



# Book Club in a Bag

## Discussion Questions

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### *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote

1. Start with the victims. What kind of family is the Clutter household? In what way does Capote create sympathy for them? Do you feel they represented the American Dream?
2. How does Capote, as a writer, handle the actual murder of the Clutter family? Or is it too gruesome, too heartbreaking to discuss?
3. Discuss the killers, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock. What kind of men were they? What were their motives in committing murder? Talk about their backgrounds and psychological make-ups? Think, for instance, about Perry Smith's chilling comment: "I thought he was a very nice gentleman.... I thought so right up to the moment I cut this throat."
4. In many ways, *In Cold Blood* is about the murderers. Do you feel they deserve such attention? Do you think that Capote pulls off the near impossible—does he build sympathy, in your mind, for the killers? Does he endow them—Perry Smith, in particular—with any kind of humanity? Or does he depict them as savage animals, devoid of human redemption?
5. What was the impact of the murders on the Holcomb community? How did it alter the residents' perceptions of the natural order of things, of life?
6. With this book, Truman has been credited with developing a new genre of writing: "literary non-fiction." What might that term mean, and how does *In Cold Blood* differ from straight crime reporting? Why did Capote create the kind of story he did, and what is its impact on the reader of this new approach?

The above questions were taken from  
<https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/14-reading-guides/non-fiction/476-in-cold-blood-capote?start=3> for your discussion of the book.

# Author Biography

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Truman Capote was born September 30, 1924, in New Orleans. After his parents' divorce, he was sent to live with relatives in Monroeville, Alabama. It was here he would meet his lifelong friend, the author Harper Lee. Capote rose to international prominence in 1948 with the publication of his debut novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Among his celebrated works are *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *A Tree of Night*, *The Grass Harp*, *Summer Crossing*, *A Christmas Memory*, and *In Cold Blood*, widely considered one of the greatest books of the twentieth century. Twice awarded the O. Henry Short Story Prize, Capote was also the recipient of a National Institute of Arts and Letters Creative Writing Award and an Edgar Award. He died August 25, 1984, shortly before his sixtieth birthday.

From Penguin Random House website:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/authors/4231/truman-capote>

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- The member who borrowed the kit is responsible for:
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