

## “Catch-22” by Joseph Heller

### Discussion Questions

November 18, 2017

1. One of the most challenging aspects of the novel is piecing together the order in which events occur. How does Heller manipulate time, fragment the action, and confuse cause and effect? Does this form fit the function?
2. Heller’s dialogue style is reminiscent of Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First?” comic routine of the 1940s. How does Heller use this back-and-forth disorderly logic to develop character?
3. Heller is sometimes criticized for his failure to develop female characters. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment and why?
4. Chief White Halfoat is illiterate, yet he is assigned to military intelligence. Does Milo Minderbinder, head of the M&M Syndicate, represent the individual’s triumph over bureaucracy, or is he a symbol of what is wrong with capitalism? Would you include one of the major themes of the novel as the struggle between the individual and an institution?
5. Chapters tend to be named for individuals in the story; however, titles are deceptive because they tend to be about other characters. Why might Heller have named chapters after one character but have written them about another?
6. How does the Chaplain’s religious faith develop and change as the story progresses? What does his timidity say about the power of moral absolutes in the world of the military? What is the significance of his sensation of *déjà vu* in relation to religious faith?
7. Is *Catch-22* a comedy, tragedy, story of morality, or an allegory?
8. What does *Catch-22* say about war? How does *Catch-22* compare to other war stories you have read or seen, particularly those about World War II? How does it compare to other satires?
9. Does there seem to be any system of justice in the novel? Are “good” characters rewarded while “evil” ones are punished? Can we clearly say who is “good” or “evil”? If not, is there such thing as justice at all?
10. Circumstances surrounding Snowden’s death are revealed slowly. What does his death mean to Yossarian? To others?
11. What are some of the examples of Catch-22s found in the novel? What is the true meaning of the title? Ironically, at the end of the novel, Yossarian has the opportunity to go home a hero and has the system in a Catch-22. Do you think the ending is a victory or a defeat?