

In cold blood

By Truman Capote

First published in 1966



Genre and Subject

Non Fiction

True Crime

Murder

Synopsis

On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues.

As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. *In Cold Blood* is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

Author Biography

Truman Capote was born in New Orleans in 1924 and was raised in various parts of the south, his family spending winters in New Orleans and summers in Alabama and New Georgia. By the age of fourteen he had already started writing short stories, some of which were published. He left school when he was fifteen and subsequently worked for the *New Yorker* which provided his first - and last - regular job. Following his spell with the *New Yorker*, Capote spent two years on a Louisiana farm where he wrote *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948). He lived, at one time or another, in Greece, Italy, Africa and the West Indies, and travelled in Russia and the Orient. He is the author of many highly praised books, including *A Tree of Night* and *Other Stories* (1949), *The Grass Harp* (1951), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), *In Cold Blood* (1965), which immediately became the centre of a storm of controversy on its publication, *Music for Chameleons* (1980) and *Answered Prayers* (1986), all of which are published by Penguin. Truman Capote died in August 1984.

If you liked this book, you may also like...

- *Killers of the Flower Moon* by David Grann
- *Midnight in the garden of good and evil* by John Berendt
- *I'll be gone in the dark* by Michelle McNamara

Discussion Starters

1. Start with the victims. What kind of family is the Clutter household? In what way does Capote create sympathy for them? Do you feel they represented the American Dream?
2. How does Capote, as a writer, handle the actual murder of the Clutter family. Or is it too gruesome, too heartbreaking to discuss?
3. Discuss the killers, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock. What kind of men were they? What were their motives in committing murder? Talk about their backgrounds and psychological make-ups? Think, for instance, about Perry Smith's chilling comment: "I thought he was a very nice gentleman.... I thought so right up to the moment I cut this throat."
4. In many ways, *In Cold Blood* is about the murderers. Do you feel they deserve such attention? Do you think that Capote pulls off the near impossible—does he build sympathy, in your mind, for the killers? Does he endow them—Perry Smith, in particular—with any kind of humanity? Or does he depict them as savage animals, devoid of human redemption?
5. What was the impact of the murders on the Holcomb community? How did it alter the residents' perceptions of the natural order of things, of life?
6. With this book, Truman has been credited with developing a new genre of writing: "literary non-fiction." What might that term mean, and how does *In Cold Blood* differ from straight crime reporting? Why did Capote create the kind of story he did, and what is its impact on the reader of this new approach?
7. Suggestion: Watch the 2005 film, *Capote*, with Philip Seymour Hoffman in the role of Truman Capote. Does the film affect your view of Capote and his motives in writing his book?

Author biography from—<https://www.penguin.com.au/authors/truman-capote>

Discussion starters from—<https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/14-reading-guides/non-fiction/476-in-cold-blood-capote?start=3>

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