some of the dialogue between Dick and Perry and the people that they meet in their travels.

**Foreshadowing**

The point of *In Cold Blood* is not the mystery of ‘whodunit’ and therefore it is a perfect tool to teach foreshadowing. The teacher can point out bits of foreshadowing early on because by the time the students have read either the book’s title/synopsis, the first chunk of pages, or done any background research they already know that Dick Hickock and Perry Smith murder the Clutter family. With that mystery out of the way, it becomes interesting and engaging to find pieces of foreshadowing that help to answer the questions: What happens that night in the Clutter home? Why do Dick and Perry murder the family? How will the town react when they catch Dick and Perry?
Genre

*In Cold Blood* was one of the first non-fiction novels and it is likely that it is the first non-fiction novel that a student has been introduced to. This makes it important to discuss how the book differs from both straight fiction and straight non-fiction.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole may be something to discuss as students begin to wonder how much they can trust the words of Dick and Perry.

Motivation

Motivation could also be an interesting topic to discuss with students. What motivates Dick and Perry? What motivates the detectives working on the case? How does motivation link to the American Dream?

Theme

*In Cold Blood* contains many varied themes within its pages, some of which were discussed above and could lead to interesting enduring issues, central questions, or class discussions.

**Affective Issues Related to *In Cold Blood***:

Being a true story, there are many issues and characters that students may be able to relate to within *In Cold Blood*:

- **Family relationships**: There are many varying familial relationships within *In Cold Blood*. It is likely that at least one of these relationships will strike a chord with every student, whether it be: a relationship similar to the loving relationship of the Clutter family (but still with secrets, such as when Nancy and Kenyon smoke unknown to Mr. Clutter), a relationship resembling the broken ties that Perry has with his family, or a relationship with unequal effort put forth, such as the relationship that Dick has with his parents.

- **Love relationships**: Love is also visited in differing forms. There is the teenage love of Nancy Clutter and Bobby Rupp, the love that Dick feels for his first wife, even the love between Mr. Clutter and his troubled wife, Bonnie.

- **Loss and loneliness**: Themes of loss occur as Susan Kidwell and Bobby Rupp deal with the loss of their friends. The community of Holcomb deals with the loss of the Clutter family. Even Dick and Perry eventually are forced to deal with the loss of freedom. Loneliness is an issue that particularly seems to come out when reading about Perry. It is likely that there are teenagers who may feel connected to Perry through the feeling of being alone or cast aside.

- **Community and isolation**: The community of Holcomb goes through a change of feeling safe and secure to feeling vulnerable and exposed—something that would be very relatable to a teenager who is gaining increased responsibility. Isolation
becomes an issue as Perry and Dick are locked in their cells awaiting their ultimate fate. This could be similar to the isolation that some students may be feeling in their own lives.

- **Peer pressure:** In a way, Perry is faced with peer pressure when Dick asks him to help rob the Clutter home. Eventually, this peer pressure convinces Perry to murder four people in cold blood. This situation is an opening for the teacher to discuss the negatives and positives of peer pressure, which is definitely an issue in the lives of students. Why would a person do something that they know is wrong? How can we learn from the mistakes of others?

Anyone who is teaching *In Cold Blood* should also be aware that the book does include violence and sexual content. While it is not excessive, there may be students who are uncomfortable with reading it or parents who are uncomfortable with their children reading it. Due to this, students and parents should be made aware of these issues prior to the book being assigned. *In Cold Blood* is a book that may perhaps be most successful when used in a literature circle setting. This would give students and parents who are uncomfortable with the text the opportunity to choose a different text to work with.

**Vocabulary Issues:**

In terms of vocabulary, *In Cold Blood* is an extremely accessible book. It is written with enough simplicity that students will be able to make sense of the text without too much difficulty. This does not mean that there is not challenging vocabulary used in the book—there is, but this makes the challenging vocabulary easier manage and make sense of. *In Cold Blood* is a great text because it is more challenging based on the themes and issues it tackles rather than the vocabulary it covers. This will allow students to spend less time decoding the text and more time analyzing and learning from the text.

One interesting issue that may arise with vocabulary is the less proper vocabulary and grammar used by Tex John Smith in his letter to Perry. The letter is transcribed as it was written and therefore has multiple spelling and grammatical errors. This would be something that a teacher would want to point out to students. It may be important to discuss what this letter tells us, not only about Perry but also about his father. What kind of education did Perry’s father have? How might this have affected Perry? The teacher may also want to discuss with students why Truman Capote would have made the decision to insert this letter into the text. Why didn’t Capote edit the letter before putting it in the book? What was the purpose of including the letter?

