**Seminar Questions and Discussion Topics, Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood***

1. **Group #1: Concerning Capote’s stylistic choices…**
   1. What do you believe to be Capote’s overarching thesis for this book? Explain…discuss…
   2. Discuss the appropriateness/effectiveness/levels of meaning for the title of this book. In what ways might it illuminate your answer to question Ia?
   3. With which character are you most sympathetic? Least? Why? What do you believe to be Capote’s intent regarding this?
2. **Group #2: Questions of Legality…**
   1. Analyze and discuss the following quotation:

“The question is this—do poor, plainly guilty defendants have a right to a complete defense? I do not believe the State of Kansas would be either greatly or for long harmed by the death of these appellants. But I do not believe they could ever recover from the death of due process” (Capote 326-327).

b. Assess the validity of the following statement:

“What’s there to say about capital punishment? I’m not against it. Revenge is all it is, but what’s wrong with revenge? It’s very important” (Capote 335).

1. Consider the discussion of the M’Naghten Rule, which basically focuses on whether a criminal defendant knew the nature of the crime or understood right from wrong at the time it was committed and the possibility of declaring a killer mentally unfit to stand trial. Is there validity to the insanity defense? To the M’Naghten Rule? Justify.
2. **Group #3: Crime, Ethics, Society…**
   1. It has often been stated that America has an apparent obsession with the archetype of the “Outlaw Hero” (e.g. Billy the Kid, Pretty Boy Floyd, Al Capone, etc.) Why do you think this is? Discuss your opinions on how Capote portrayed Dick and Perry. Were they romanticized? Villified? Objectively portrayed?
   2. The town of Holcolmb itself is sometimes discussed as almost being another character in the story. To what degree does the setting (time and place) factor in to the themes/messages delivered? How might the story differ if the murders took place somewhere or sometime other than where/when they did?
   3. Assuming Dick never actually committed any of the killings, should he be held legally responsible to the same degree as Perry?

**Other Group Responsibilities**

Your group needs to choose a section from the book that you feel is both rhetorically important and relevant to the topics/discussions that you are responsible for. Make copies for the rest of the class and work with the class to perform a close reading analysis of that passage.

**Individual Responsibilities**

**Close read** the short article about the recent request to exhume the bodies of Dick and Perry (you can find this attached on my website in the Capote section). If it is true that they committed murders other than the Clutters’, does this alter your perception of them—or the story, or any of Capote’s messages—at all? Explain. Attach your response to this sheet along with YOUR questions below.

**Along with your written response to the above, I now want you to give me your own two best questions. Think of it this way, if you were teaching this book and were involving your students in a Socratic Seminar of sorts, what questions would you give them to initiate a conversation…(I expect something thought provoking here)**