

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Demian

by Hermann Hesse

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Demian

Notes

Written in 1919, *Demian* is the story of Emil Sinclair (the pseudonym Hesse chose because he felt that young readers would be reluctant to believe an older writer could have written such a book). Sinclair is a young scholar, who is torn between the orderly, religiously based world of his childhood and the sensual, chaotic outside world. By relating his story, Sinclair offers the reader a spiritual guide that shows a way beyond the everyday world to what Hesse refers to as a “path to humanism.”

On his journey, Sinclair has discussions with the other characters about several Biblical stories. In the course of these conversations, the characters propose alternative interpretations for these stories, which may spark intense discussion among students. This novel is an excellent way to introduce philosophy to students, and it illustrates how philosophical concepts apply to our lives.

Due to its vocabulary level and its challenging philosophical concepts, this novel is recommended for gifted students in the 11th or 12th grades.

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Brief Biography of Hermann Hesse

Herman Hesse was born July 2, 1877, in Germany. His father served as a missionary in India and was a scholar of Indian traditions. Hesse's childhood home was rich with Eastern culture. His parents practiced the Lutheran religion, but in a very strict sense. They interpreted the Bible literally, rejecting dancing, sports, or any other activities of that nature. When he grew up, Hesse abandoned his family's wishes that he become a minister in order to pursue his writing career. As a young man, he worked in many bookshops, which provided him with the materials necessary to educate himself.

After he married, Hesse and his family settled in Switzerland in 1912. Hesse was criticized by Germany because of his dislike of German nationalism. Officially, Germany hated Hesse, but he was loved by a generation of young Germans who wanted peace. Hesse's wife was put into a mental institution, his son contracted meningitis, and his father soon died. Due to these pressures, Hesse entered a sanitarium and underwent psychoanalysis. He became interested in the ideas of Freud and Jung. Jung's theories of the mind and of dream interpretation greatly influenced his writing. Hesse is well known for writing, among others, *Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf*. Hesse died in 1962.

All references come from the Dover Thrift Edition of *Demian*, copyright 2000.

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Background Information

Jacob's Fight with an Angel

Jacob was one of the founding fathers of the Jewish nation. Abraham was his grandfather, and Isaac was his father. In the Bible, Jacob tricks his twin brother Esau out of his inheritance. On his road back home to make peace with his twin, he encounters an angel and wrestles with him until dawn. Jacob, who has outwitted many men, now wrestles an angel and prevails.

The Mark of Cain

Cain murders his brother Abel out of jealousy. God tells Cain that he is going to be banished from his homeland. He must wander the world as a nomad, but he thinks that if God banishes him, the people he comes into contact with will try to kill him. God, therefore, tells Cain that He will put a mark on him so the people will understand that they are not permitted to kill him.

Thieves on the Crosses Next to Jesus

There are two thieves crucified next to Jesus. The crowd jeers and taunts Jesus. One thief joins in with the crowd and suggests that if Jesus is the Messiah then He should free Himself. The other one admonishes the first thief to be quiet and realize who he is talking to. The second thief then asks Jesus to forgive him for being a sinner. Jesus tells the second thief that that night he will be with Jesus in Paradise.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

The night Jesus is arrested, Judas went off to betray him. Jesus knows that He will be crucified the next day. He takes Peter, James, and John with him to the garden and asks them to stay and watch with Him while He prays. They fall asleep, leaving Jesus alone. He asks God if it is possible to avoid what is to come. In the end, though, Jesus accepts his crucifixion. He prays and is so overcome with anxiety that his sweat becomes blood.

