

Approved for use in English IV

Summary of the Work:

Darkly funny, Heller's novel presents a group of American combat men assigned to a mythical Italian island (Pianosa) during World War II. The characters each pursue quirky eccentricities; for example, in the hospital those trying to survive the war censor modifiers out of enlisted men's letters, signing them "Washington Irving." Milo Minderbinder, a genius at procuring fresh eggs and other delicacies for the tables of the enlisted, illustrates Heller's satire when he is able through his profit sharing syndicate to convince the Germans to help fly food. The madness of war is illuminated in the characters' attempts to achieve their goals; the central character, a bomber named Yossarian, is in fact the sanest of all, since he desperately wants merely to survive. Strangely, whenever the authorities wish, they may choose to send the unwilling enlisted men into combat or alter the rules of play. Upon every successful bombing mission, Yossarian continually is thrown into despair when Colonel Cathcart raises the number of bombing missions he must fly.

"For Catch-22 is the unwritten law which empowers the authorities to revoke your rights whenever it suits their cruel whims; it is, in short, the principle of absolute evil in a malevolent, mechanical, and incompetent world," said the critic Robert Brustein in 1961 upon the publication of Catch 22.

Rationale:

The non-chronological style and frequent shifts from various characters' points of view make a tumultuous timeline. As a criticism of bureaucracy and a representation of the nightmare of the evils of war, Heller's satire is at times hilariously comedic, and at other times depictive of the purposelessness of such a life. Students will understand that the novel goes beyond an anti-war statement to present a view of life in a nuclear age as absurd.

"There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.

'That's some catch, that Catch-22,' Yossarian observed.
'It's the best there is,' Doc Daneeka agreed."

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Wilson's Senior High School 11/01/97

Wilson's Fiction 04/01/01

"The Logic of Survival in a Lunatic World," a review by Robert Brustein written in 1961 may be found at the following link:

http://www.powells.com/review/2001_05_31.html

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Waterstones Books of the Century (1997, No. 5)
- Time's All-Time 100 Novels selection
- BBC's Big Read (Best loved novel, 2003, No. 11)
- The Modern Library's 100 Best Novels (The Board's List, 7)

Readability

- Lexile Score: 1140
- Readability Level: 9

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Heller has popularized the phrase "Catch 22," used to indicate any situation out of an individual's control. Through episodes hilarious or horrendous, Heller's bleakly satiric view of individuals in a desperate struggle to find meaning in the world at war is portrayed. While some sexual content may offend readers, the author's purpose is to illuminate the deeply troubled existence of his characters.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Students in English IV will recognize Heller's influence on thinking about modern warfare and its horrific reality .

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

Catch 22 is frequently a choice on the AP English Literature exam.