



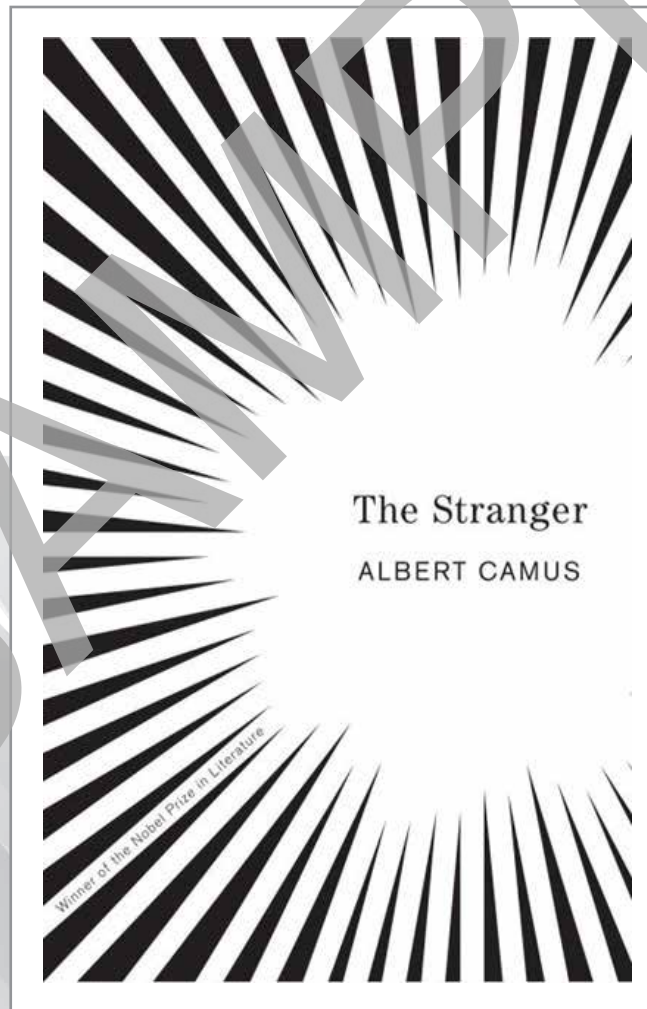
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Stranger

Albert Camus



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Stranger

Albert Camus

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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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Character analysis, text
combing, brainstorming,
predictions

Comprehension

Cause/effect, sequencing,
compare/contrast

Writing

“Voice,” comparisons,
“Imitation Camus
Competition,” letter writing,
newspaper article, poetry,
stage directions, limerick,
journal entry, script,
conversation, scene

Literary Elements

Setting, characterization,
tone, “the absurd,” style,
juxtaposition, lyricism,
Antichrist/Antihero, motifs,
counterpoint, perspective

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, talk
show, oral reading, drama,
radio play

Other

Illustrations, collage, cartoon
strips, movie poster, music,
social studies, time line,
current events, science

Summary of *The Stranger*

The Stranger is the story of Meursault, an office clerk in Algeria, and his complete indifference to anything except physical sensations. Meursault doesn't play society's "game." He is convinced that nothing matters much, and he refuses to act as though it does.

In Part One, Meursault finds his mother's funeral inconvenient, and shows no sadness. In fact, the next day he picks up a girl at the beach and they go to a funny movie and then make love. His ambivalence about the funeral extends into this relationship as well as into other parts of his life, including a sort of friendship with a violent-natured neighbor, Raymond, who soon involves Meursault with three Arabs who are seeking revenge for Raymond's brutal treatment of his Arab girlfriend. At the end of Part One, Meursault finds himself on a beach with a gun in his hand, confronting one of Raymond's enemies. Meursault kills the Arab.

In Part Two, Meursault retains his indifference and detachment as he progresses through the Algerian justice system. This part covers about a year, during which time Meursault is arrested and tried. He manages to anger and mystify the examining magistrate, his lawyer, and the prison chaplain with his refusal to show remorse or trying to justify his actions. His unexplained lack of emotion at his mother's funeral becomes "evidence" in the trial, which culminates in his conviction. Facing the guillotine, Meursault rejects the idea of atonement—yet the prospect of imminent death does finally lead Meursault to introspection and a realization of how much he values life.