**Background Knowledge:**

The teacher may wish to discuss the issue of capital punishment during the late 1950s, and perhaps even relate it to the issue of capital punishment today. Capital punishment, being such a controversial and changing issue, is something that the teacher will want to address without bias. Students should have the opportunity to reach their own conclusions regarding how they feel about the death penalty, and this opinion may change as they read *In Cold Blood.*

Students will need a basic understanding of the time and setting as mentioned above under ‘Setting.’ Again, a map may be a useful tool for the teacher to have on hand.
It would also be important for students to understand the basics of the legal system. The book discusses jurors, judges, and a court case. The issue of biased jurors eventually comes up in the book and students would need some basic information about the process of selecting jurors in order to have an opinion about the trials of Dick and Perry.

**Implications for Students of Diversity:**

Diversity is particularly evident in the characters of Dick and Perry, and if used carefully by the teacher, the diversity of these characters could really help students of diversity better access the text and find personal meaning in it. It is also possible, if not used carefully, the diversity of Dick and Perry could cause students of diversity to become uncomfortable and more isolated within the classroom.

The teacher can avoid such problems by not pointing fingers when discussing the diversity of Dick and Perry—the diversity that comes with being mixed-race or a minority race, coming from an untraditional family, having a different socioeconomic status, having a different physical appearance, etc.—but rather making the class a safe place to discuss these differences and the problems that arise within these differences. By handling diversity in a tactful way, it is likely that students will become more interested in the story—particularly those who feel some of the same pressures and challenges that the characters are dealing with.

**Gender Issues:**

While *In Cold Blood* does not largely deal with gender issues there are still relationships that could be examined as relating to gender issues. The relationship of Dick and Perry, for example, could be used to show a twisted version of gender roles. Dick becomes the dominant and controlling male character while Perry is submissive and weak, showing characteristics that would be more attributed to a woman.

Interestingly, one of the few times that Perry overcomes his submissive and womanlike nature is when Dick tries to exert more dominating male power than Perry thinks is appropriate—when Dick wants to rape Nancy Clutter. This is one of the very few times that Perry sticks up for himself, absolutely refusing to allow Dick this opportunity. Here, students would learn that gender roles are not simply black and white. Gender roles change and present themselves in various forms. They even, strangely, have the ability to alter within one set character.

**Possible Research Topics:**

- Capital punishment in the United States
- Poetry and music used throughout *In Cold Blood*
- Comparison of *In Cold Blood* with other journalism and fiction
- Truman Capote’s relationship with Dick Hickock and Perry Smith
Possible Project Ideas:

**Character journal:** Students must pick a character to focus on throughout their reading. They will then write entries (possibly even to teacher given prompts) from the perspective of their character.

**Multigenre project:** Students are required to share another work (painting, song, video clip, etc.) that has some comparison to *In Cold Blood.* The similarity could in theme, tone, etc.

**American Dream response:** Students must respond to prompts given regarding the American Dream. Are all entitled to the American Dream? Who deserves to achieve the American Dream? They will then discuss their thoughts in groups, or perhaps, in a Fishbowl or Socratic Seminar setting.

**Socratic Seminar or Chalkboard exercise:** Students will comment on the issue of the American Dream or Capital Punishment. They will also be required to constructively respond to the comments made by their peers.

**Media or Art presentation:** Students must create a film, power point, painting, etc. that uses words, pictures, music, etc. to highlight a specific theme within the novel.

Enrichment Resources:

*The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery* is an elaborately illustrated children’s book by Graeme Base. In it, Horace the Elephant invites animal friends to his home for his eleventh birthday to play games and eat a fest. At eleven o’clock the party guests are shocked to find that someone has already eaten the feast.

The book is written in rhyme and the reader is expected to use the pictures and clues provided to discover the identity of the thief. This book would serve as a perfect and very interesting introduction to foreshadowing, mystery, motive, etc. within *In Cold Blood.*

**Other Books:**

*The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin  
*The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris Van Allsburg
Poetry and music lyrics are used throughout *In Cold Blood*. The book even opens with the first four lines of a French poem “Ballade des pendus” written by François Villon:

Frères humains, qui après nous vivez,  
N'ayez les cœurs contre nous endurcis,  
Car, si pitié de nous pauvres avez,  
Dieu en aura plus tôt de vous mercis.

Brothers that live when we are dead,  
don't set yourself against us too.  
If you could pity us instead,  
then God may sooner pity you.

**Other Poetry:**

“The Race Who Don’t Fit In” Robert W. Service  
(A poem that Perry gave to a woman before he left her, pretending that he was the author.)

Perry sings and plays the guitar throughout the book, including the songs:

“I’ll Be Seeing You” Bing Crosby  
“Give Me Flowers While I’m Living” Flatt and Scruggs

The song “Renegade” by Styx would be a great song to introduce the idea of capital punishment. It also fits perfectly with Dick and Perry’s sentence in *In Cold Blood*. The entire song is the first person narrative of a man who is about to be executed by hanging for his crimes.

