

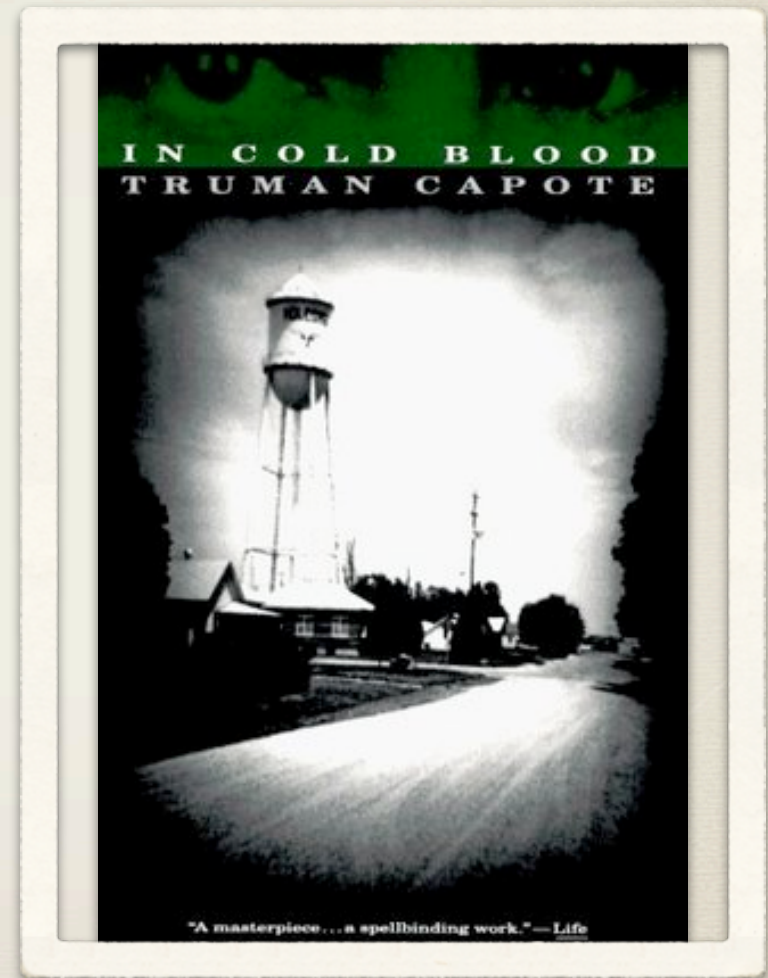
IN COLD BLOOD

Truman Capote

**BY: MEGHANA SHAH, CARLY WILLIAMSON,
DAISY GARCIA**

Introduction

- * The book In Cold Blood, written in 1965, was part of a new genre in writing that emerged in the early 1960s, known as “New Journalism”. This entailed using literary techniques formerly seen in fiction writing to illustrate nonfiction accounts. The murder of the Clutter family is a true incident that occurred on November 14, 1959. Capote first heard of the murder in the newspaper and became so intrigued that he decided to travel to Kansas to investigate it further. In an effort to gain the trust of the people of the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, Capote brought along his lifelong friend, Harper Lee, also the author of To Kill A Mockingbird. Capote worked on the story over the course of six years and it was first published in three installments in “The New Yorker” magazine before being compiled into a novel. (M)



Reading Quiz

- * 1. What imagery do you envision when Capote describes the town of Holcomb, throughout part 1?
- * “No, sir. Nothing like that here. All equal, regardless of wealth, color, or creed. Everything the way it ought to be in a democracy; that’s us” (Capote 34)
- * 2. What was the single devisor of the town?
- * (c)

Character Introduction

Herbert William Clutter

- * 48 years old
- * Wore rimless glasses, average height 5'10", broad shoulders and dark colored hair, his teeth are healthy and intact, weighs a hundred and fifty-four, early riser and skimpy eater, second richest in the town of Holcomb.
- * Honest, loyal to his town (kept children in the town's school), active in the town, a leader, very Religious, Methodist and highly against drinking
- * Used to be a member of the Federal Farm Credit Port, now a successful farmer, following his families past, loves his trees
- * "My husband cares more for those trees than he does for his children, and everyone in Holcomb recalled the day a small disabled plane crashed into the peach trees: 'Herb was fit to be tied! Why, the propeller hadn't stopped turning before he'd slapped a lawsuit on the pilot'" (Capote 13)
- * Four children: Eveanna, Beverly, Nancy, and Kenyon
- * Bonnie Fox is his wife, met during college (D)