About the Author

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, on November 7, 1913. His father was killed at the Battle of the Marne the following year, and his mother went to work as a cleaning lady in Algiers. Albert, his older brother, his nearly-deaf and illiterate mother, his uncle, and his grandmother all lived in a two-room apartment. Albert spent a great deal of time outdoors, where natural beauty, sunlight and sports could be enjoyed despite the family's poverty. As a schoolboy, Camus showed great promise, and an interested teacher helped arrange a scholarship to secondary school for him.

He began writing in 1932, at the age of 19; he married at 20, divorced at 21, and joined the Communist Party. This affiliation lasted only about three years. Camus ran the Théâtre de l'Equipe from 1935-1938, then suffered a great disappointment in 1938 when he could not pass the medical examination required for him to continue his government-funded studies at the university, where he was studying philosophy and hoping to become a full professor.

Camus turned to a career in journalism, writing social-justice pieces for the left-wing *Alger-Républicain*, which was soon suppressed by Algerian authorities for its pro-Arab slant. In 1940 Camus moved to Paris and began working for the daily paper, *Paris Soir*. He married again that year, and wrote and edited *Combat*, an underground Resistance newspaper published during the Nazi occupation of France.

The Stranger and *The Myth of Sisyphus* were published in 1942, bringing Camus almost instant fame. These were followed by *The Misunderstanding* (1944), *Caligula* (1944), *State of Siege* (1948), *The Plague* (1947), *The Rebel* (1951), *The Fall* (1956), *Exile and the Kingdom* (1958), *Possessed* (1960), and

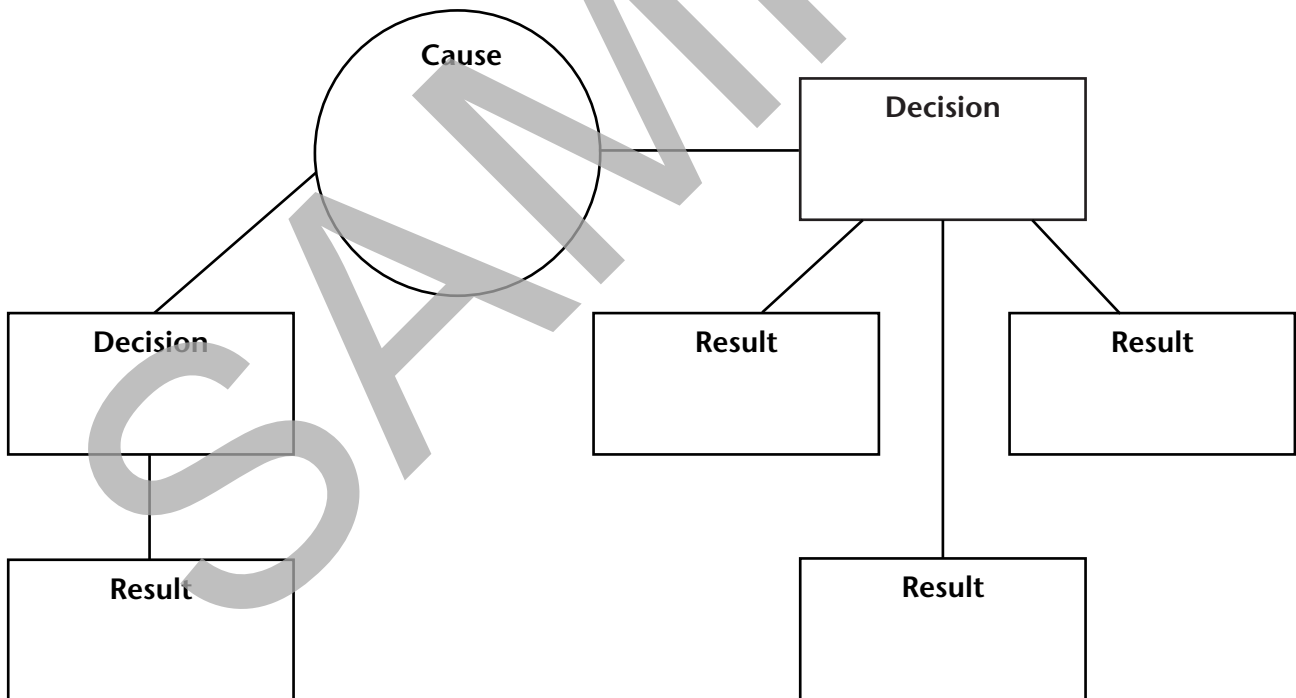
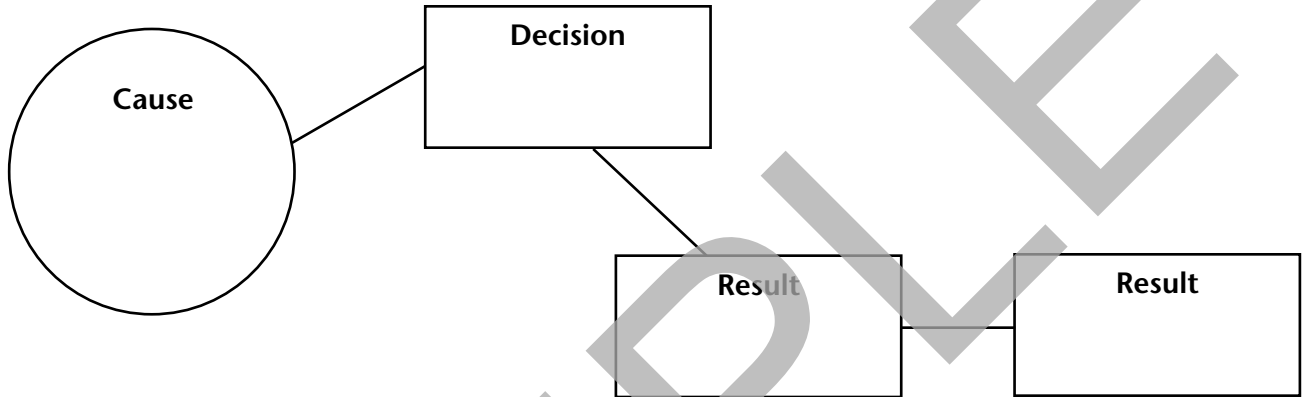
Attribute Web