[Chorus]  
The jig is up, the news is out, they finally found me  
The renegade who had it made, retrieved for a bounty  
Never more to go astray  
The judge'll have revenge today on the wanted man
Other Music:

“Folsom Prison Blues” Johnny Cash
“Bohemian Rhapsody” Queen
“Small Town” John Mellencamp
“Fortunate Son” Creedence Clearwater Revival

* * *

In season 2 episode 14 (“The Big Game”) of “Criminal Minds” Perry Smith is quoted from *In Cold Blood*. Being a very popular show currently this could be a good way to catch the attention of students during the unit.

Other Videos:

There are video readings of *In Cold Blood* available by searching on YouTube. One example video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srr4_TP93kw
Pre-Reading Strategy: Personal and Group Anticipation Guide

Context:

The Anticipation Guide is the perfect first activity for this unit. As its name suggests, the Anticipation Guide helps students to anticipate the reading and the unit that is approaching. The students will be introduced to the book *In Cold Blood* and then immediately do an activity that will get them thinking about the themes and issues within the book. There is no reason to delay—it is time to start thinking about the meaning behind the book. Students should be given the opportunity to understand why the book has value and why the class is studying it, and the Anticipation Guide provides them with that background.

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of the Anticipation Guide worksheet is to introduce students to issues and themes that will come up in the reading. It serves as a pre-reading tool to help guide each student’s thought and reading. Presenting yes or no questions on controversial topics will likely spark not only discussion but also a curiosity within students to learn more about these topics and to have interesting and intelligent opinions about these topics.

By selecting opinions about these topics prior to reading the book, students may find that the book changes some of their views or students may find that the book reinforces the views they already had. Really, this is what reading is about—to challenge or enhance our opinions about the world. This activity is a tangible way to view student’s opinions prior to reading the book, and it would be interesting or useful to repeat the activity (or a similar activity) at the end of the reading to see how they have changed.

Directions:

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Copies of the Anticipation Guide worksheet for each student. (Also, possibly an example anticipation guide for the teacher to use as a model.)

**Before the Activity:** Here, the teacher would open class by introducing (or re-introducing) the central question of the classroom. In this case, the teacher would explain the idea of the American Dream. It would also be useful to take this time to introduce the book *In Cold Blood* so that students can make the connection between the anticipation guide and the book that they will be reading.

STEP 1: Introduce the activity by passing out the Anticipation Guide. Have students take a look at the questions and let them ask about anything they are confused about. (The teacher may need to explain concepts such as: American Dream, psychiatric evaluation, etc.)

STEP 2: Have students follow the directions on the Anticipation Guide. The teacher may want to model answering a question by putting a sample worksheet on the overhead.

Frossard. BYU. 2011.
with simple questions (Do you brush your teeth every morning?). Give students time to answer each question with a yes or a no under the “Personal Answer” section.

STEP 3: Next, read each question aloud and have students respond with a yes or a no by raising their hand. This will give the teacher a feel for what questions are more controversial and may provide more opportunities for discussion.

STEP 4: Break students into groups of three and have them repeat filling out the Anticipation Guide with a yes or a no answer. This time, students will be expected to come to an agreement within their group and write that answer under the “Group Answer” section.

STEP 5: Finally, have students fill out the final section of the worksheet—either explaining why they changed one of their answers or explaining a comment made by one of their peers that was enlightening. This final step could then easily lead into a classroom discussion where students can share their opinions, why their opinions changed or stayed the same, and what their peers said that was interesting to them.

**Assessment:**

Not only does the class discussion provided by this handout assess student understanding, but the last section on the anticipation guide is also meant as a small assessment. The point of the activity is for students to view controversial topics with a thoughtful eye, to question these ideas, and to question the ideas of their peers. At the end of the activity, if students are able to have meaningful discussion then the activity has been successful. Similarly, if students are able to reflect and fill out the final section of their Anticipation Guide then the activity has been successful. By filling out the final section of the Anticipation Guide students are showing that their ideas have either been challenged or reinforced by the discussion that has taken place—which is the overall purpose of the assignment.
**Anticipation Guide**

*Instructions:* On your own, read each question carefully. Place a ‘Y’ for yes or an ‘N’ for no in the “Personal Answer” boxes. Think about each question and be prepared to defend your answer. Next, in groups you will answer the same questions—this time deciding on one answer as an entire group. Place these answers in the “Group Answer” boxes. Discuss each question carefully with your group and, again, be prepared to defend your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>Personal Answer: (Y/N)</th>
<th>Group Answer: (Y/N)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is killing ever justified?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are killing and murder the same thing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are all Americans entitled to achieve the American Dream?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the death penalty a good solution to crime?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do people always have control over their own actions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Should people always be held accountable for their actions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Should a jury or judge take a criminal’s childhood background into account when determining their fate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Should a jury or judge take a criminal’s psychiatric evaluation into account when determining their fate?</td>
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</table>