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. provide details to support this statement of theme: there is a the relationship between the spiritual rebirth of the individual and the spiritual renewal of society. In doing so, the student will consider whether or not civilization can survive if man fails to understand his true nature.
2. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the extent to which Sinclair follows the path to humanism as defined by Hesse: innocence to guilt, guilt to despair, despair to either destruction or salvation.
3. discuss the ways in which the structure of this novel mirrors the Biblical story of Adam and Eve.
4. discuss the significance of the “mark of Cain” in this story; trace its recurring presence and point out its radical departure from its traditional roots.
5. discuss the following Biblical stories as metaphors in this novel that illustrate the qualities a man must develop within himself to reach self-awareness.
 - the thieves on the crosses next to Jesus
 - Jacob’s fight with the Angel
 - Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
6. understand some of Carl Jung’s theories of the mind and of dream interpretation; cite incidents from the story illustrating that Hesse’s work is influenced by these ideas.
7. point out examples of the way Hesse uses descriptions of nature to illustrate the feelings of his characters and his own philosophical principles.
8. discuss the extent to which Sinclair’s mother is an archetype representing the ideal mother.
9. recognize why Sinclair’s decision to steal the money from his mother is ironic.
10. discuss whether or not Kromer is Sinclair’s alter ego and what Kromer’s whistle might represent in the story.
11. discuss the ways that both Beatrice and Lady Eve guide Sinclair on his path to humanness; comment on whether or not Lady Eve and Sinclair are lovers.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What is Carl Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious"? Find an incident in this story that illustrates the theory.
2. Why does Sinclair fail to tell his parents about Kromer and allow himself to be blackmailed? In what way is it ironic that Sinclair steals from the money box to pay Kromer?
3. Which incident in the story marks the point when Sinclair first begins to separate himself from his family so he can become his own person?
4. In what sense might Kromer be referred to as Sinclair's alter-ego? What might Kromer's whistle represent in this story?
5. How is Demian different from the other students? Why does he strike up a conversation with Sinclair?
6. Why does Sinclair describe his first discussion with Demian about the story of Cain and Abel as though, "A stone had fallen into the well, and the well was my young soul"?
7. Jung believes that certain symbols in dreams and myths are residues of ancestral memory. Select any three dreams in the novel and attempt to interpret the dreams using Jung's theory.
8. Why do you think this novel was popular with the younger generation in Germany after the First World War? What is Hesse's opinion of nationalism?
9. Discuss Demian as being a Christ-like figure in this story. In what ways might he also be thought of as Sinclair's alter ego?
10. Why does Sinclair begin to drink? How does his love for Beatrice change his life?
11. Discuss Demian's opinions concerning "free will." Do you think Hesse advocates man doing exactly as he wishes at all times regardless of the consequences to others?
12. Relate Demian's dream about his mother. In what sense is she an archetype for a good mother?
13. Why is Sinclair attracted to Pistorius' music? In what ways does Pistorius help Sinclair move along his path to humanness? What is Pistorius' definition of a human being?

Chapter One: Two Worlds

Vocabulary

barbs – cutting remarks
beseechingly – to ask earnestly; plead
bonhomie – good natured friendship
constabulary – a police force
contrition – regret for having done wrong
corrosive – decaying
disavow – to deny any knowledge of
dunned – asked insistently or repeatedly for payment
gall – something that is bitter or distasteful
imperiously – arrogantly, overbearingly
instigator – one who incites an action
malicious – spiteful, intentionally mischievous
pfenings – a monetary unit of Germany
prodigal – exceedingly or recklessly wasteful
reproach – to accuse of and blame for a fault
retort – to answer back
sanctity – saintliness or holiness
sauntered – walked
thaler – silver coin
vestibule – a small entrance hall or room
wormwood – bitter, unpleasant

1. Briefly describe the “Two Worlds” the narrator, Emil Sinclair, refers to in the title of this chapter.

2. Describe Franz Kromer. Why does Sinclair make up the “elaborate tale of thievery” that he tells Franz and the other boys?

11. Critics believe that the character Demian is a Christ-like figure. Others believe that he is another one of Sinclair's alter egos. What do you think Demian represents in this story? Cite passages or incidents from this chapter to support your answer.

12. Why does Sinclair retreat into the safety of his family instead of seeking out Demian and trying to learn more about Cain, Kromer, and mindreading?