Directions: Select a character from the book to tell about using the blocks below.

<i>Who is the character?</i>			
<i>What did the character do?</i>		<i>Why did s/he do it?</i>	
<i>Why is the character's name well chosen?</i>	<i>What is the nature of this character's actions? (reactive, active, important, consequential, secondary)</i>	<i>What is the significance of the book's time and place to the character?</i>	
<i>What is unusual or important about the character?</i>	<i>How does the character change in the story?</i>	<i>Does the character remind you of another character from another book? Who?</i>	<i>Do you know anyone similar to this character?</i>

Cause/Effect Chart

Directions: Make a flow chart to show decisions the characters made, the decisions he or she could have made, and the result(s) of each. (Use your imagination to speculate on the results of decisions the character could have made.)



Part One— Chapter 1

Summary

Wearing a borrowed black tie and arm band, Meursault catches the bus from Algiers to Marengo, where his mother, who has just died, has been living in an old people's home for the past three years. The director tells Meursault he understands that Meursault could not properly care for his mother, and that she had been happy in the home. Keeping vigil by the closed casket, Meursault listens to the garrulous caretaker, drinks a cup of coffee with milk, and smokes a cigarette. Later, when his mother's friends join the vigil, Meursault falls asleep. On the 45-minute walk to the church the next day, Meursault is irritated by the slowness of the procession and the nearly intolerable heat. At the funeral, he is surprised to see the obvious grief of his mother's "fiancé," Thomas Pérez, who faints at the cemetery. Back home in Algiers, Meursault is filled with joy at the prospect of sleeping for twelve hours.