**Finally:** Now that you have answered these questions individually and as a group it is time to reflect on your answers. Are there any answers that you changed after discussing with your group? If so, please explain why you changed your opinion. If you did not change any answers, please write down one comment that was made in your group that you thought was enlightening or interesting. Explain how this comment made you think differently or reinforced an idea that you already had.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
In Cold Blood
2007 Modern Library Edition

Pre-Reading Strategy:

Context:

The most effective time to introduce a KWL Chart is prior to a student learning about a particular topic—in fact, they don’t really work once the student has been exposed to information about the topic. For this reason, the KWL Chart would be most effective at this moment. By using the KWL Chart to introduce the American Dream students are being exposed to some of the most important pieces of the book prior to reading. This should prove to be very effective as students begin to learn more about the Central Question and more about the actual book.

Statement of Purpose:

Here, the KWL Chart will be used as a pre-reading strategy and it will introduce the topic of the Central Question. Front-loading is so important to any student’s success that it made sense to do an early front-loading activity that would introduce some of the most important themes and issues of the book. By front-loading at this point students should become relieved of some confusion and frustration later because they will have a better handle on the more important aspects of In Cold Blood.

Directions:

Time: 30 minutes  
Materials Needed: Copies of the American Dream KWL worksheet for each student.  
Before the Activity: Prior to this activity, remind students of the unit’s Central Question. Give students a few minutes to think about what they know about the American Dream.

STEP 1: Provide students with an American Dream KWL Chart. Instruct them to fill out the “What I Know” and “What I Would Like To Know” silently, by themselves based on the idea of the American Dream.

STEP 2: Allow students to share items under the “What I Know” column. As they share students should write new facts they learn from their peers under the “What I Learned” column.

STEP 3: Finally, this sharing will lead to a teacher-led discussion about the American Dream. Students should continue to fill out the “What I Learned” column of their American Dream KWL worksheet as they gain new information and insights.
Assessment:

In the case of the KWL Chart, assessment largely comes from the “What I Learned” column. Here, the teacher is able to easily view the change from a student knowing a very limited amount to a student knowing a much wider range of information on a given topic. Discussion will also become a form of assessment as students become engaged in learning about a particular topic such as the American Dream.
## American Dream KWL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Know:</th>
<th>What I Want To Know:</th>
<th>What I Learned:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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During Reading Strategy: Character Venn Diagram

Context:

Students will complete this activity around the time that they are reading Part II. This is so that students do not have to skip past information that they are not familiar with in order to complete the Character Venn Diagram—they will already have read enough about the characters in question to successfully complete the assignment. A Venn Diagram becomes a great way to visually view the differences and similarities of characters. Because of this, this activity would be useful for In Cold Blood particularly when examining who has and has not achieved the American Dream.

Statement of Purpose:

The Character Venn Diagram is a during reading strategy that is meant to assist students in linking the central question and/or other themes to the characters that they are reading about. By examining the various characters in In Cold Blood students will gain a better understanding of the motivations and thoughts behind their actions. It is important to understand characters in order to understand how they shape or change the themes within the text. If a student is not able to relate to or understand a character they cannot be expected to gain anything from the writing. It is, therefore, important that a teacher helps students to create these links. This will ensure that students are actually gaining something meaningful from their reading.

Directions:

Time: 30 minutes
Materials Needed: Copies of the Character Venn Diagram worksheet for each student. Copies of the text for each student (or, at the very least, copies of their assigned section of the text).
Before the Activity: Students should have the opportunity to listen to portions of the book in class. This would be a good opportunity, particularly if they could listen to a passage that describes either Herbert Clutter, Dick Hickock, or Perry Smith.

STEP 1: Assign each student either Part I or Part II of In Cold Blood. (It would work well if each row was assigned different parts. Then students could easily be partnered with their neighbor later on.)
STEP 2: Hand out the Character Venn Diagram worksheet to each student. Instruct each student to read the directions at the top of the worksheet. The teacher should then model how to fill out the Venn Diagram. Do this by writing “Kansas Resident” in the circle that connects “Dick Hickock” and “Herbert Clutter.” Both Dick and Mr. Clutter are Kansas residents, but Perry Smith is not supposed to be in Kansas because this is a parole violation...
for Perry. Now have students continue filling out the Venn Diagram with information from their assigned book section.

STEP 3: Once students have finished filling out the Character Venn Diagram with information from their section, partner them with a student who was working on the alternative section. Have students explain their conclusions to one another, filling out any points that they did not previously have.

