



RESOURCES – Discussion Questions

1. Holcomb, Kansas, appeared to Capote as the very embodiment of traditional American ideas. Discuss the importance of the setting in Holcomb. What does the novel reveal about the town? How does the gossip surrounding the crime reflect underlying truths about Holcomb and small town Kansas? Is the town a character or protagonist?
2. Capote wrote what he termed a non-fiction novel. The combination was intended to achieve historical accuracy but also use fictional devices to shed creative light on actual events. In what ways is *In Cold Blood* like a fiction novel? In what ways is it like journalism? Did Capote achieve his goal?
3. Capote also tried to be both documentary and literary in *In Cold Blood*. For example, describing Kansas: "The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them." How does this influence the reader's sympathies?
4. How is montage used in *In Cold Blood*? Capote used several points of view—third person through the narrator's eyes, third person through Alvin Dewey's eyes, third person through Perry Smith's eyes. Does this shifting perspective hide what Capote thought of the crime or the people involved? Do the back-and-forth descriptions of events in Holcomb and the trial make the novel more vivid?
5. Because the Clutter family could not speak for themselves, Capote's information about them was supplied by neighbors, friends and other people who knew the family. Capote got most of his information about the perpetrators of the crime directly from them. How does these shape readers' opinions about the victims and about the criminals?
6. Capote carefully depicted the personalities of secondary characters such as Alvin Dewey and Bobby Rupp. Why did he do this? Were there any secondary characters you emphasized with because of small details? Do these detailed depictions add to the book?
7. Why did Capote omit descriptions of the two older Clutter sisters, who were not home at the time of the crime? Does the narrative benefit from this exclusion?
8. Why did Capote split the narrative into three sections? He recounted the story in a particular order, beginning with the day of the crime, discovery of the crime, investigation of the crime, and the capture, trial, and execution of the criminals. Did the author make you feel attached to the family with this style? Why did he save the descriptions of the murders until the criminals' confessions?
9. How did Capote build suspense despite the fact that readers know the ultimate outcome from the beginning of the book? How did he color the opening with a sense of impending doom?
10. The tone of the book reveals the author's attitude toward his subject matter. Capote intended *In Cold Blood* to be both objective (non-judgmental) and sympathetic. Is this possible? Did he achieve it?
11. Did Capote take a stand on the death penalty? Why could he not finish the book until after the executions? Does *In Cold Blood* make an argument for either side?