Vocabulary

vigil (3)	condolences (3)	mortuary (5)	atheist (6)
abscess (7)	destitute (8)	convulsion (11)	ashen (12)
commotion (12)	censer (14)	acolytes (14)	gaunt (14)
pallor (15)	melodious (17)	quavering (17)	incessant (18)

Discussion Questions

1. The first sentence of Chapter One is one of the most famous "opening lines" in literature. What was your reaction when you read the first paragraph? How does the direct quotation of the telegram add to the mood? (*Like the first two sentences, the telegram is terse, concise, without feeling.*)
2. Does it seem to you that Meursault enjoyed having everyone at Céleste's feel sorry for him? Can you tell how he feels about anything he mentions as he gets ready to leave for the funeral? (*He seems to be concerned with what he perceives as some callousness on the part of his boss; seems to feel a little harried and inconvenienced by having to rush to Emmanuel's to borrow a mourning band and tie, having to run to catch the bus.*)
3. Does Meursault seem to feel guilty about putting his mother in the home—or is he just defensive? (*He doesn't express his own feelings, but he does expect that the director might criticize him.*) Would you say Meursault sees the director and his boss in the same light, i.e., as authority figures to whom he must answer for his actions?
4. The director tells Meursault that his mother had expressed her desire for a religious funeral, yet Meursault is sure his mother had "never in her life given a thought to religion." Why then didn't he tell the director this, perhaps insist that it would not be her wish? (*He seems to just "go with the flow." He probably thinks it doesn't matter much, and that it's easier to just go along with the plans the director has made.*)
5. Do you find it odd that Meursault did not want the caretaker to open the casket? How would you feel, in this situation? Does the caretaker seem surprised? (*He wants to know why, says he understands even though Meursault gives no explanation.*)
6. The caretaker tells Meursault a lot about his own life. If you were in Meursault's situation, what would you have asked him to tell you about? Do you think it was rude for the two of them to smoke while they were sitting by the casket—or do you agree with Meursault that it didn't matter?

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7. What things does Meursault notice at the wake? (*the smell of flowers on the night air, the uncomfortable brightness of the room when the lights are turned on, the wrinkled faces of his mother's friends, how much his back hurts*) Does he ever mention an emotion? (*only his irritation at the woman who can't stop crying, then his irritation at the silence in the room*) Would you feel as though the old people were there to "judge" you if you were in a situation like this?
 8. Who is Thomas Pérez—and how does his behavior contrast with that of Meursault? (*Pérez was Maman's "fiancé."* He acts as one might expect Meursault to act, expressing the grief Meursault does not.) Do you find it strange that Meursault tells us Pérez fainted at the cemetery—but doesn't let us know if someone tried to revive him and if he was all right?
 9. Skim the chapter for references to light and heat. What mental images and/or physical sensations do you experience as you read these descriptions? How does the sun and heat affect Meursault? (*page 16—"the glare from the sky was unbearable;" page 17—"the sun...was making it hard for me to see or think straight."*) What other images struck you in this chapter? (*example: the "white flesh of the roots" mixed with the "blood-red earth spilling over Maman's casket," page 18*)
 10. **Prediction:** Will Meursault have a "delayed reaction" to his mother's death—will his grief "hit him" when he wakes up the next day?

Supplementary Activities

Literary Analysis: Tone

An author's **tone**—which may be expressed through the attitude of a first-person narrator—is like the tone of voice a person uses when speaking, for example sarcastic, sincere, angry, lighthearted, matter-of-fact, serious, tongue-in-cheek.

Ask: How would you describe the tone of the first chapter of *The Stranger*? (*Most will agree that Camus/Meursault "speaks" with a matter-of-fact, indifferent tone. One is reminded of an old rerun of "Dragnet," in which we are given "just the facts, ma'am."*)

Writing Ideas

1. Rewrite the first few paragraphs of this chapter with a different tone. Find a "voice" for yourself as the first-person narrator, and make your tone clear to your reader.
2. In a paragraph, compare your expectations of Meursault's behavior (from Introductory Activity #3, page 5) with what actually happened.

Listening and Speaking

"**The absurd**" is a term often applied to literature portraying the sense that the human condition is without purpose, meaning or value. Absurdist writers—led by Camus—wrote stories in which characters found themselves in unfathomable predicaments. These writers felt the true absurd nature of human existence could only be expressed in literature that was equally absurd. A number of 1950s playwrights wrote in a style that was later termed "**theatre of the absurd.**" Camus' *Caligula*, *State of Siege*, and *The Misunderstanding* are all absurd dramas. Another classic work from this period is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Obtain several copies of Beckett's play, assign roles, and have students read a few pages out loud to the class. Ask for reactions.

(*Other absurdist include Kafka, Albee, Genet, Ionesco, Pinter, and Havel.*)