STEP 4: Finally, have the students discuss and respond to the final section of the worksheet in their partnerships. Based on their Character Venn Diagram they should have some conclusions or inferences made regarding the different characters and the American Dream. This section of the worksheet could easily lead into a class discussion. (It may even be useful to replicate the Character Venn Diagram on the whiteboard to allow partners to share ideas with the rest of the class.)

Assessment:

With the Character Venn Diagram, assessment mainly comes in the form of viewing each student’s Venn Diagram and listening and observing the conversations that are happening among students during the activity. If students are engaged and have plenty to label then it is likely that they are understanding and learning about the characters in the book.

The last section of this worksheet also serves as a sort of assessment. Here, students must think more about the overall theme of the novel as it relates to these specific three characters. By doing this, students show that they are grasping theme.
Character Venn Diagram

Instructions: You will be assigned Part I or Part II of *In Cold Blood*. Once you have been assigned a section, skim through the section looking for information about Herbert Clutter, Dick Hickock, and Perry Smith. This information could include: physical appearance, character traits, childhood background, personal philosophies, or anything else that you can find or infer about the character. Fill out the Character Venn Diagram below using the information that you find.

**Include page numbers** next to the information you provide. If the information applies only to one character, put it into their personal section. If the information applies to more than one character put it in the space linking the appropriate characters.

What does the Character Venn Diagram explain about these characters and their relationship to the American Dream? Have any of them achieved the American Dream? Why or why not? How is this evident?

_______________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________

Frossard. BYU. 2011.
Context:

At this point, students will have read enough of the book to have been introduced to many interesting characters. The Body Biography is the perfect activity to get students more engaged with the characters in the text.

Statement of Purpose:

Body Biographies can help students to explore the complexity of character within a novel. This activity will allow students to explore personality, physical appearance, motivation, etc. of various characters during reading. Because *In Cold Blood* has such interesting and varied characters this activity will be particularly engaging for students. It will also provide an opportunity for them to share the things that they are learning with their peers.

Directions:

Time: 50 minutes

Materials Needed: Large sheets of butcher paper (one for each group). Markers, crayons, pens, scissors. Copies of the Body Biography worksheet for each student (or, at the very least, one for each group.)

Before the Activity: Discuss character and what makes a good character. What do we need to know about a character for them to be meaningful to us, as the reader?

STEP 1: Introduce the idea of character. Are characters complex? What makes up a character? Is there a difference between what is outwardly seen of a character and what is going on inside of a character?

STEP 2: Divide students into groups (of 3 or 4) giving each group a different *In Cold Blood* character. Hand out the Body Biography worksheet and go over the list of requirements for the assignment.

STEP 3: Give students time to brainstorm, spread out and trace each other, and work on drawing, coloring, and writing on their life-sized poster.

STEP 4: Allow students to present orally (requiring each member to contribute something) to their classmates. Let them answer questions asked by their peers.
Assessment:

The presentation made by each group once they have completed their Body Biography is a useful form of assessment. It allows students to show not only their peers but also the teacher what they have been learning about character as they have read *In Cold Blood*. Students will have to articulate arguments and explanations for why they chose certain artwork or words for their particular piece. If they can share their Body Biography with the class then it is likely that they are understanding character within the novel.
**Body Biographies**

*Instructions:* In groups, you will be making a Body Biography for one of the following characters:

Herbert Clutter, Bonnie Clutter, Nancy Clutter, Kenyon Clutter, Dick Hickock, Perry Hickock, Alvin Dewey, Bobby Rupp, Susan Kidwell

For this character, you must give the class an idea of their identity and personality using art and writing. *Along with your own creativity, your Body Biographies are required to have:*

- Some kind of color representation (race, personality, etc.)
- At least two quotations relating to your character (annotated)
  - The “spine” of your character—the thing that most drives him or her
  - Some form of physical representation (height, weight, hair color, clothing, etc.)

As you complete this activity, please consider:

- **Placement:** Carefully select the placement of your art and words. For example, the feet might indicate where a person is headed in life, the heart might indicate the things that they love and care for.
- **Inner and Outer Character:** A character may appear different on the outside than they actually are on the outside. Consider, what traits are outer traits and what traits are inner traits. How might you illustrate this?
- **Changes:** How has the character changed throughout *In Cold Blood.* Come up with a creative way to show these changes.
Context:

This activity will provide students with writing experience that they are likely to find engaging and interesting. By allowing students to demonstrate their writing skills through a fun activity that they get to exchange with a partner students will be more encouraged to study and really get to know the character that they are “interviewing.”

