

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Lost Horizon

by James Hilton

Copyright © 1988 by Prestwick House Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593.
www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her
personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale. *Revised March, 2002.*

ISBN 978-1-60389-844-7

Item No. 201240

Lost Horizon

Lecture

James Hilton (1900 – 1954) was one of the most popular novelists of the early twentieth century. Many of his novels were made into movies, a number of which Hilton helped to direct. *Lost Horizon* (1933) and *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* (1934) are his two best-known works.

Hilton, born and educated in England, graduated from Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1921 with a degree in history and English. In 1935, he moved to California. Hilton wrote *Lost Horizon* in the early 1930's, a time of chaos and darkness. The death-grip that the Great Depression had on the world's economy brought poverty and despair in its wake. Hitler's rise to power in Germany brought some apparent relief to that country, but his actions created fear throughout the rest of Europe. The generation that fought "the War to End Wars" (World War I) now dreaded the prospect of having to fight another war. It was into this furnace of despair and angst that the Utopian land of Shangri-La blossomed.

The name "Utopian" takes its name from the sixteenth century novel *Utopia* written by Sir Thomas More. The country More created, Utopia, is free of crime, injustice and all other ills. In the tradition begun by More, writers of Utopian novels use their imaginations to create model worlds. These model worlds, in marked contrast to the real world, point out what the real world could and should look like. It is in this light that we should view Shangri-La. The student might ask, "How relevant is Hilton's Shangri-La to the real world, and can we use Shangri-La as a standard to judge our own world?"

Lost Horizon

Tibet and Tibetan Culture

It has been called: “The Land of Snows”; “The Western Treasure House”; “The Roof at the Top of the World.” Tibet has captivated travelers and writers for centuries as one of the last unspoiled places on earth, and until the twentieth century, it was as pristine and mysterious as the Tibet presented in *Lost Horizon*.

Tibet is a land of mountains and mountain plateaus and contains Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world (29,028 feet; 8848 meters). The average altitude of Tibet is 14,000 feet above sea level (4267 meters), so inhabitants and travelers alike must become acclimatized to the lack of oxygen to survive. Even in the summer, it rains, snows, or hails daily. Western Tibet has been compared to the surface of the moon, since it averages less than one inch of rain each month. Tibetan Buddhists believe Mount Kailash (21,832 feet; 6656 meters) in western Tibet is the cosmic center of the universe, and no one has ever tried to conquer its pyramid-shaped peak. Mount Kailash, then, may have been Hilton’s model for the Shangri-La of *Lost Horizon*.

Tibet also has many lakes, streams, and rivers. The Mekong, Yangtse, Salween, Tsangpo, and Yellow Rivers flow out of Tibet to serve nearly half of the world’s population. Tibet also has over 2,000 natural lakes, some of which are considered sacred or play a vital role in Tibetan culture. The country is a land of herders and farmers. An estimate one million herders tend 70 million domesticated animals like yak and blue sheep, and most other Tibetans farm grasslands three miles high.

Tibet is considered by many to be a land of religion, despite its occupation by China. Tibetan Buddhism is the religion of most Tibetans and is led by the Dalai Lama, currently in exile in India. Religion permeates every aspect of Tibetan life. The only educational system for centuries was religious, all cultural and intellectual activities were centered around religious beliefs, and the heads of governments were Buddhist monks. Tibetan Buddhists are expected to recite prayers and mantras (mystical incantations) regularly, pray at religious shrines, make offerings to temples and monasteries, and participate in religious and cultural festivals.

Lost Horizon

Objectives

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

1. develop critical thinking skills by evaluating the relevance of Hilton's utopia to our present reality.
2. write an essay which compares, point by point, Shangri-La to the student's own "vision" of an ideal world.
3. relate the imagery used in the novel to Wordsworth's poem "The Prelude" (Book VI, lines 561 – 615 Book XIV, lines 11 – 65).
4. explain how the novel *Lost Horizon* is an experience of the imagination.
5. discuss the two functions of the novel's Prologue:
 - To arouse the reader's interest and sense of mystery.
 - To establish reader credibility by creating a distance between the reader and the story.
6. describe and illustrate Hilton's method of characterization, which develops characters by showing and contrasting their reactions to events.
7. point out how each character's motivation is consistent throughout the novel with the initial traits, attitudes, and values of each.
8. discuss the following themes:
 - Because tension arises in our society from a tendency to go to excesses, our goal should be to strive for moderation in all things.
 - We are in such a hurry that we have no time to "live."
 - If we can see success in terms of quality, not quantity, each person can achieve a personal ideal and strive for a personal goal.
9. discuss the pros and cons of the following assertions: "The danger implicit in escaping to a utopia is that one gives up a personal responsibility for personal happiness and a considerable degree of personal freedom since, by definition, a utopian society involves giving up personal freedom for a common good."

Lost Horizon

Vocabulary

abyss – a hole so deep it appears bottomless
aloof – unconcerned, remote in character
amenities – conventions observed in polite social intercourse
anecdote – short amusing or interesting story about a real person or event
antechamber – a room leading to a more important room
badinage – good-humored teasing
banter – dialogue, talking
brooding – thinking long and deeply or resentfully
burnished – polished
cantankerous – bad-tempered
capacious – roomy
cataclysm – violent upheaval or disaster
celibate – remaining unmarried
chaff – good-humored teasing or joking
chaste – celibate, pure
clamber – to climb with difficulty
compatriot – a person from the same country as another
conspicuous – easily seen
contingency – something unforeseen
corrugated – shaped into alternate ridges and grooves
curt – rudely brief
deprecation – an expression of disapproval
disillusionment – state of being set free from pleasant but mistaken beliefs
disparagement – something spoken in a belittling way
dispassionate – free from emotion
disquieting – causing anxiety or fear
distraught – greatly upset
edelweiss – an alpine plant with white flowers and woolly leaves
effervescent – bubbling with life
encampment – a camp
equanimity – calmness of mind or temper
etiquette – rules of correct behavior in society
exquisite – having special beauty
fastidious – selecting carefully; easily disgusted
festooned – decorated with hanging ornaments
fortnight – two weeks
garish – excessively bright and over decorated
gastric – of the stomach
gullible – easily deceived
harangue – to make a lengthy, pompous speech
heretical – something contrary to generally accepted beliefs
hiatus – a break or gap, a period of rest

Chapter 2

1. What are the plot developments in this chapter?

2. Characterize Barnard and Miss Brinklow.

3. Explain how Conway and Mallinson remain consistent with their initial characterization.

4. Predict what you think will happen in the next chapter.

5. Re-read the descriptions of the cone-shaped mountain. List the words or phrases that create pictures in your mind.

5. What do you learn about Barnard? How does Mallinson react to Barnard? How does Conway react to Barnard? Why?

6. What does Chang announce to Conway?

7. List at least four ways Shangri-La is different from our society.

8. Barnard says that “the whole game’s going to pieces.” Conway remembers this phrase “with a wider significance than the American had probably intended.” What does Conway see “going to pieces”?

5. Why does the High Lama consider Conway an extraordinary man? Has Hilton convinced you that Conway is extraordinary?

6. Describe Mallinson's behavior in this chapter.

7. Conway says, "Perhaps the exhaustion of the passions is the beginning of wisdom." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
