

**Discussion Questions for “In Cold Blood” by Truman Capote**  
**October 22, 2022**

1. Why did Capote begin the book with the following [translated] quote:  
Brothers, men who live after us, Let not your hearts be hardened against us, Because, if you have pity for us poor men, God will have more mercy toward you.
2. Why does the author introduce the town of Holcomb, Kansas before any of the people? Does Holcomb embody “traditional American ideas” (at least in 1960s America)?
3. Does “In Cold Blood” have a protagonist, such as Herb Clutter, Dewey, Perry, the town of Holcomb, or someone else?
4. What role does "dreaming" (including the American Dream) play in the novel?
5. How is suspense built although readers know the outcome from the beginning of the book?
6. Why has Capote chosen to leave himself out of the story even though he often developed close relationships with the characters? Did you feel that the author was truly absent from his work or could you feel his presence in any way?
7. The Clutter family could not speak for themselves, so neighbors, friends, and other people who knew the family provided information about the family. How does this structure shape readers' opinion about the victims and the criminals?
8. “In Cold Blood” is considered a non-fiction novel intended to shed creative light on actual events. In what ways is the book like a fiction novel? In what ways is it like journalism? Did Capote achieve his goal?
9. Perry Smith eventually admitted that it was he alone who actually committed each of the four Clutter murders. At the trial, the prosecuting attorney told the jurors that “Regardless of who pulled the trigger on Richard Eugene Hickock’s shotgun, both men are equally guilty.” Dick steadfastly maintained that he was less guilty and did not deserve the death penalty because he “never touched a hair on a human head.” Which of these two points of view is more valid?
10. In the course of “In Cold Blood,” Truman Capote manages to create sympathy for almost every person from murder victims, murderers, law-enforcement officials, and ordinary citizens. How does he create sympathy for all of these characters? Is “In Cold Blood” making an argument capital punishment?
11. What do you think the thesis statement of “In Cold Blood” is?
12. Do you think the book is as ground-breaking now as it was as the time of its release?

**Sources:**

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