



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Catch-22

Joseph Heller

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Catch-22

Joseph Heller

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference,
research, opinions,
predictions

Comprehension

Plot development,
compare/contrast,
cause/effect

Literary Elements

Foreshadowing, theme, irony,
humor, symbolism, conflict,
characterization

Vocabulary

Definitions, application,
synonyms/antonyms

Listening/Speaking

Presentations, plays,
discussion

Writing

Essay, poetry, creative
writing, research paper, letter,
list, journal, synopsis, proverbs

Across the Curriculum

Literature—related novels,
anti-war novels, Washington
Irving, *Hamlet*; History—
World War II, B-25 bomber,
Smith Act of 1940, Supreme
Court cases, world empires,
Sixth Amendment violations;
Art—diagrams, ad campaign,
painting, collage, comics

Genre: historical fiction, anti-war satire

Setting: island of Pianosa and Rome, Italy during the height of World War II

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: death, duty, love, self-preservation, loss, friendship, patriotism, religion, heroism, insanity, perseverance, greed, fallacies of war

Conflict: person vs. society, person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. nature

Style: dark, comedic narrative

Tone: caustic, humorous, bleak, hopeful

Date of First Publication: 1961

About the Author

Joseph Heller was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1923, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. He loved to write as a child, even submitting a story to the *New York Daily News* at the age of 11. At age 19, Heller joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and served as a bombardier over Italy, flying 60 missions in a B-25 bomber during World War II. After the war, Heller studied writing at the University of Southern California and received his M.A. from Columbia University in 1949. In 1953, Heller spent a week writing the first chapter of *Catch-22* but didn't write any more of the book for a year. While his interest and attachment to the book came and went over the next eight years, Heller finished *Catch-22*. It was published in 1961 and received mixed reviews. After the novel's paperback release in 1962, the popularity of the book exploded due to the dark humor and anti-war sentiments, and the book quickly became a bestseller. The title of the book became a pop-culture buzz word symbolizing a difficult and cyclical situation one cannot easily escape. *Catch-22* became a film in 1970, and Modern Library ranks *Catch-22* at number seven on its list of the greatest English language novels of the twentieth century. After *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller wrote numerous plays, screenplays, short stories, and novels including *Something Happened* (1974), *God Knows* (1984), *Closing Time* (1994, the sequel to *Catch-22*), and *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* (2000), all selling well but never achieving the popularity of *Catch-22*. Joseph Heller died in 1999 shortly after completing his final novel, *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man*.

Background Information

World War II: World War II was a global military conflict involving over 100 million military personnel and resulting in the deaths of over 60 million people, making it the largest combat operation in the history of the world. Beginning in Asia in 1937 and Europe in 1939, the war ended in 1945 with a victory by the Allied powers. The Allied powers included troops from the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, Belgium, Australia, Canada, and China, among many others. The Axis powers, led by Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany, included Austria, Italy, Japan, Hungary, and others. The Allied powers began their assault on Italy in 1943. Allied troops fought a plodding and bloody war through the rugged, mountainous terrain of Sicily and onto mainland Italy, slowly capturing more ground and pushing the Axis troops further north. Allied troops saw many setbacks and suffered an exorbitant number of casualties. Bombing missions became vitally important to the ground effort, and the fighting and bombings continued into 1945.

Chapters 10–13

Clevinger dies when his plane disappears during a bombing run, and a whole barrack of men vanish. Yossarian hopes they went AWOL. Mudd, the man in Yossarian's tent, dies two hours after he arrives on base, and no one is able to remove his belongings from Yossarian's tent because Mudd did not officially check in before he died. Death and fear saturate the base, even more so when the men must bomb Bologna. Captain Black begins the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade, forcing all men and officers to sign a never-ending series of loyalty pledges until Major — de Coverley refuses to sign, thus ending the "crusade." The mission to Bologna is postponed due to rain. When Yossarian moves the bomb line beyond Bologna on the briefing room map, the mission is called off because the officers presume Bologna has been captured overnight. Milo convinces his superiors, through means of freshly-cooked meals, to give him control of military planes for his syndicate. Cathcart threatens Yossarian with a court martial for flying over a target twice and successfully bombing the target rather than flying once and missing, but Yossarian is given a medal and a promotion instead.