Statement of Purpose:

Students have read an entire book that is based on extensive interviews conducted by Truman Capote. Now, it’s time for the students to become the journalists in this after reading strategy. After discussing the non-fiction novel as a genre it would only make sense to give students some experience as a non-fiction novel writer. This activity will also force students to study the characters in the book. They will have to get inside their heads in order to come up with plausible responses to questions.

Directions:

Time: 30 minutes
Materials Needed: Copies of the Character Interview worksheet for each student. Copies of the book for each student.
Before the Activity: It would be useful to, as a class, make a list of some of the mysteries that were left unanswered in the text. This will get students thinking about the kinds of questions they would want to ask.

STEP 1: Bring up the idea of unanswered mysteries in the text. Students should each be given a copy of the Character Interview worksheet. They will write their name in the “Interviewer Name” space.

STEP 2: Give students time to write good interview questions for a character of their choice. (The teacher can guide students by giving them examples of bad questions: What is your favorite color? And good questions: Why did you pull the trigger if you went to the Clutter home not wanting to hurt anyone?)

STEP 3: Have each student trade papers with another student. They will now write their name in the “Interviewee Name” space and proceed to answer the interview questions written by their classmate.

Assessment:

By having each student write their name on each worksheet it holds every student accountable. Assessment can then be easily made by viewing and analyzing each student’s writing. Students who are understanding the text and properly analyzing the characters will...
be able to write thoughtful and interesting interview questions. They will also be able to
write thoughtful and interesting responses to interview questions. If students are not
understanding the text then this will be evident as they struggle with the assignment.
Character Interview

**Instructions:** Select a character from *In Cold Blood* that you would like to interview. This character could be someone who was already interviewed extensively, such as Dick or Perry, or a character who was never interviewed, such as the rich German tourist, Otto. Next, write five interview questions tailored specifically to this character.

**Character:** ______________

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________

Now trade papers with another student. The other student now becomes the interviewee and will answer the interview questions. Use the book for hints as to how the character might have answered these questions.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________
**Context:**

Silent discussions can be a really successful way to get students interacting with their peers while giving them time to reflect and form their own opinions. A silent discussion would work particularly well as a wrap up to a unit because it gives students a chance to slow down and solidify the things that they have learned over the past few weeks.

**Statement of Purpose:**

This Silent Discussion will serve as an effective **after reading** strategy, particularly after the anticipation guide that it slightly resembles. An important part of teaching is actually tying lessons together and allowing students to see the link from one lesson to another. Without this, a class can seem very disjointed and students can become very confused about the purpose of the class and the objectives that they are supposed to be reaching.

The questions used in this Silent Discussion activity mirror the questions used in the *In Cold Blood* Anticipation Guide, although they are different enough that they will still be new and engaging for students. The purpose of this activity is to provide the teacher and students to see the growth and change that has occurred as a result of reading *In Cold Blood*. It is likely that students will be able to better articulate their opinions than they could during the pre-reading activity. It is also likely that they will have changed some of their opinions.

**Directions:**

**Time:** 30 minutes  
**Materials Needed:** 9 large pieces of butcher paper and 9 discussion questions printed on 9 individual papers. Tape to attach these to the walls. Copies of the Silent Discussion: Personal Response worksheet for each student.

**Before the Activity:** Give students a few minutes to free-write about themes and issues covered in the unit.

**STEP 1:** Begin by explaining to students that they will be participating in a silent discussion today. Give a copy of the Silent Discussion: Personal Response worksheet to each student. Place a copy on the overhead and read through the instructions. Then, read through each question clarifying and defining any words that may be confusing (entitled, American Dream, sentence, etc.).

**STEP 2:** Give students time to respond to some of the questions on the worksheet. They should write a response to at least 5 of the 9 questions.

**STEP 3:** Explain how the silent discussion works. Each student will walk around the room writing responses on the butcher paper hanging on the walls. Students can make an
original comment or make a comment that connects to another student’s comment. All comments should be constructive and respectful and students should initial each of their comments so that they are held accountable for the comments that they make.

STEP 4: Allow the students to begin the silent discussion. Pay attention to questions that students seem particularly interested in or that are sparking conflicting commentary. These are the questions that the teacher will want to address when the class comes together to talk about the silent discussion activity.

**Assessment:**

This entire activity is a type of assessment. As mentioned earlier, it will allow the teacher to easily view the learning and change that has occurred as a result of reading *In Cold Blood*. If students are better able to constructively argue, share an opinion, and back up their opinion then they were at the beginning of the unit—then the teacher has had success in teaching this book.

Without linking after reading activities with reading activities done earlier in the school year it would be much more difficult to view the learning that has taken place. By allowing various reading activities to have similar purposes it is much easier to see the growth and change that occurs in students.
Silent Discussion: Personal Response

Instructions: Respond carefully to at least five of the questions below. These responses will help to prepare you for the classroom’s silent discussion. Be sure you can explain your reasoning behind each response.

