

The Stranger by Albert Camus

General questions and ideas to consider as you read:

1. Be sure you understand the meaning of the following: alienation (alienated), abstraction (abstracted), egocentrism (egocentric), minimal response, empathy, and absurdism (absurd).
2. Watch for and note evidences of irony.
3. Watch for and note examples of satire of bureaucracy, social attitudes, etc.
4. Watch for and note examples of this paradox: the abstracted man (Meursault) seems to draw people to confide their personal problems to him. Why does this happen?
5. Explain the following statement in terms of *The Stranger*: We are all one; we are all alone.
6. To which of the five senses does Camus' writing appeal most strongly?
7. Consider the style of the novel: the separateness of each short sentence in Part I, the transition to more involved sentence structure in Part II (why is that?), the remarkable simplicity as complex ideas are brought up, and the first person point-of-view.
8. Imagery to watch for and note:
 - Imagery of sun, light, and heat
 - Imagery of water and the sea
 - Imagery of evening and moonlight
 - Imagery of silence vs. sounds
 - Mentions of sleep, sleepiness, and dizziness
 - Clichés of words, reactions, situations
9. Watch for and note places where Meursault shows or voices unconventional attitudes, and consider why he does this.

Existentialism: *Existence precedes essence.* Earlier philosophies assert Cartesian logic of *Cogito ergo sum* ("I think; therefore I am")—Existentialists say "I can react; therefore I exist." The concept that man has an essential self is an illusion. The existentialist says Man's self is nothing except what he has become; it is the sum of his life as he has shaped it up to that point. Existentialists believe humans have been "thrown" into a world of chaos, and mankind arbitrarily tries to construct order amidst the disorder of the natural world.

This philosophical idea gets its name from an insistence that human life is understandable only in terms of an individual man's existence, his particular experience of life. It asserts man *LIVES* (exists) rather than man *IS* (has a being of essence), and each individual man's experience of life is unique or radically different from others and can only be understood in terms of his involvement in life or commitment to it. From the outside, an individual appears to be another creature; inside, he is an entire universe, the center of infinity.

Existentialism is a point of view about life, involving the actual existence of an individual as the basis and important fact instead of theories and abstractions: man is what he makes of himself, as he possesses a free will and the responsibility that accompanies it. If he refuses to exercise his free will or if he lets outside forces dominate him, then he is contemptible.

Existentialism does not necessarily deny the possibility of God or any sort of Higher Power. Some Existentialists were religious (Kierkegaard, Buber, Marcel, Tillich, Berdyaev) and some were not (Sartre, Camus). Those who maintained faith or religious belief asserted that such belief supercedes reason; therefore, no philosophy (which is founded upon reason and logic) can be successfully applied to it. The "beyond reason" aspect of this argument of course became the tenet of the atheistic Existentialists for why religious belief runs counter to the philosophy.

Nihilism: (from the Latin *nihil*, nothing) is a philosophical position that argues that existence is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value. Nihilists generally assert that objective morality does not exist, and that no action is logically preferable to any other in regard to the moral value of one action over another. Nihilists who argue that there is no objective morality may claim that existence has no intrinsic higher meaning or goal. They may also claim that there is no reasonable proof or argument for the existence of a higher ruler or creator, or posit that even if higher rulers or creators exist, humanity has no moral obligation to worship them.

The term nihilism denotes a general mood of despair at the pointlessness of existence.

Part I Questions—

Chapter 1

Look at the nurse's words at the bottom of page 17. What are the thematic implications of her statement?

Chapter 2

In what way(s) is Meursault's room representative of his personality and attitude toward society?

Chapter 3

What point does Camus appear to be making by including details about Salamano and his dog?

Chapter 4

Salamano loses his dog. What is his response, and how is his response related to the idea of the novel as an identity search?

Chapter 5

Meursault meets the "robot woman" in this chapter—when does this meeting occur, and why does he find her so fascinating?

Chapter 6

The style changes dramatically in the final paragraph of this chapter. Describe these changes and explain how they are relevant thematically.

BIG OVERALL PART I QUESTION:

In order to begin the journey toward awareness, an individual must encounter an existential crisis which stimulates him to begin introspective thought. That "crisis" may range from the trivial (misplacing a hairbrush one busy morning) to the traumatic (being the victim of a crime). No matter how unimportant the event may seem to an observer, it is "critical" in the truest sense of the word to the individual it affects. Identify Meursault's existential crisis, and how does it stimulate his introspective thought?