

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Siddhartha

by Hermann Hesse

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Prestwick House

Item No. 302272

Siddhartha

Objectives

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

1. analyze the characters of Govinda, Kamala, and Vasudeva and explain how these supporting characters help develop the protagonist.
2. trace the development of Siddhartha's character, making note of how and why he changes in his journey toward Nirvana.
3. analyze the structure of the story and how it influences the plot.
4. analyze the story from a Jungian perspective—identifying the influence of Jungian theory on the text.
5. discuss the symbols in the story.
6. identify autobiographical elements in the text.
7. analyze the text as a Quest novel.
8. identify and analyze water as a major theme and extended metaphor.
9. analyze how the elements of the Hindu religion affect the development of the story.
10. analyze how the elements of Buddhism affect the development of the story.
11. analyze the literary elements in the story and how they affect the story.
12. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
14. offer a close reading of *Siddhartha* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

Lecture Notes

HERMANN HESSE

Hermann Hesse was born in the town of Calw in Württemberg, Germany on July 2, 1877. Hesse's parents were both missionaries with a Basel, Switzerland Mission to India. Hermann's father, Johannes Hess, was born the son of a doctor. His mother, Marie Gundert, was the daughter of a missionary as well.

Hesse's formal education began at the Latin School in Göppingen, where he first showed promise. His second boarding school was the Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1891. It was in March of 1892 that Hesse ran away from the Seminary. Similar to characters in his books, Hesse rebelled against traditional education and his parents' strict religious upbringing. Hesse's book *Beneath the Wheel* is an autobiographical novel about a young man coming to terms with the artist inside him. As the struggles of the story unfold, the protagonist runs away from the seminary school he is attending. In the less autobiographical, more allegorical *Siddhartha*, our protagonist is fully aware of his intentions, and his departure is symbolic and contrived rather than characterized by frustration. Many of Hesse's works contain autobiographical elements, and the events of his early life can be recognized in works such as *Beneath the Wheel*, *Siddhartha*, *Demian*, and *Steppenwolf*.

Due to the death of his father and other pressures, Hesse underwent psychoanalysis in 1915 with a student of Carl Jung, Dr. Josef Lang. This was Hesse's introduction to psychoanalysis, which led to an interest that strongly influenced his writing.

The writing of *Siddhartha* began on the same incredibly prolific summer that Hesse wrote *Klingsor's letzter Sommer* (*Klingsor's Last Summer*), which is a collection of short stories. *Siddhartha* was completed the following year, in May 1922.

Biographical information relevant to Siddhartha:

All of Hesse's books are autobiographical to some extent, and *Siddhartha* is no exception. Both *Siddhartha* and Hesse avoided a parental dictate putting them into the priesthood. The writing of *Siddhartha* also coincided with a personal preoccupation with Indian culture, and began at the end of one very prolific summer. The first eight chapters were written rapidly, and then Hesse stopped writing, unsure of how to finish. This period lasted for eighteen months, during which Hesse did his own searching, similar to his character, *Siddhartha*. Hesse spent much of the time reading from *The Upanishads*, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, and Buddhist scriptures.

At this stage in Hesse's life and at this stage in the book's development, Hesse looked to a comrade and growing influence, Carl Jung. Ever since his treatment by Jung's student, Dr. Josef Lang, Hesse had developed an interest in Jung's theories. Hesse corresponded with Jung for years, and during the writing of *Siddhartha*, he called on his friend for counsel.

Siddhartha

Chapter One

1. Find the epithet for Siddhartha. What does it suggest?

2. “Atman” is described as something that is “within this inner essence of his that was indestructible and one with the universe.” Is there anything that is roughly equivalent to “Atman” in other world religions?

3. How old do you believe Siddhartha is from all information given in Chapter One?

4. What is the significance of Siddhartha’s name?

5. What is Govinda’s opinion of “ordinary Brahmins”? What is it about real Hindu society that leads to this possibility?

6. How is the restlessness that Siddhartha feels similar to that experienced by many young people? How is Siddhartha different?

Chapter Three

1. What is suggested by Siddhartha's recognition of the Buddha while he has to be pointed out to Govinda?

2. Upon reaching the town where the Buddha resided, what understatement does Govinda make regarding enlightenment? What does this reveal about the character?

3. What information is given about the structures of Buddhism early in Chapter Three?

4. It is mentioned that Siddhartha had never loved a person as much as the Buddha. This is the first mention of Siddhartha loving anyone or anything. Why is it significant that Siddhartha feels more love for this person than either of his parents or Govinda?

5. Why does Hesse tell us about the Buddha's eating habits?

5. How is Siddhartha's addiction to gambling ironic?

6. Siddhartha's dream of the songbird and Kamala's later release of the bird are both highly symbolic. Explain the meaning of the dream and the release.

7. Explain the concept of Samsara as demonstrated by the book. How did it affect Siddhartha?

8. Siddhartha observes the signs of Kamala's aging: "under her eyes and next to the corners of the mouth he read ... a horrible inscription of small lines, slight grooves." "With a sigh, he said farewell to her while his soul was full of hesitation and hidden anxiety." Some mistakenly attribute Siddhartha's departure to the dream of the songbird, but Siddhartha had already decided to leave Kamala before he had the dream. Why? Was he afraid of death? Explain your answer.
