

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Catch-22

by Joseph Heller

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. understand and explain the role of sarcasm and irony in creating satire
2. discuss what each of the following might symbolize or represent in the story:
 - The Solder in White
 - The Eternal City
 - Deja Vu
 - The Syndicate (M&M Enterprises)
 - Catch-22
3. analyze the differences between the public and private aspects of religion
4. discuss the following themes in this story:
 - The most basic force motivating most people is self-interest
 - Relationships based on self-gratification will ultimately be unsatisfying
 - Institutions will be as cruel as they need to be to survive
 - In a large society, the interests of the individual must be sacrificed for the greater good
5. identify and explain the ways that alliteration and oxymoron are combined to heighten the sense of paradox
6. identify examples of twisted dialogue and dry humor, and relate these examples to the author's style
7. discuss the relationship between the physical and emotional characteristics of characters in the novel
8. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following theme: People can be fooled into following any sort of dogma as long as they are motivated by fear or by material gain
9. point out examples of allusions in the story and comment on how they enhance the reader's understanding of the narrator's ideas
10. define and find examples of numerous literary devices including metaphor, simile, alliteration, juxtaposition, oxymoron, polysyndeton, personification, etc.
11. discuss how point of view shifts within the third-person narrative

12. discuss whether or not this novel accurately reflects conditions in the Air Force during World War II
13. point out examples of foreshadowing and comment on how they add interest to the story
14. give examples of the uses of diction in the story to create and enhance humor
15. follow the non-linear plot and understand how it contributes to the overall unreality of the book

Note to teachers: Catch-22 contains the narration of some fairly strong sexual content. There are numerous references to nudity, prostitution, and promiscuous sex. This is a novel about war, and, in wartime, such activities are commonplace. There is also some profanity, including the play on words about Lt. Scheisskopf's name; Scheisskopf is the German word for "shit-head." Catch-22 also depicts some of the horrors and gore of war in a realistic manner, includes profanity, and shows the military in its most negative light. You may want to consider these elements in deciding if the novel should be taught to lower grades or less mature students.

All page references come from the Simon & Schuster edition of *Catch-22*, copyright 1989.

CATCH-22

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Chapter 1: The Texan

Vocabulary

jaundice—a yellowish discoloration of the whites of one's eyes and skin, caused by diseases of the liver

monotonous—unchanging

intralinear—within the line

salutations—greetings

repercussions—consequences

ethereal—beyond perception by the senses

echelon—level or rank

accord—will

expurgating—eliminating

loony—crazy

squadron—a basic air force tactical unit

conciliating—soothing

glutinous—sticky

meticulously—with great care

derogated—ridiculed or insulted

epitome—ideal

1. Why does Yossarian “fall in love” (Pg. 1) with the chaplain?

Answers may vary. Example: It is clear from their conversation on page 21 that Yossarian feels, at the very least, that he can make the chaplain feel better; he may even feel pity for the chaplain. It is the chaplain's pitiful quality that makes Yossarian “[glow] with affection.” (Pg. 21)

2. How is antithesis used to introduce the idea of an inefficient medical establishment within the military?

The fourth paragraph of the story uses repetition of the phrase “brisk and serious” to emphasize the strict routine that the doctors follow. The doctors’ “efficient mouths” are then contrasted with their “inefficient eyes,” suggesting that the doctors are much better at talking about medical problems than recognizing them. Their stringent manner is at odds with their inability to make accurate diagnoses.