More about Herbert Clutter

- * “His reaction delighted Mrs. Ashida, for she knew he would not approve her plan unless he meant it; he was a gentleman. She had never known him to ‘act the Squire,’ or to take advantage or break a promise” (Capote 36)
- * Traveled a lot : Washington, Chicago, Oklahoma, Kansas City, San Francisco, etc
- * “He was a ‘joiner, a ‘born leader’; she was not and stopped attempting to be. And so...they began to go their semi-separate ways – his, a public route, and hers a private one that eventually wound through hospital corridors.” (Capote 27)
- * (D)

Discussion Question

- * 1. Why do you think the author gave the biggest character description to Herbert Clutter?
- * 2. What does not carrying cash say about Mr. Clutter?

- * (M)

Bonnie Fox/Clutter

- * 45 years old
- * Married Mr. Clutter, slept in separate bedrooms
- * Sister of Mr. Clutter's roommate, a timid, pious, delicate girl -before her breakdown
- * Her sickness was caused by postnatal depression that never subsided after giving birth to Kenyon.
- * in and out of Medical Centers, always cold, only ninety eight pounds, she barely came out of her room
- * "All my children are very efficient. They don't need me [. . .] No, they don't need me, she repeated" (Capote 25)
- * Tried nursing school, but dropped out because she wasn't cut out for the hospital life, regrets dropping out
- * Always well off, never experienced poverty
- * "What if she made a mistake? What if Herb should be displeased? Better to lock the bedroom door and pretend not to hear, or say, as she sometimes did, 'I can't. I don't know. Please'" (Capote 28-29)
- * (C)

Discussion Question

* 1. What type of person do you view Bonnie as? Is she shy, timid, childish, mature? Why?

* (D)

Eveanna Clutter

- * Married to Don Jarchow, veterinarian, with a boy of ten months
- * Lives in Illinois, visited her family frequently
- * Eldest daughter

- * (D)

Beverly Clutter

- * Engaged to ha young biology student, Vere English
- * Their wedding scheduled for Chirstmas Week
- * Second eldest child
- * Studying nursing

- * (D)

Nancy Clutter

- * Sixteen years old
- * Very involved, helped community, straight A student, ran the household, president of her class, leader of the 4-H program and the Young Methodists League, skilled rider, excellent musician, popular, prize winning cherry pie baker, well organized and scheduled her day precisely
- * Pretty, lean, agile, short-bobbed chestnut colored hair, soap-polished complexion, faintly freckled, and dark eyes that held the light.
- * “She’s got *character*. Gets it from her old man” (Chapote 18)
- * Her boyfriend was Bobby Rupp
- * Always looking to make her father happy
- * (M)

Discussion Question

* 1. How does Capote exemplify, demonstrate, Nancy's selflessness and willingness to help others?

* (M)

Kenyon Clutter

- * 15 years old, youngest of the four children
- * Very handy, likes to build
- * “Kenyon resembled neither of his parents physically; his crewcut hair was hemp-colored; and he was six feet tall and lanky, though hefty [. . .] sturdy, strong, but cursed with a lanky boy’s lack of muscular coordination” (Capote 38)
- * “You never knew what he was thinking, never even knew if he was looking at you -on account of he was slightly cockeyed. Some people said he was a genius, and maybe it was true. He sure did read a lot” (Capote 52)
- * Falling out with his best friend, Bob Jones, due to girls, he didn’t understand why Bob was so into them
- * “‘You’ll see.’ Kenyon doubted it; he could not conceive of ever wanting to waste an hour on any girl that might be spent with guns, horses, tools, machinery, even a book. If Bob was unavailable, then he would rather be alone, for in temperament he was not in the least Mr. Clutter’s son but rather Bonnie’s child, a sensitive and reticent boy” (Capote 38)
- * “Lives in a world of his own” (Capote 38)
- * (C)

Susan Kidwell

- * Very close to the Clutter family, came California without a father, willowy, wan and sensitive
- * Was best of friends with Nancy, however transferred to the Garden City art school
- * Susan's mother is Wilma

- * (D)

Bobby Rupp

- * Seventeen years old
- * Roman Catholic
- * Star of the high school basketball team
- * Started dating Nancy in eighth grade, because he asked her to the dance
- * Singled out as a suspect to the murders

- * (D)

Discussion Question

* How do you think Bobby felt when he was interrogated as a suspect to the Clutter family's murder?

