

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Fountainhead

by Ayn Rand

written by Pete Boysen

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Background/Pre-Reading

1. Ayn Rand began her screenwriting career during college and continued it when she emigrated to the United States. She enjoyed the writing process, but came to see it more as a tool for expressing the views of objectivism rather than for creating and adapting stories for their own sake. It is ironic that someone who scorned the ideas of teamwork would choose a profession that requires so much collaboration with others.

Rand uses her main characters to serve as mouthpieces for her philosophy. Imagine that you are a screenwriter. You have written a script that concerns one of the main values of mainstream society: education, politics, religion, the justice system, the family unit, or a different value, one of your own choosing.

Write an opening monologue for your main character, and express your opinion about the value you have chosen in that monologue.

2. *The Fountainhead* is a dystopian novel about an architect who never finds financial success despite his ingenious gift. He takes personal satisfaction from his immense creative gifts and from seeing his creative visions come to life; he does not need validation from others to feel like he has talent and genius.

Consider other stories you have read, or movies you have seen, that are about people who have tremendous talents and gifts, but are unable to experience prosperity from their gift because of their own personal stubbornness, or a refusal to satisfy society's expectations.

Come up with a character description and plot outline for your own original story about someone with tremendous gifts who is not able to experience success for reasons similar to Howard Roark. Your plot outline should be written in bullet points and be no longer than a page.

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3. The word *fountainhead* refers to the source of something—most commonly the water in a river, or knowledge. *The Fountainhead* is all about Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism—namely, that the individual is more important than society as a whole, and that selfishness is the highest virtue. As one might expect from someone operating from such an egotistical viewpoint, before her death in 1982, Rand believed that her novel is the source of a wisdom that would transform the planet.

What is your opinion about the value of the individual? When should the individual be more important than his/her society? When should society be more important? Give examples for each part of your opinion from personal experience.

4. A blurb is the paragraph that describes the book that someone is about to read; it's usually on the jacket of the book or in a section after the book is completed. The blurb for *The Fountainhead* talks about Ayn Rand's unique philosophy of objectivism. It also asserts that Howard Roark was alone in his fight against the world, which sought to bring him down to its own level of mediocrity. It gives clues as to the tragic fight that Roark will have to endure if he is going to maintain his intellectual and aesthetic purity.

The purpose of a blurb is to grab the reader's interest, but not spoil the story by giving away too many of the plot's events. Another common feature of a dust jacket is selections from positive reviews of the book. Imagine that someone is going to write your biography; compose the blurb that would appear on the dust jacket. What novel or play might your life resemble? Of course, much of the information would have to be made up, so allow your imagination free rein. Instead of making up a few quotes about your book, write a positive, three-line review of the story of your life.

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5. Society's fear of genius is the primary source of opposition to Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*. This opposition is the source of much conflict, and it is this conflict that moves the plot along. While such figures as Ellsworth Toohey will embody this fear, it is the *fear* that is Roark's enemy, rather than a specific person. The most difficult part of the story, from Rand's perspective, is that the antagonist is invisible and eternal.

In your own life, what invisible antagonists do you face? What are the pressures that you face from day to day? Examples might be time constraints, peer pressure, body weight, procrastination, bad habits, fear of failure, or family strife, among others.

If you could face one of your invisible antagonists, what would you say? Write a conversation that the two of you might have.

Part I

6. The novel opens with the young architect Howard Roark, standing naked at the edge of a cliff made of granite. He has just been kicked out of his architecture school because of the individualism with which he approaches his craft. He goes to meet with the dean of the school, and the dean explains that Roark's designs had been, up until that point, too modern. He offers Roark readmission to the school, once Roark matures and can accept direction from others about his design work. Roark rejects the dean's offer; afterward, the dean asserts that Roark will never become a genuine architect.

How do you think Roark reacts internally to this meeting? How would you have reacted? Write a letter from Roark to one of his friends, detailing both his response to the dean and his feelings about the confrontation.

7. When prized students at academic institutions are expelled, there is generally a strong response from the student body. While some may favor the expulsion of the student, depending on the particular offense, the more common (and usually more vociferous) response comes from the supporters of academic freedom.

Write an editorial that would appear in the campus newspaper at the Stanton Institute of Technology, concerning the expulsion of Howard Roark. You may choose to support or argue against the expulsion, but be sure to give valid reasons that support your opinion.

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8. Roark is conspicuously absent from the rows of graduates at the Stanton commencement exercises. However, Peter Keating does graduate, and Chapter 2 shows him sitting and thinking about how great he is and will become. This pride is gratified when the commencement speaker, Guy Francon, comes by and offers Keating a job. Keating has to decide between this job and a wonderful scholarship that he has won to go to graduate school. Ultimately, his mother cajoles him into accepting the job.

Write a poem that expresses Keating's feelings and point of view, EITHER as he sits and basks in his own glory, OR after his mother has talked him into accepting the job from Guy Francon.

9. The first five chapters of the book contain a great deal of material about the academic backgrounds, relative levels of confidence, and organization of priorities of Roark and Keating. The reader comes away knowing a great deal about what makes both men tick, and what will motivate both men to accomplish great things.

Which of these architects do you think will achieve the greatest professional and personal success? Which of these architects do you think best espouses the values that Ayn Rand values so highly? Why?

10. When you graduate college, one of the most important documents you will need to create is your resume. This summarizes all of your educational experience and any practical experience you had while you were in college that would contribute to your professional success. Examples of practical experience could include special projects you worked on for some of your classes, internships you held during college, as well as any paid employment.

Write a resume for either Keating or Roark, that they could use as they go out into the work world after college. This should be no longer than one page, but it should include their contact information, educational experience, and skills and attributes that would make them a valuable asset to an architecture firm.