

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

The Stranger by Albert Camus

English Language Arts, 12th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

A shipping clerk living in French Algiers in the 1940s, Meursault is a young, detached but ordinary man. The novel begins with Meursault receiving a telegram informing him of his mother's death. He attends the funeral, but surprises other attendees with his unusual calm and (once again) detachment. Over the next two weeks, Meursault carries on life as if nothing tragic has happened. He frolics with a new girlfriend, befriends a pimp, and goes on a beach vacation with both. During the beach vacation, however, Meursault and friends are confronted by two Arabs. Violence ensues, with Meursault eventually killing one of the Arabs. It was a hot day, and aside from the weather, no explanation exists for Meursault's crime. At his murder trial, the court seemed much more interested in Meursault's lack of grief over his mother's death than the alleged heinousness of his crime. Judged to be a cold-hearted, nonconforming, and of course, detached misanthrope (hater of humankind), the jury finds Meursault's character—not crime, per se—punishable by death. Awaiting his execution in prison, Meursault struggles to come to terms with his impending death. One day, after becoming enraged with an annoying, preachy chaplain, Meursault denounces Christianity and vehemently refuses to appeal to religion as a way of finding solace. Meursault joins the absurdist camp when he declares that 1) the world is meaningless, lawless, and without rational order, and 2) this is a perfectly justified claim. Some would say he gets "enlightened" in prison. Others would disagree. Either way, Meursault looks forward to his execution as affirmation of his "life is ridiculous" mantra. At the very least, he gets to leave society and all that goes with it behind.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 1: Language and Perspective**
 - Essential Question: "How does language influence perspective?"
- **Unit 3: Personal Responsibility**
 - Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"
- **Unit 4: Universal Human Experience**
 - Essential Question: "How can reading reveal universal truths about the human experience?"

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.12.2
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.12.5
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.12.1
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.12.11
- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. RL.12.3
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. RL.12.4
- Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant. RL.12.6
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem, evaluating how each version interprets the source text. RL.12.7
- Demonstrate knowledge of foundational works of American and world literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics. RL.12.9
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading. RL.12.10
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RL.12.12