* (D)

Dick Hickock

- * 28 years old
- * Dominate personality
- * Father of three boys with second wife, but in love with the first wife, Carol. He divorced both, but still thinks and talks about Carol
- * Drives a black Chevrolet sedan
- * Disrobed he was athlete constructed, tattooed but unprofessional, his face was composed of mismatching parts a fraction off center
- * “All the same, Dick was full of fun, and he was shrewd, a realist, he ‘cut through things,’ there were no clouds in his head or straw in his hair”(Capote 44)
- * His off putting features were from a car collision in 1950, “an accident that left his long-jawed narrow face tilted, the left side rather lower than the right, with the results that the lips were slightly aslant, the nose askew, and his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size” (Capote 31)
- * “Perry had told him, ‘ The eye doesn’t matter. Because you have a wonderful smile [. . .]’ It was true that the tightening action of a smile contracted his face into its correct proportions, made it possible to discern a less unnerving personality” (Capote 31) (M)

Perry Smith

- * Powerful, looks like a weight lifter (his hobby was weight lifting), vain, superstitious (believes in destiny), not proportional -tiny feet that could fit in a woman's ballet slipper, no taller than a twelve year old child, stunted legs, "like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound" (Capote 15)
- * Half Cherokee and Irish, iodine skin, dar eyes, black hair; pink lips and a perky nose came from the father, he is also tattooed, artistically and professionally done. The name Cookie tattooed on his right biceps.
- * "said Perry, whose voice was both gentle and prim -a voice that, though soft, manufactured each word exactly, ejected it like a smoke ring issuing from a parson's mouth" (Capote 23)
- * Submissive personality
- * Willie-Jay, Christian, saw something special in Perry and viewed him as an equal, "[O]nly Willie-Jay had ever recognized his worth, his poetentialites, had acknowledged that he was not just an undersized, overmuscle half-breed, had seen him, for all the moralizing, as he saw himself - 'exceptional,' 'rare,' 'artistic.'" (Capote, 45)
- * Willie-Jay pointed out Perry's flaw which was "explosive emotional reactions out of all proportion to the occasion" (Capote 43)
- * Perry was in a motorcycle accident in 1952, spent half a year in a State of Washington hospital and six months on crutches. His legs broke in five places which pains him still, became an aspirin addict. (C)

Dick and Perry's Relationship

- * “The two young men had little in common, but they did not realize it, for they shared a number of surface traits” (Capote 30)
- * Both were: very hygienic especially their finger nails and fastidious
- * Perry's submissive personality led him to follow Dick's plan
- * “‘Get the bubbles out of your blood. Nothing can go wrong.’ No. Because the plan was Dick's, and from first footfall to final silence, flawlessly devised.
- * “The anecdote elevated Dick's opinion of Little Perry; he began to see more of him, and, like Willie-Jay, though for dissimilar reasons, gradually decided that Perry possessed unusual and valuable qualities” (Chapote 55)
- * Dick's view on their relationship was that Perry's “natural killer” mentality can “be profitably exploited” (55)
- * (C and D)

Discussion Question

- * 1. Why do you think Truman Capote gave a background relationship of Perry, between Willie-Jay and Dick?

- * (C)

Discussion Question

* Who really stood out, character wise, to you? Why?

* (M)

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- * Capote spends the first two pages describing Holcomb, “stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call ‘out there.’ [. . .] Not that there is much to see -simply an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad” (Capote 1)
- * The reader is introduced to Herbert Clutter and the family
- * Talks about Mr. Clutter’s admiration towards Bobby, however, “it was a parting that must eventually take place. The Rupp family were Roman Catholics, the Clutters, Methodist” (Capote 8)
- * We learn Herbert designed the house himself, “The house -- for the most part designed by Mr. Cluter, who thereby proved himself a sensible and sedate, if not notable decorative, architect” (Capote 9)
- * Alfred Stoecklein and the family, lived about a hundred yards from the Clutter’s, “Long faced man with long brown teeth” (Capote 12)
- * Babe, the horse, Teddy, the dog, Boobs, Nancy’s deceased cat (suspicion it was poisoned)
- * We meet Perry and Dick
- * Switches to Nancy starting her day off, with a busy well organized “she had overscheduled it. She had committed herself to helping another neighbor’s child, Roxie Lee Smith, with a trumpet solo that Roxie Lee planned to play at a school concert; had promised to run three complicated errands for her mother; and had arranged to attend a 4-H meeting in Garden city with her father. And then there was lunch to make and, after lunch, work to be done on the bridesmaids’ dresses for Beverly’s wedding” (Capote 18) Opened her schedule for Jolene for baking a pie
- * (M)