3. What is the effect of the simile comparing the Texan to “someone in Technicolor”? (Pg. 17)

This simile is designed to make the Texan seem more exaggerated than everyone else. He represents the extreme conservative rhetoric of the time; he feels that “people of means—decent folk—should be given more votes than...indecent folk—people without means.” (Pg. 17)

4. What reaction do the soldiers in the ward have to the Texan?

The image of “shudders of annoyance scampering up ticklish spines” emphasizes the extreme annoyance that the good-natured complacency embodied by the Texan brings out in all the other soldiers in the ward. (Pg. 18)

5. What words express the lifelessness of the soldier in white on page 18?

Answers may vary, but should include at least two of the following: the soldier’s “useless” and “strange” limbs; the “lead weights suspended darkly above”; the “zippered lips”; the “silent” pipe, and the machinelike way in which his waste and nutrients are simply switched. Nothing in the ward is more non-vital than this figure. The fact that a thermometer is needed to “discover” that he is dead cements the impression.

6. What details suggest the balance of power in the relationship between Yossarian and the chaplain?

Yossarian smiles at the chaplain with a “big, fascinated grin” and “glow[s] with affection” when the chaplain is talking to him. (Pg. 21) The chaplain “flush[es]...and gaz[es] down at his hands” and even “shove[s] his knuckles into his mouth with a giggle of alarm.” (Pg. 18) Clearly, there are self-esteem issues that place the chaplain at Yossarian’s mercy. Luckily, Yossarian takes pity on the chaplain—he’s the only in the unit to do so.

Chapter 2: Clevinger

Vocabulary

infundibuliform—shaped like a funnel

apoplectic—seizure-like

putrescent—rotten and decaying

vehemently—with passion

homicidal—murderous

stupor—sleeplike state

succulent—juicy and sweet

spatulate—shaped like a spatula

1. Is it a paradox when the narrator says that the Texan is “really very sick”? (Pg. 25) Why or why not?

The narrator gives his opinion of the insanity of war in the beginning of this paragraph and seems to be suggesting that the war requires its participants to lose their grasp of reality. We are told that the Texan’s “indestructible smile cracked forever across the front of his face.” (Pg. 25) The fragmented nature of the smile suggests that the Texan’s patriotism is an unhealthy response to the ironies of war. Paradoxes appear in the contradictions of war; thus, the Texan’s attempts to be positive demonstrate sickness.

2. Pages 25 and 26 contain the dispute between Yossarian and Clevinger about whether Yossarian is insane. Is Yossarian paranoid, or are his fears justified?

Answers may vary. Example: Yossarian believes that “every one of” the enemy soldier is trying to kill him. Clevinger argues that it is not a personal matter, because the enemy is trying to kill every Allied soldier. To Yossarian, though, it makes no difference, because his own life is at stake, and he has none of Clevinger’s patriotic convictions. It would seem that Yossarian’s only distortion is his lack of patriotism.

3. How are the conventions of normal language twisted on pages 26 and 27 to express Yossarian’s difference from the archetypal soldier?

When the narrator is discussing Yossarian’s opinions about his place in the war, he inserts “not” in normally positive descriptions to show Yossarian’s discontent: “And if [being shot at] wasn’t funny, there were lots of things that weren’t even funnier.” (Pg. 26) When the narrator is describing the officer’s club, he refers to it that the “officers’ club that Yossarian had not helped build. Actually, there were many officers’ clubs that Yossarian had not helped build, but he was proudest of the one on Pianosa.... Yossarian throbbed with a mighty sense of accomplishment each time he gazed at it and reflected that none of the work that had gone into it was his.” (Pg. 27) Yossarian lacks the self-sacrificing patriotism that feeds, in the narrator’s opinion, the military establishment. This is brought to a climax on page 29, where Yossarian refers to himself as a “supraman”—a man capable of heroism, but only for or toward himself.

4. Explain the allusion to Dostoevsky on page 29.

Clevinger compares Yossarian to Raskolnikov, the protagonist in Crime and Punishment, one of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s most famous novels. Raskolnikov justified his murder of an old woman by claiming that some people deserve to use, and even dispose of, other people who are “inferior.” His real motive, of course, was his own poverty and her hoarded riches, but he convinced himself that he deserved to kill her because he had more genius and potential than she did. Clevinger argues here that it is a similar egoism that keeps Yossarian from feeling the same patriotism as his fellow soldiers.