1. Is the death penalty a good solution to violent crime? Why or why not?

2. Do family or childhood circumstances effect the decisions that people make? If yes, is this valid? If no, why not?

3. Who is entitled to achieve the American Dream? Why?

4. Do all Americans have equal access to the American Dream? Why or why not?

5. Did Dick Hickock and Perry Smith receive a fair trial? Why or why not?

6. Was it right for Dick Hickock and Perry Smith to receive the same sentence? Why or why not?

7. Does Truman Capote want the reader to feel a certain way about the Clutter family and their murders? If so, how is this evident? If not, how does he remain unbiased?

8. Does Truman Capote want the reader to feel a certain way about Dick Hickock or Perry Smith? If so, how is this evident? If not, how does he remain unbiased?

9. Is it possible for a jury or judge to be completely unbiased? Why or why not?
Vocabulary Strategy: Why It Makes Sense

Context:

Vocabulary is something that should be addressed with all students. Often, vocabulary lessons are most practical and most fun when the vocabulary is actually being used in the book that the students are reading. This activity allows students the freedom of selecting their own vocabulary while still providing them with the structure of an organized assignment. This mixture of freedom and structure would work particularly well with older students.

Statement of Purpose:

The goal of this vocabulary activity is to help students become more engaged with the text. While In Cold Blood does not have particularly difficult language there is definitely some higher-level (Tier 3) vocabulary that students could use extra help with. If students can learn to use the clues provided in the text to help them understand difficult vocabulary then they will be largely benefitted when reading any text in the future. This is the aim of the Why It Makes Sense vocabulary worksheet—to help students learn to find vocabulary clues and help within the text itself.

Directions:

Time: This worksheet should be explained on the date that Part II reading assignments begin. The explanation should take 5-10 minutes.
Materials Needed: Copies of the Why It Makes Sense worksheet for each student. Copies of the book for each student (or, at the very least, a copy of page 87 of the text).
Before the Activity: Ask students if they have had an problems with vocabulary in the book. If yes, where?

STEP 1: Hand out a Why It Makes Sense worksheet to each student. Have students read the instructions at the top of the page.
STEP 2: Have students turn to page 87 of In Cold Blood. Run through the example that is at the top of the worksheet. Explain each box that students need to fill out as they complete the vocabulary assignment. Answer any questions that student have as the worksheet is explained.
STEP 3: Point out the due date to students. Have them write the exact due date on their copy of the worksheet.
Assessment:

Part of assessing this assignment will involve simply checking the assignments once the students turn them in. This will tell the teacher how engaged the student was with the text. If they can explain why a particular word made sense within the story—then they are grasping the purpose of the assignment and benefitting from it. It would also be a good idea to have some kind of further writing assessment. This could nicely work in the form of having students write a story that correctly employs a handful of the words that they selected.
**Why It Makes Sense**

**Instructions:** As you read Part II of *In Cold Blood*, look for words that you are unfamiliar with and that look interesting. When you find a word fill out one column of this worksheet. The most important box is the “Why It Makes Sense” box. Here, explain how the context of what is happening in the book helps you to better understand the definition of the unfamiliar word. This worksheet is due the day that reading for Part II ends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Why It Makes Sense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Intrepid</td>
<td>“Certainly not Holcomb’s widowed postmistress, the intrepid Mrs. Myrtle Clare, who scorned her fellow townsman as ‘a lily-livered lot, shaking in their boots afraid to shut their eyes.’”</td>
<td>Characterized by resolute fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance.</td>
<td>This makes sense because earlier in the book, Capote described Mrs. Myrtle Clare as the only member of Holcomb who was unshaken by the murder of the Clutter family.</td>
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Discussion Strategy: Whiteboard Discussion and Mini Socratic Seminar

Context:

An easy way to get students actively involved with a text is to have varying discussion throughout the book. For this reason, a Whiteboard Discussion or Socratic Seminar activity would be practical at any point during the reading process. Each of these strategies would be particularly useful once students have been introduced to themes or issues in the book.

Statement of Purpose:

By allowing students to explore an issue in two different discussion settings it creates a way for them to really get into depth on that topic while keeping them from getting bored. Some issue are big enough that they need to be explored in multiple ways (such as an issue relating to a central question) so it is up to the teacher to help students explore while still giving them variety.

Directions:

Time: 50 minutes  
Materials Needed: Whiteboard and a handful of working dry erase markers. Copies of the Whiteboard Discussion/Mini Socratic Seminar scoring sheet for each student.  
Before the Activity: Students should be given some time to brainstorm about the given topic. It will keep the discussion on track if students are ready to write before they visit the whiteboard.

