

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Fountainhead

by Ayn Rand

written by Pete Boysen

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Background/Pre-Reading

1. Ayn Rand began her screenwriting career during college and continued it when she emigrated to the United States. She enjoyed the writing process, but came to see it more as a tool for expressing the views of objectivism rather than for creating and adapting stories for their own sake. It is ironic that someone who scorned the ideas of teamwork would choose a profession that requires so much collaboration with others.

Rand uses her main characters to serve as mouthpieces for her philosophy. Imagine that you are a screenwriter. You have written a script that concerns one of the main values of mainstream society: education, politics, religion, the justice system, the family unit, or a different value, one of your own choosing.

Write an opening monologue for your main character, and express your opinion about the value you have chosen in that monologue.

2. *The Fountainhead* is a dystopian novel about an architect who never finds financial success despite his ingenious gift. He takes personal satisfaction from his immense creative gifts and from seeing his creative visions come to life; he does not need validation from others to feel like he has talent and genius.

Consider other stories you have read, or movies you have seen, that are about people who have tremendous talents and gifts, but are unable to experience prosperity from their gift because of their own personal stubbornness, or a refusal to satisfy society's expectations.

Come up with a character description and plot outline for your own original story about someone with tremendous gifts who is not able to experience success for reasons similar to Howard Roark. Your plot outline should be written in bullet points and be no longer than a page.

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3. The word *fountainhead* refers to the source of something—most commonly the water in a river, or knowledge. *The Fountainhead* is all about Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism—namely, that the individual is more important than society as a whole, and that selfishness is the highest virtue. As one might expect from someone operating from such an egotistical viewpoint, before her death in 1982, Rand believed that her novel is the source of a wisdom that would transform the planet.

What is your opinion about the value of the individual? When should the individual be more important than his/her society? When should society be more important? Give examples for each part of your opinion from personal experience.

4. A blurb is the paragraph that describes the book that someone is about to read; it's usually on the jacket of the book or in a section after the book is completed. The blurb for *The Fountainhead* talks about Ayn Rand's unique philosophy of objectivism. It also asserts that Howard Roark was alone in his fight against the world, which sought to bring him down to its own level of mediocrity. It gives clues as to the tragic fight that Roark will have to endure if he is going to maintain his intellectual and aesthetic purity.

The purpose of a blurb is to grab the reader's interest, but not spoil the story by giving away too many of the plot's events. Another common feature of a dust jacket is selections from positive reviews of the book. Imagine that someone is going to write your biography; compose the blurb that would appear on the dust jacket. What novel or play might your life resemble? Of course, much of the information would have to be made up, so allow your imagination free rein. Instead of making up a few quotes about your book, write a positive, three-line review of the story of your life.

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5. Society's fear of genius is the primary source of opposition to Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*. This opposition is the source of much conflict, and it is this conflict that moves the plot along. While such figures as Ellsworth Toohey will embody this fear, it is the *fear* that is Roark's enemy, rather than a specific person. The most difficult part of the story, from Rand's perspective, is that the antagonist is invisible and eternal.

In your own life, what invisible antagonists do you face? What are the pressures that you face from day to day? Examples might be time constraints, peer pressure, body weight, procrastination, bad habits, fear of failure, or family strife, among others.

If you could face one of your invisible antagonists, what would you say? Write a conversation that the two of you might have.