Vocabulary

adroitly
insurrection
sardonic
torpid
austere
macabre
fatalist
sibilant
ebullient
obsequious
venerable
repudiation

Discussion Questions

1. Who is Mudd, and what do Sergeant Towser and Yossarian think of him? (*Mudd moved into Yossarian's tent and died on his first mission two hours after he arrived. Because he never officially checked in, nobody has the authority to remove his belongings. Therefore, Yossarian technically lives with a dead man. Sergeant Towser, who has no interest in war, thinks it is a waste to fly a man all the way from America "just to have him blown into bits" [p. 107]. Yossarian believes Mudd, the quintessential unknown soldier, never had a chance. Now Yossarian feels his tent is contaminated with death.*)
2. After realizing that Dr. Stubbs has lost faith in medicine, what does Dunbar say to convince Dr. Stubbs to keep trying to save people's lives? Do you agree with Dunbar? What does Dr. Stubbs think of Yossarian? Why do you think he feels this way? (*Dunbar says the point of being a doctor in war is to try to help the soldiers live as long as they can and that one must forget the fact that we all die eventually; Answers will vary; Dr. Stubbs thinks Yossarian is crazy but may be the only sane person left on base because of his refusal to fly any more missions; Dr. Stubbs probably thinks that although going against Cathcart's orders is crazy, the desire to stop fighting is sane.*)
3. What is the general mood and atmosphere on the base after the soldiers find out that they will be flying to Bologna? (*The mood is dismal and nearing chaotic. After Clevinger disappears and the entire barrack of men vanish, a pall of anxiety falls over the base. Captains Piltchard and Wren find it difficult to keep full mission crews ready, and Sergeant Towser believes that everyone who wears a uniform is crazy. "The clinging overpowering conviction of death spread steadily with the continuing rainfall" [p. 108] as the men waited for the mission to Bologna. The men feel helpless, and "fear flowed everywhere" on the base.*)
4. What is the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade? How is it kept alive, and how does it end? Do you agree with Captain Black's beliefs in the use of loyalty oaths? (*The Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade forces the men in the squadron to prove their loyalty every day. The men must sign oaths in order to do everything, from getting their pay to getting their hair cut; If someone voices an objection, Captain Black says "people who were loyal would not mind signing all the loyalty oaths" [p. 113]. He bullies officers into taking part in the oath-signing. For example, Captain Black threatens Captains Piltchard and Wren with the idea that the F.B.I. might find it suspicious that all the other officers*

made their men sign the “oaths” but Piltchard and Wren did not. When Major — de Coverley refuses to sign a loyalty oath to get food, his blunt refusal to participate effectively ends the crusade; Answers will vary.)

5. What effect does the Bologna mission have on the squadron? What is their “only hope,” and why does it fail to comfort the men? What else happens to delay the mission? (*The men are terrified of flying over Bologna and even run back to the parachute tent for extra flak suits. As the pilots drive to their planes, Nately sits in the truck in a depressed trance, and only the newer, naïve pilots ask why everyone is so worried about the mission. The veterans know how dangerous and deadly this mission will be; Since the rain keeps the men from having to fly, their only hope is that the rain will never end. They know this is foolish because the rain has to stop someday; In the middle of the night, Yossarian decides to move the bomb line on the map beyond Bologna. When the officers wake the next morning, they think the Army captured Bologna, and they abort the mission.*)
6. Clevinger tells Yossarian that they have “no right to question” (p. 123) Colonel Cathcart about how or why they are killed. How does Yossarian argue against this point, and do you think Clevinger truly believes what he is saying? (*Yossarian calls Clevinger insane and tries to make Clevinger realize that Yossarian doesn’t want to die “just because the colonel wants to be a general” [p. 123]. Yossarian says there is no point in dying for a war that is all but won; Clevinger does hesitate at certain points throughout the argument and shows some signs of uncertainty in his statements, yet he is smug and self-assured at other points. His visibly fluctuating confidence may convey that he wants to believe in what he says, but he is also secretly afraid of going against his commanding officers or is simply repeating what he heard elsewhere.*)
7. Describe Major — de Coverley and his role in the squadron. How is he injured, and what is ironic about this injury? (*He is an “awe-inspiring, grave old man” [p. 131] who is respected by all, mostly out of fear. He spends his time playing horseshoes, kidnapping Italian laborers, and renting apartments in mainland Italy for soldiers on leave, “and he excelled at all three” [p. 131]; Major — de Coverley is injured during a victory parade when an old man, in a fit of joy, throws a flower at him. It is ironic that a symbol of strength and hard-boiled American bravery, a John Wayne figure, is injured by something as dainty and innocuous as a flower.*)
8. **Prediction:** How will Colonel Korn use Yossarian to his advantage?

Supplementary Activities

1. Research the Smith Act of 1940 as well as the 1958 Supreme Court case *Speiser v. Randall*. Write an essay explaining how these landmark laws/cases are similar to the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade in *Catch-22*, and explain your opinion regarding their fairness.
2. Complete the Characters With or Without Character chart on page 36 of this guide.

Chapters 14–18

To avoid the Bologna mission, Yossarian destroys his intercom and instructs his bomber crew to turn back, which they cheerfully do. Once back at the base, the men are solemn and silent, and Yossarian sneaks off to the beach. When he wakes from a nap, he sees the other planes returning unharmed. Bologna had not been the disaster he thought it would be, but then Cathcart sends them back for a second mission. Heavy flak slams Yossarian’s plane, and though Orr crash-lands on his return, they all make it back alive. In Rome, Yossarian falls in love with a woman named