

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Catch-22
by Joseph Heller

written by Brian Johnson

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1

The Texan

1. In the beginning of the novel, Captain John Yossarian is in the hospital because he says his liver is sore and he's running a temperature of 101°. Yossarian always has a temperature of 101° and he feels fine. The doctors can't find out what's wrong with his liver so they keep him in the hospital to figure out the problem.

Write a journal entry discussing a time when you used a physical ailment to avoid a particular responsibility or engagement. Was the fact that you misled someone justifiable? Is Yossarian justified in avoiding his bombing missions in the war by feigning illness and staying in the hospital?

2

Clevinger

2. Clevinger and Yossarian disagree on many things. Consider the two quotes below:
- “There were many principles in which Clevinger believed passionately. He was crazy.”
 - Yossarian is crazy because he has “an unfounded suspicion that people hated him and were conspiring to kill him.”

Respond to Yossarian as Clevinger, defending why it’s rational to believe in things passionately (like right and wrong, good and bad, enemies and allies). You may also choose to respond to Clevinger as Yossarian, explaining why he’s correct in thinking people hate him and are conspiring to kill him.

3. “Dunbar liked Clevinger because Clevinger annoyed him and made the time go slow.”

Dunbar thinks that he is prolonging his life if things go by slowly. So, he’s happy when he’s bored, and he’s happy when he’s miserable because such events make time go by more slowly. Write a paragraph or two, commenting on Dunbar’s theory and explain whether you would choose a short life full of fun or a long life that seemed to drag at times.

3

H a v e r m e y e r

4. In the beginning of the novel, Yossarian has flown forty-four missions, but Colonel Cathcart raises the number of missions pilots must fly to fifty. As the novel progresses, Yossarian completes more missions, and Colonel Cathcart raises the number he must fly, always keeping the goal just out of reach.

Recall or create a story about a task you've had to complete where the goal always seemed just out of reach, or the end kept getting further away just as you approached it. Describe this experience.

5. Yossarian has a very frustrating conversation with Orr, who lives in the tent with him. Yossarian asks why, as a kid, Orr walked around with crab apples in his cheeks. Orr replies that they were better than horse chestnuts. Orr explains that he'd walk around with rubber balls in his hands in case someone asked why he had crab apples in his cheeks. Then he could hold out his hands to show them he had rubber balls, not crab apples, and they were in his hands, not his cheeks.

Write a conversation (real or fictitious) between two people in which one person is trying to get a simple answer from another, but the responses consistently evade answering the questions, (much like the conversation between Orr and Yossarian). Another example along the same line is the famous "Who's On First?" skit between Abbott and Costello.

4

Doc Daneeka

6. Colonel Korn devises a rule governing the asking of questions. “Colonel Korn’s rule was a stroke of genius.” In essay form, explain Colonel Korn’s rule governing the asking of questions and explain how it’s an example of a paradox (something which appears to contradict itself).
7. Clevinger considers Dunbar’s theory about a long life, and says, “Maybe a long life does have to be filled with many unpleasant conditions if it’s to seem long.” He continues, “But in that event, who wants one?” Dunbar says he does, because “what else is there?” List as many reasons you can think of explaining why unpleasant conditions may be useful or even positive in a person’s overall lifetime.

5

Chief White Halfoat

8. Chief White Halfoat is a Native American who tells Yossarian how difficult it is to be treated differently because of race. “Racial prejudice is a terrible thing, Yossarian. It really is. It’s a terrible thing to treat a decent, loyal Indian like a nigger, kike, wop, or spic.”

Do you think the type of hypocrisy exhibited by Chief White Halfoat exists today? Write an essay expressing your view. Do you believe people of a particular race, sex, religion, or group expect to be treated a certain way yet fail to extend that same courtesy to others, or do you think they treat others the way they hope to be treated? Be specific and use examples.

9. In this chapter, we learn what “Catch-22” truly is. Imagine you must explain this concept to a group of people. Write a speech explaining, in your own words, what Catch-22 is, and why you think it has become part of our American vocabulary.

6

Hungry Joe

10. Hungry Joe's main motivation is to get photos of naked girls. He tells the girls that he is an important photographer, which incidentally he was in civilian life, and he finds girls to pose any way he wants. Maddeningly for him, the pictures never come out. Ironically, Hungry Joe himself is far from attractive, at least in the way Heller describes him. Based on the description, list as many adjectives as you can describing Hungry Joe.
11. Explain how one of the following qualifies as a "Catch-22":
 - Hungry Joe crumbled promptly into ruin every time he finished another tour of duty because the stress of waiting for orders was too much to bear.
 - Captain Flume slept like a log, only dreamed he was awake, and had to go to sleep after awakening out of pure exhaustion.
 - Colonel Cathcart believes his men are ten missions better than any other outfit. If one of his men doesn't share this belief, he can "get the hell out." In order to get out, the man who doesn't share this belief must fly ten extra missions.

In addition, write a brief paragraph about a "Catch-22" of your own.

7

McWatt

12. In this chapter, we learn that Milo Minderbinder is an enterprising cook in the mess hall, who trusts Yossarian with every secret (except where he hides his money). Throughout the book, Milo will share the details of his often off-the-wall schemes.

Do you have a friend you would share absolutely anything with, from the embarrassing to the dishonest or private? Write an anonymous letter to this person defining the things that separates him or her from the rest of the good friends and family in your life.