

The Stranger by Albert Camus (1942)

Summary of the Work:

A shipping clerk living in French Algiers in the 1940s, Meursault is a young, detached but ordinary man. The novel begins with Meursault receiving a telegram informing him of his mother's death. He attends the funeral, but surprises other attendees with his unusual calm and (once again) detachment. Over the next two weeks, Meursault carries on life as if nothing tragic has happened. During the beach vacation, however, Meursault and friends are confronted by two Arabs. Violence ensues, with Meursault eventually killing one of the Arabs. It was a hot day, and aside from the weather, no explanation exists for Meursault's crime. At his murder trial, the court seemed much more interested in Meursault's lack of grief over his mother's death than the alleged heinousness of his crime. Judged to be a cold-hearted, nonconforming, and of course, detached misanthrope (hater of humankind), the jury finds Meursault's character—not crime, per se—punishable by death. Awaiting his execution in prison, Meursault struggles to come to terms with his impending death. One day, after becoming enraged with an annoying, preachy chaplain, Meursault vehemently refuses to appeal to religion as a way of finding solace. Meursault joins the absurdist camp when he declares that 1) the world is meaningless, lawless, and without rational order, and 2) this is a perfectly justified claim.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Through the story of an ordinary man unwittingly drawn into a senseless murder on an Algerian beach, Camus explores what he terms "the nakedness of man faced with the absurd." First published in English in 1946; now in a new translation by Matthew Ward.

Rationale:

Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) works well in a class like AP Literature because the novel offers multiple access points for beginning a larger discussion of literature as philosophy. Not only can class discussion focus on literary techniques like point of view, tone, mood, character development, and sensory detail, but the novel provides excellent context for Camus's views on meaning and purpose as they relate to concepts like existentialism, absurdism, solipsism/sonder-ism, and nihilism.

Themes:

- Man and The Natural World
- Mortality
- Isolation
- Religion
- Detachment and Non-Conformity
- Friendship
- Passivity and Indifference

Essential questions:

Essential Question: "How does language influence perspective?"

Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"

Essential Question: "How reading/studying a text reveals universal truths about the human experience?"

Noted Distinction:

Readability

- Lexile Score: 880

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

The Stranger

by Albert Camus

(Published in 1942)

Notes on the Text:

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

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Connection to the Curriculum:

RI.11- 12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11- 12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11- 12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, cultures, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Additional Connections:

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