

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter: Questions & Answers

Discussion Questions for Part One, Pages 1-94

1. In picking up this book for the first time, with its very poignant title and a serious photo of the author on the cover, what do you expect from it? Talk about your initial impressions, what you had heard about the book, or other things you knew about the novel prior to starting the first chapter.
2. The first chapter paints a vivid portrait of the friendship between Singer and Antonapoulos. How do you feel about each of these characters from the beginning? How do the men seem similar, other than the fact they are both deaf-mutes? What do you feel the friendship brings Singer in particular?
3. In meeting Biff Brannon in chapter two, what can you tell immediately about his relationship with his wife? Describe what interests you about him as a character and about the New York Café as a place.
4. Analyze the things Jake Blount says in the first part of the book. What do we know about him from his dialogue with others? What is your initial impression of him?
5. In chapter three, the details of Mick's life are laid out very carefully. How do you interpret her interest in Singer? Do you think his quiet nature relates to Mick's interest in music or her need for a place to listen to it in her own head?
6. What can you tell about the environment of the Kelly household from the initial information you are given by the author?
7. Choose five adjectives to describe Doctor Benedict Mady Copeland. How does he appear to be an outsider in his own community? What do you think about his decision to return to the South after having been educated as a doctor in the North?
8. Each of the characters you meet in the first part of the novel seems estranged from the community in some way. Describe in what ways their estrangements are similar, and also in what ways they differ.
9. Which character do you like the most or feel the closest to? Who does the narrator seem partial to, if anyone?
10. Discuss the narration. What is consistent about the voice throughout this first part of the novel? How are the details about places and people described, and what do you like or dislike about the descriptions? How does the point of view contribute to the overall feeling of the novel?

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter: Questions & Answers

Discussion Questions for Part Two, Pages 97—326

1. Talk about the party at the Kelly house at the beginning of Part Two. How is Mick's behavior typical of an adolescent girl and how is it different? What is unique about Mick?
2. Think about Mick's love of music. How is music used throughout the book—to evoke a mood, to punctuate certain paragraphs, or to convey an idea or underlying theme?
3. Discuss Biff's views of Alice and how they are different from his views of her sister Lucile. Also, think about how Biff handles his wife's illness. How is the breakdown of their marriage reminiscent of Alice's sickness?
4. Talk about the many ways religion is used throughout the text.
5. Discuss Doctor Copeland's strange relationship with the town. What do you understand about his views of society? As a symbol of the African-American race, what statement do you feel the author is trying to make about race relations in the South?
6. What do you think about Portia as a character? How do you feel about the way she handles her relationship with her father? Do you feel she's a strong woman, and if so, why?
7. Put together a list of descriptors of the Georgia town that serves as a backdrop for the novel. Talk about what you know about the town from the people who live there.
8. What do you think about Singer's devotion to his friendship with Antonapoulos?
9. Singer comes to represent God—or a deified presence—for each of the other characters in the book: "each man described the mute as he wished him to be." (p. 223) Why?
10. Toward the end of Part Two, many of the situations the main characters find themselves in are dire. Nothing seems to be going well. Do you feel the author is writing an optimistic or pessimistic story at this point? If you had to guess at some resolution, what would it be?

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter: Questions & Answers

Discussion Questions for Part Three, Pages 329—end

1. Were you surprised by Singer's death at the end of Part Two? If so, what was most surprising to you about it?
2. At the beginning of this final section, Doctor Copeland is very bitter and angry. Why do you think he feels this way? Do you think he has a right to be?
3. Do you feel Jake Blount has changed throughout the course of this novel? If so, in what ways?
4. There are some religious undertones in many of the passages of these final chapters. How might they relate to Singer and his death?
5. Once Singer has exited the novel, which of the four remaining main characters do you feel you connect with the most? Which one do you feel is portrayed most sympathetically—or do you think they are portrayed in the same fashion?
6. The finale of Mick's story is very short, yet a great deal of the novel was taken up by her coming-of-age. Do you feel satisfied by the way her story ended?
7. Think through the journeys these characters took. Do you feel they ended someplace different than where they started?
8. How much do you think the time period and region in which this book is set contributes to the way things end up?
9. Do you read the ending of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* as positive, negative or neutral?
10. Now that you've finished reading, do you feel Carson's book captures the way you personally feel about loneliness and isolation? In what ways?