

Name: _____
English II

Date: _____
Period: _____

ORDINARY PEOPLE

Socratic Seminar

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

1. Guilt and Punishment. Conrad suffers from survivor's guilt following his brother's death until his climactic session with Dr. Berger after Karen's suicide, at which time Dr. Berger finally convinces Conrad that guilt is not punishment - - it is just guilt. Does the author suggest that punishment is (1) effective therapy for guilt, (2) temporary avoidance of inevitable guilt, or (3) a prolonging of guilt that would otherwise dissipate? Analyze the following events in formulating your answer.
 - a. Conrad's anxiety as he waits to tell his parents about the fight with Stillman (Chapter 22)
 - b. Conrad's reminiscence of the time when he and Buck had a run-in with the drugstore clerk and when Cal caught them playing the prisoner game in the garage (Chapter 27)
 - c. Conrad's reflection on fellow patient Robbie Clay's self-mutilation (Chapter 27)
 - d. Conrad's suicide attempt, and
 - e. When Cal tells Conrad that he never had the heart to punish him as he grew up because Conrad was already so hard on himself (Chapter 31).

2. Making a Person feel ordinary again. Upon Conrad's release from the mental hospital, he attempts to return to an ordinary life. Various characters in the novel react to him in different ways. Consider how the following characters react toward Conrad and classify their treatment of Conrad in one of the following three categories: ordinary, extraordinary (i.e., special or superhuman), or unordinary (i.e., different but not special)
 - a. Mrs. Mellon (Chapter 3 — her willingness to give him an extension on his book report, as contrasted with her critiques of his poems a year earlier)
 - b. Coach Salan (Chapter 10 — he chastises Conrad for his ingratitude),
 - c. Jeanine Pratt (Chapter 18 — no measurable reaction to Conrad's loss of sibling and suicide attempt),

- d. Lazenby (Chapter 12- his concerns about Conrad quitting the swim team and the revelation that Lazenby wrote to Conrad while he was in the mental institution), and
 - e. Dr. Berger (Chapter 27 – Dr. Berger’s fable about the not-so-perfect kid).
3. Self-imposed isolation. Beth Jarrett is portrayed as an aloof mother and wife who cares about no one but herself. Does her character evoke sympathy or anger toward her? Consider whether the following events from the novel support or disprove your answer:
- a. Dr. Berger’s theory that Beth is incapable of loving anyone, but that she loves Conrad as much as she is able to (Chapter 14),
 - b. Beth’s anger toward Conrad when she learns from Carole Lazenby that Conrad quit the swim team (Chapter 13),
 - c. Beth’s anger at Cal for revealing at the Genthes’ party that Conrad is seeing a psychiatrist, particularly Beth professed concern for “privacy” (Chapter 8) and,
 - d. The final showdown between Cal and Beth before Beth makes the decision to leave her family (Chapters 29 and 30).
4. Marital bonds. Analyze the author’s presentation of the elasticity of the bond of matrimony throughout this novel, with comparison of three following marriages:
- a. Beth and Calvin, with analysis of Beth’s eventual departure despite Calvin’s willingness to accommodate her (nothing in particular the discussion of marital infidelity at the end of Chapter 21),
 - b. Ray and Nancy, who remain married despite Ray’s infidelity seven years earlier (see chapters 11 and 19, particularly Ray’s wise counsel of Cal in the latter), and
 - c. Jeanine’s parents (see chapter 24 – Jeanine’s reflection of how she once hoped her parents would get back together).
5. Time. Reflect on the sub-theme of time in this novel. Does the passage of time heal emotional wounds and/or does it solidify emotional distance? To answer this question, consider the following unrelated events:
- a. Karen and Conrad discussing how hard it is to lose a whole year of your life (chapter 7)
 - b. Dr. Berger’s dismissive comment about the Great Schedule in the Sky (Chapter 9)
 - c. Beth’s eventual decision to leave her family (Chapter 28 and 29), and
 - d. The second to last paragraph in the epilogue.