The Stranger by Albert Camus

Essential Questions: Does life have meaning? If so, what is the meaning of life?

Tasks:
1. **Conduct** a careful and thoughtful reading of the text.
2. **Annotate** for analysis and inquiry.
3. **Color-mark** the following motifs throughout **Part One**: light, heat, sound, water, sun, stranger, violence.
4. **Color-mark** the following motifs throughout **Part Two**: light/dark, sound, freedom, death, justice, and outsider/stranger.
5. **Answer** the focus questions. *You can use your notes during discussions.*

When you return in September, we will discuss these color-markings and other important aspects of the novel during Socratic Seminars. You will also take a test and/or write an essay on *The Stranger.* All students will conduct an interactive oral on the cultural and historical aspects of the time period, author’s life, and novel. More details will follow in September.

Biographical Notes on Albert Camus

- Born in Algeria (where *The Stranger* is set) on November 7, 1913.
- His father, a soldier in World War I, died the following year in battle.
- The loss of his father had a profound impact on Camus and made Camus painfully aware of the tragic effects of war and political strife.
- The death of his father left Camus, his mother, and older brother in poverty.
- While still in high school Camus contracted tuberculosis and nearly died, giving him a new perspective on death and awareness of his own existence. The inevitability of death is an important theme in much of Camus’ literary work.
- Albert Camus gained wide recognition as one of the leading French writers of his day.
- He worked with a significant influence on a post-war generation concerned with political and philosophical issues that dealt with human alienation and the search for meaning in a troubled world.
- During World War II Camus joined an underground anti-Nazi group and became editor of a resistance newspaper. It was during this time that he wrote *The Stranger,* which was published in 1942, and developed his theory of the absurd. This theory declared that life is essentially meaningless because of the inevitability of death. Camus, however, was never satisfied with the absurdist attitude of moral indifference (hence his work with the resistance). He felt that while life might be absurd, there were still moral responsibilities.
- Existentialists, like Jean-Paul Sartre, immediately recognized *The Stranger* as having existential qualities (although this categorization of the novel has proved to be controversial).
- Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957.
- Throughout his life Camus became known for his political views and activism. He was an outspoken critic of capitalism, although he was also anti-communist.
- Camus died in an automobile accident in 1960.

Historical Background

- Algiers is the capital of Algeria, a North African country located along the Mediterranean Sea. Due to its location close to Europe and its function as a port city, Algiers has had contact and influence from many different cultures for centuries.
- In 1942 Algeria had been a colonial possession of France from nearly a hundred years. Arabs, Europeans, and pied-noirs (people of European descent who were born in Algeria—like Camus himself) all lived side by side in the crowded city of Algiers. This was a situation which had its inevitable tension and unrest (as reflected in *The Stranger*).
- Under French colonization the native population, a majority of which were 8.5 million Muslims, had low paying jobs often performing menial tasks for Europeans, and little political influence, and by the early 1900s the native population became increasingly resentful of foreign rule. This unrest worsened after the devastation of World War I, and it was into this charged environment that Albert Camus was born.
What is Existentialism? Existentialism is a philosophical approach that rejects the idea that the universe offers any clues about how humanity should live. In other words, the identity of any one person cannot be discovered by examining other people, but can only be found by examining what that one person has done. According to existentialism, no one can claim that his or her actions are caused by anyone else; each individual is wholly responsible only for his or her self. Existentialist literature, therefore, usually focuses on freedom and responsibility for one's actions.

Part One Focus Questions

1. Describe how Meursault behaves at his mother’s funeral.

2. How do the members of the old age home react to Meursault’s mother’s death and to Meursault?

3. Describe the relationship between Salamano and his dog.

4. What is Raymond’s problem and what does Meursault do for Raymond?

5. Describe Meursault’s relationship with Marie.

6. Describe the strange little woman who dines at Celeste's.

7. What does Meursault’s boss offer him and how does Meursault respond?

8. Describe the shooting in the sun. Give as many details as possible.

Part Two Focus Questions

1. Right after the shooting, what is the conversation like between Meursault and the magistrate?

2. Describe Meursault’s feelings about killing the Arab and about being imprisoned.

3. Describe what Meursault does during his imprisonment.

4. At the trial, describe Celeste’s and Salamano’s testimony and the jury’s response.

5. At the trial, describe Raymond’s testimony and the lawyer’s cross-examination.

6. Describe the rest of the trial, including the verdict. Give as many details as possible.

7. Explain what Meursault tells the Chaplain.

Looking ahead Book titles for the 2014-2015 school year:

- *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald