***The Stranger*** **– Discussion Questions**

# **Part I**

**Chapter 1**

1. Let’s psychoanalyze Meursault based on our initial knowledge of him. Why do you think he places his mother in a “home” but then never visits? Give both his stated reason for never visiting and his actual reason.

2. What strikes you as odd about Meursault in the story’s second paragraph?

3. Discuss Meursault’s reaction when he’s asked about seeing his mother in her casket. What can we infer about him from his response?

4. Determine the meaning of the term “resident” as it’s used on page 8. This definition is crucial to understanding the keeper.

5. Describe Meursault’s dream-like experience beginning on page 9. What is happening?

6. Several times in this chapter, Meursault will state something or do something and then “realize” that he shouldn’t have done or said it. What are some of these examples? What do his “realizations” about acceptable behavior tell us about him?

7. What are Meursault’s last thoughts during the burial scene?

8. Make an inference. Based on the text so far, why do you believe the novel is called *The Stranger*? Do you expect your inference to remain true throughout the novel?

**Chapter 2**

1. Whom does Meursault meet the day after his mother is buried?

2. On page 21, what hint is the reader given as to where Meursault lives?

3. What does Meursault choose to do on Sunday? What does this demonstrate about his character/ personality?

4. What does Meursault mean when he says, "It occurred to me....really, nothing had changed."?

**Chapter 3**

1. What is implied in Meursault’s compulsion to wash his hands?

2. In your opinion, offer an explanation for why Meursault takes a "flying leap" onto a truck with Emmanuel.

3. Who is Salamano? Explain his relationship with his pet.

4. Compare and contrast the relationship between Salamano and his dog with the relationship between

Meursault and his mother. What are the similarities? Which is more loving?

5. Who is Raymond Sintes? What is "the word around the neighborhood" regarding Raymond?

6. What prompted Raymond’s fight with "the man"? What prompted Raymond to beat his girlfriend "till she bled"?

7. On page 29, Raymond states that beating the man “wasn’t his fault.” Where have we heard that expression used previously in this novel? What does this connection suggest?

8. Close read the last paragraph of this chapter. What do you notice?

**Chapter 4**

1. Explain the situation between Raymond and his girl. How do you know if Meursault is upset or calm about what just happened?

2. What happens to Salamano’s dog, and how does he react?

3. How is Salamano’s relationship with the dog similar to Raymond’s relationship with his girl? Why would Camus create this parallel?

**Chapter 5**

1. In the first few pages, Meursault’s boss offers an opportunity and so does Marie. How does Meursault respond to both? What does this suggest about him?

2. In your opinion, is Meursault’s behavior normal regarding his job and his girlfriend? Why/why not?

3. What explanation can you offer as to why Meursault follows the woman from Celeste’s?

4. Salamano and Meursault talk. What new info. does Salamano convey about Meursault’s Maman?

5. How has Salamano’s loss brought out his humanitarian side?

**Chapter 6**

1. When leaving for the beach, whom do Ray, Meursault, and Marie see across the street? Why did Camus include this in the narrative?

2. The first few pages in this chapter discuss the sun, beach, and beautiful scenery. Look at the diction he uses while providing this imagery throughout the chapter. How does it help develop the theme related to the physical vs. the social or emotional world?

3. On page 53, Meursault says, "The blazing sand looked red to me now." What symbolism can you find in this statement?

5. When Raymond, Masson, and Meursault go back to face the Arabs again, why don’t the Arabs react to the men’s discussion, which takes place right in front of them?

6. The heat is mentioned multiple times in this passage. When Meursault goes back to face the last Arab, what does the heat cause him to remember?

7. What event "shatter[s] the harmony" of Meursault’s day?

8. What is meant by the last sentence of this chapter?

9. Metaphors and personification are significant in chapter six. "All I could feel were the cymbals of sunlight crashing on my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear flying up from the knife in front of me." "The sea gasped for air with each shallow, stifled little wave that broke on the sand." "I could feel my forehead swelling under the sand." What do the personification and metaphors do for the movement of the murder scene? Why does Camus use these devices?

10. What does the title of the novel mean?

# **The Stranger - Part II**

**Chapter 1 - Part II**

1. What does this line demonstrate about Meursault: “When leaving, I very nearly held out my hand and said, “Good-by”; just in time I remembered that I’d killed a man.”?

2. On p. 70, Meursault says, "I thought about it for a minute and said that more than sorry I felt kind of annoyed." Do you believe Meursault has a conscience?

3. Meursault’s attitude- where is he happiest? Where does he act non-chalant? Where does the heat get to him? What do each of these places tell you about Meursault?

4. How was the examination of the magistrate like the killing of the Arab? (Think about light, the crucifix, heat, silence)

5. Discuss the Magistrate’s thoughts on religion vs. Meursault’s. How does this conversation illuminate the theme we’ll construct about the meaninglessness of human life? Think about this quote: “He asked me if I believed in God. I said no. He sat down indignantly. He said it was impossible; all men believed in God, even those who turn their backs on him. That was his belief, and if there were ever any doubt to it, his life would become meaningless. Do you want my life to be meaningless? he shouted.”

6. What are your thoughts on the Magistrate referring to him as “Monsieur Antichrist”?

**Chapter 2 - Part II**

1. Briefly describe Meursault’s prison cell. Is this what he had expected?

2. Look back at the beginning of the chapter when Marie visits. What does Meursault think about the whole time he’s looking at her? Is this surprising to you or not?

3. Meursault talks about missing cigarettes and women: “Apart from these annoyances, I wasn’t too unhappy.” Is this proof he is a sociopath?

4. In what way could you say Meursault has, ironically, found freedom in prison?

5. Discuss the Czech murders on pages 79-80 - what are their purpose or what do they demonstrate? Do they illuminate any of our three themes?

6. The last sentences on page 81 refer to Meursault’s mother’s funeral and to what nights in prison are like. Are these two things connected?

7. Our theme about “the physical vs. the social and emotional” is starting to become clearer. How is Meursault becoming more of an emotional being and less of a physical one?

**Chapter 3 - Part II**

1. What clues is the reader given to show that the Algerian court system is different than the U.S. Judicial System?

2. Look on page 84 when Meursault is describing the demeanor of those in the courtroom. He calls himself an “intruder.” Why does he say this? And how does it relate to the title of the novel?

3. At the bottom of page 89, Meursault says “that for the first time in years I had this stupid urge to cry, because I could feel how much all these people hated me.” What do you make of this line? Does it influence your characterization of him?

4. Something occurred between the caretaker and Meursault, which is discussed on page 90. How does this story add to the meaning of the novel’s title? In what ways, so far, is Meursault a stranger?

5. How does Maman’s death play a part in the case? Think about his emotional reaction, but also what Marie admits at the bottom of 93. Is this fair to use this as evidence?

6. Does Perez hurt or help Meursault’s case? How is he a character foil to Meursault?

7. Celeste repeatedly refers to “bad luck” and Raymond refers to “chance.” Which theme does this testimony illuminate? How does it do so?

8. Explain the last line of this chapter.

**Chapter 4 - Part II**

1. In the first paragraph of this chapter, much happens. How does Meursault, in a way, attack the justice system?

2. Same paragraph as #1 - One motif that has reoccurred throughout he novel is Meursault not having anything to say. Why is it appropriate for this motif to show up again here?

3. On p. 100, how does Meursault reveal one key to his personality?

4. The prosecutor does something interesting in his closing statement: he talks about the parricide coming to trial after this session. What is his subtle purpose in doing so?

5. What was Meursault’s defense for having killed the Arab? How legitimate do you find his reasoning?

6. On page 104, Camus uses some interesting imagery ("left me with the impression...Was making me dizzy.") What is Meursault feeling at this point?

7. Does the verdict surprise you or not?

**Chapter 5 - Part II**

1. We see a shift from the physical self to the social/emotional Meursault in the first few pages of this chapter. Has he fundamentally changed? Why or why not?

2. Talk about the verdict of Meursault’s death sentence. In what way does his sentence (think about how he views it) reinforce the theme regarding the irrationality of the universe?

3. On page 112, Meursault mentions thinking about the dawn and his appeal. Why are both of these things significant, and why does he choose to no longer think about either?

4. Do you find it significant that he has two memories about his mother during this section? (Her story about his dad witnessing an execution and her saying about always finding something to be happy about)

5. Re-read page 114 and summarize Meursault’s views on death and dying.

6. Think about Meursault’s flat rejection of God and religion. Since Meursault is an unlikeable character, does his fate actually detract from Camus’ purpose? In other words, why should we agree with his (and probably Camus’) views on the universe?

7. What does the priest mean when he says, "your heart is blind”?

8. In the last few paragraphs, how does Meursault finally relate to Maman?

9. What does Meursault mean by the “gentle indifference” of the world? How does “opening [himself]” up to this idea help him accept his fate?

10. Why was the scene of the chaplain directly before this?

**End of the Novel**

1. How does the guillotine symbolize man’s essential condition?

2. How does Camus satirize the legal system? What point is he making?

3. Compare Part I vs. Part II.

4. Is the ending absurd or existential?

5. We see characters in this novel through Meursault’s eyes. He (as is customary with his character) tells us very little. Analyze Raymond and Marie. How do Meursault’s observations reveal his attitudes and judgements toward this characters? What level of insight (deep/shallow) does he provide?

6. By the end of the novel, what are the principles or values Meursault lives by (his ideology)? How does Meursault’s ideology develop throughout the novel? How does he get to the point where he opens himself to the “gentle indifference of the world”? What causes this epiphany? How do earlier events in the novel foreshadow this development?

7. How does Camus’ writing style evolve as the novel goes on? Contrast his short, simple sentences in the first half against the more philosophical/social/emotional approach to the second half.