- * Susan and Nancy speak, Nancy confesses she's been smelling smoke, "regardless of what private anxieties might be, she could not believe that Mr. Clutter was finding secret solace in tobacco" (Capote 22). The conversation was interrupted by Jolene who had come over to practice baking a cherry pie
- * Dick and Perry work on the black Chevrolet sedan, talk about their plans
- * Nancy finishes helping Jolene bake a cherry pie and rushes off to help Roxie Lee with her trumpet lessons. Jolene is left alone with Mrs. Clutter, "Jolene had never before been alone with Nancy's 'strange' mother, but despite discussions she had heard, she felt much at ease, for Mrs. Clutter, though unrelaxed herself, had a relaxing quality" (Capote 25)
- * Jolene and Mrs. Clutter discuss baking and how tired Jolene will be after awhile, then Mrs. Clutter shows her the little possessions, "Little things really belong to you,' she said, folding the fan. 'They don't have to be left behind. You can carry them in a shoebox.' [/] 'Carry them where to?' [/] 'Why, wherever you go. You might be gone for a long time" (Capote 27)
- * Capote goes more into detail about Mrs. Clutter's condition, "She always wore a pair of these socks to bed, for she was always cold. And, for the same reason, she habitually kept her windows closed" (Capote 29)
- * We learn more about their relationship and both their accidents
- * Capote describes, in greater detail, Holcomb in Garden City, "Anyone who has made the coast-to-coast journey across America, whether by train or by car, has probably passed through Garden City, but it is reasonable to assume that few travelers remembered the event. It seems just another fair-sized town in the middle -almost the exact middle- of the continental United States" (Capote 33). Also the social standing of the religions, Clutter being the exception (pg 34)
- * Mr. Clutter recognizes Mrs. Ashida, mother of four. She describes him as a sweet and honest man. Last thing she ever said to him was, "I can't imagine you afraid. No matter what happened, you'd talk your way out of it" (Capote 36) (C)

- * Slowly Dick and Perry are making their way to Holcomb, stop at Emporia, Kansas, “a large town, almost a city, and a safe place, so the occupants of the car had decided to do a bit of shopping” (Capote 36). They converse more about their plan, Dick repeats, “No witnesses” (37)
- * Kenyon is described more on pages 38-41, his hobbies and interests, Bob and his friendship subsiding due to girls
- * Kenyon speaks with Paul Helm “one of the hired men”, the husband of the Clutter’s housekeeper
- * Mr. Helm and Kenyon Check out the gray Buick, outside Herb’s office, they believe it is the health insurance man, Mr. Johnson
- * We learn about Kenyon’s horse Skeeter who died because Kenyon overworked him
- * The book switches over to Dick and Perry, outside of Emporia. Perry suggested getting black stockings from nuns to cover their faces but because Perry is superstitious he waits in the car. This gives us, the readers, “personal time” with Perry where he discusses his time in jail with Dick and Willie-Jay (43)
- * Mr. Clutter and Bob Johnson meet and talk about life and how short it is, “You’re a *young* man. Forty-eight. And from the looks of you, from what the medical report tells us, we’re likely to have you around a couple more weeks” (Capote 47)
- * Dick and Perry are driving, Perry discussing their future after ‘their plan’ is through, Dick is very short in answering him (50)
- * Bobby explains his visit to the family’s household, nothing out of the ordinary.
- * (D)

- * The murderers stopped in Great Bend for dinner, after bought more supplies for that night's agenda. They drove a bit more and just seven miles from the ten, stopped for gas where a boy came out to fill their car up. Perry retreated into the bathroom, where he popped more aspirin pills. "They were glue-covered, sticky and thin, and as he inched them on, one tore -not a dangerous tear, just a split between the fingers, but it seemed to him an omen" (Capote 53)
- * While Perry is in the restroom, Dick has time to contemplate his relationship with Perry. "Dick became convinced that Perry was that rarity, 'a natural killer' [. . .] It was Dick's theory that such a gift could, under his supervision, be profitable exploited. Having reached this conclusion he had proceeded to woo Perry, flatter him --pretend, for example, that he believed all the buried treasure stuff and shared his beachcomber yearnings and seaport life" (Capote 55)
- * Nancy's room and routine is described, with personal photos, nightly "time to be selfish and vain" (56), and patterned journal logs.
- * Mr. Ewalt and his daughter, Nancy Ewalt, drive up to the Clutter's household for church. When there was no and no sign of the family, they drove to the Teacherage thinking they picked up Susan Kidwell. When Susan hadn't seen them either, she phoned them with no luck. They went back to the house, where Mr. Ewalt waited while the girls entered the house. They found Nancy Clutter first, "I don't remember screaming. Nancy Ewalt says I did --screamed and screamed. I only remember Nancy's Teddy bear staring at me. And Nancy. And running" (Capote 60). Mr. Ewalt found that the phones' cords were cut
- * (M)