STEP 1: Decide on a topic that should be the guide for discussion (American Dream, capital punishment, etc.) and write that topic in the middle of the whiteboard.  
STEP 2: Give each student a copy of the Whiteboard Discussion/Mini Socratic Seminar scoring sheet and explain that there will be two discussions happening in class today—a silent discussion and a group discussion.  
STEP 3: Begin the whiteboard discussion by explaining that students may write an original comment on the topic or they may comment constructively on another student’s comment (they must do each at least once). When a whiteboard marker is free they can begin their commentary.  
STEP 4: Once whiteboard discussion has stopped make sure that students have signed their Whiteboard Discussion sheet under “Signature.” Explain the Mini Socratic Seminar. The class will be divided into two groups. Each student will hold up two fingers, letting one down each time they comment.  
STEP 5: At the end of the Mini Socratic Seminar give students time to evaluate their own group performance on the Mini Socratic Seminar sheet under “Rating.”
Assessment:

The main assessment for this activity comes in the personal scoring sheet given to each student. Here, students are held accountable for the work that they do which is a really important thing—particularly in an older high school grade. Assessment also comes as the teacher actively watches what is going on in the classroom. By reading and listening to the comments a student is making the teacher is more likely to better discover which students are on track, which students are struggling, and what needs to be re-taught or re-visited.
### Whiteboard Discussion

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I made <strong>at least one</strong> original comment on the whiteboard discussion:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made <strong>at least one</strong> constructive comment on another student’s whiteboard discussion idea:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mini Socratic Seminar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Rating (1 lowest – 5 highest):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I acknowledged and built-off of other student’s comments in a positive way. I was respectful in my comments to others:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was present at the Socratic Seminar—meaning that I was listening and contributing. My comments and questions related back to the topic:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
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Context:

Using varied genres to teach a book can ensure that students will remain engaged with the text even after multiple weeks. This strategy works to keep students thinking creatively while still employing good writing and analysis. Any activity similar to this one would be particularly effective during reading when students are beginning to get bored with the text.

Statement of Purpose:

It is important to use multiple genres when teaching anything in order to better engage student attention and interest. Music is a valuable tool to use when teaching students—it is something that they are familiar with, something that is enjoyable, and something that they will get excited about. By allowing students to get creative with a text they are more likely to find the text memorable, and more likely to master an understanding of the complexities within it. This type of creative activity would definitely serve well as a during reading activity, giving students a break from the monotony of typical reading exercises and schedules.

Directions:

Time: 30 minutes (Give students plenty of time to get creative and write their own song lyrics. The activity could take longer if the teacher also gave students the chance to share their song lyrics with their peers.)

Materials Needed: The song “Renegade” by Styx with printed lyrics to put on an overhead. Copies of the Character Song Lyrics worksheet for each student.

Before the Activity: Start by asking students to think about songs that are personally meaningful. Let students share. Discuss tone, imagery, theme, etc. within a song—explaining that songs are very similar to poetry.

STEP 1: Give each student a copy of the Character Song Lyrics worksheet. Explain the background behind the song “Renegade” by Styx. Allow the students to listen to the song while viewing the lyrics on an overhead.

STEP 2: Explain the assignment to the students allowing them to think about which character they wish to write from the perspective of. Discuss tone, motive, theme, etc. within song lyrics.

STEP 3: Give students time to get creative and write their own song lyrics.

STEP 4: Finally, have the students annotate the lyrics that they have written, explaining their thought behind the words. At this point, the teacher could allow students to share their song lyrics aloud with their peers. It would be especially entertaining for
the students to keep their character a secret and have their peers guess who wrote about.

**Assessment:**

The last section of the Character Song Lyrics worksheet serves as an assessment for student learning. If students are able to annotate their own work and explain their ideas and thinking then it is likely that they are learning and understanding material. Having the students perform or share their song lyrics would also be a good form of assessment. If students are able to correctly guess the characters then the students writing and the students guessing are each showing their knowledge of the characters in the novel.
Character Song Lyrics

The song “Renegade” by Styx is written as the first person narrative of a man who is about to be executed by hanging for his crimes. As we listen to the song, think about how the lyrics compare to what Dick Hickock and Perry Smith appear to be feeling as they await their own hanging.

[Chorus]
The jig is up, the news is out, they finally found me
The renegade who had it made, retrieved for a bounty
Never more to go astray
The judge'll have revenge today on the wanted man

Instructions: Next, select a character from In Cold Blood and write your own song lyrics for that character. Your song lyrics must be at least 10 substantial lines in length.

When writing the song lyrics think about:
• What is the personality of the character?
• What would the character want to say?
• What tone would the character write in?

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Finally, go back and annotate your song lyrics. Explain why you chose specific words, sounds, smells, etc. Write what tone you were attempting to portray—point out the places where the tone, theme, or motive is evident.