Investigating Their Death

Readings from the book

- * Larry Hendricks, a teacher of English, was interviewed about his account with the murders. He accompanied Mr. Ewalt and Sheriff Robinson, “When he came to the part about finding the wires cut, right then I thought, Uh-uh, and decided I’d better keep my eyes open. Make note of every detail. In case I was ever called on to testify in court” (Capote 62)
- * They came to the house at nine thirty-five, Mr. Hendricks comments on Nancy and Kenyon, pg 62 paragraph 2
- * They went through the kitchen, say Nancy’s purse lying on the floor and the phone with its’ wire cut
- * When they enter Nancy’s room on page 62 paragraph 3
- * “We opened on, and that turned out to be a bathroom. Something about it seemed wrong. I decided it was because the chair --a sort of dining-room chair, that looked out of place in a bathroom” (Capote 62)
- * They opened Kenyon’s door and found his glasses and an empty bed that looked as if it was slept in. They proceeded to Mrs. Clutter’s bedroom where they found her, page 63
- * “I remeber the sheriff searched around to see if he could find the discharged cartridge. But whoever had done it was much too smart and cool to have left behind any clues like that” (Capote 63)
- * (C)

Investigating Their Death Continued..

- * When they couldn't find Mr. Clutter or Kenyon they went back downstairs and into Mr. Clutter's office, "We looked all over, and everything was just as it should be --no sign of struggle, nothing disturbed. Except the office, where the telephone was off the hook, and the wires cut, same as in the kitchen" (Capote 63-64)
- * They continued to the basement and found Kenyon on reupholstered couch, page 64 paragraph 1
- * Then they turn on the furnace room's light and find Mr. Clutter on page 64-65 paragraph
- * One clue is left behind, "On the mattress box. A half-sole footprint with circles --two holes in the center like a pair of eyes" (Capote 65)
- * On thing Mr. Hendricks couldn't get out of his mind, on page 65 paragraph 1
- * Investigators speak with Alfred Stoecklein, who recalls hearing Bobby Rupp leave around ten-thirty, "But he was saying as to how he hadn't hear a sound --said, 'I didn't know a thing about it till five minutes ago, when one of my kids come running in and told us the sheriff was here. The Missis and me, we didn't sleep two hours las night, was up and down the whole time, on account of we got a sick baby" (Capote 65)
- * "The suffering. The horror. They were dead. A whole family. Gentle, kindly people, people *I* knew --*murdered*. You had to believe it, because it was really true" (Capote 66) (D)

Investing Their Death Continued..

- * What was Mrs. Clare's reaction to their death? How does it compare to Bobby Rupp's? pg 68-69 and pg 73
- * Hartman's Café become the integral part of the community, was this important to the people? Why? pgs 70-71
- * Bobby gets the news about the Clutter family, he reacts strongly. "Bobby began to cry. Larry lingered at the edge of the Teacherage yard, hunched against a tree. He couldn't remember ever seeing Bobby cry, and he didn't want to, so he lowered his eyes" (Capote 73)
- * (M)

Discussion Questions

- * 1. Pg 63-64: Based on how the victims were found and details, like how the telephone wires were cut, do you think the murderers had a well thought out plan? If so, why?
- * 2. Why is the cord tied to the steampipe above Mr. Clutter's body important to note?
- * 3. Do you think there was some significant to the objects misplaced throughout the house? Why? Why do you think Mr. Hendricks found it important to mention the dining room chair in the bathroom?
- * 4. Who do you think the intended victim was? Why? Top page 65
- * 5. How does the town react when they find out what's happened to the Clutters? Is there a difference between the way their closest friends react and acquaintances of the family? For example Mrs. Clare of the Hartman Café and Bobby Rupp, Nancy's boyfriend. (Pg 68-69) and (Pg 71-73)

- * (M and C)

Discussion Question

- * Why do you think the author thought it important to end each interview with a foreshadow of their death (D)
- * What was Capote's purpose in alternating between the Clutters and Dick and Perry's' perspective during the beginning of the story? (C)
- * Pg 73-74: How do you feel about the fact that Dick and Perry arrive back home, act as if nothing happened, and go to sleep peacefully? Does that bother you? What do you think it says about the characters themselves? (M)