



A Discussion Guide for *Hillcrest Journal*

“The Pen is Mightier”

In various places in *Hillcrest Journal*, Chad Wilson describes the writing process. Early on, he states that writing helps him keep track of the details of his life (p. 30). Otherwise, he tends to forget many things in his day-to-day life. Do you agree?

Later, he states that writing allows him to understand his thinking more clearly, like moving an iceberg to the surface (p. 15, 18, 29). Do you agree?

Writing can be therapeutic (p. 27). Do you agree?

As *Hillcrest Journal* progresses, we, the readers, see Chad’s writing style developing. He even experiments with his style (p. 20.) Has your writing changed over the years? If so, how?

Chad tends to write in a more colloquial style when his entries are written during emotional moments. Does being aware of one’s style, such as using correct grammar, inhibit emotions? How important is it that *everyone* watch *his* writing style? (Or should that be *his/her*?)

After his pornography article is published (p. 158), Chad wishes that he could rewrite it. He now sees the article through the eyes of an editor rather than through the emotions of the writer. Is this true of all writing?

This is a work of fiction, yet many devices set it up as if it were true. This device is called verisimilitude. What are the most effective examples of verisimilitude?

“All the World’s a Stage”

Early in the novel, Chad states that a bigger part requires more responsibility (p. 48). Discuss your experience with this idea.

In the party that Chad and Sarah attend, Sarah lets him catch up in Ping-Pong (p. 50). Should she have let him? Discuss.

After Chad joins the theater group, there are many references to acting and the masks that people wear off stage (p. 56, and p. 89, for example). This contrasts with Chad’s desire to be honest. What sort of masks do you see in others? In adolescents? In adults?

Chad decides that acting is not for him, yet is he “acting” in real life? He writes that he seeks to be honest with himself and with others (p. 58). To what extent is he successful?

When Pastor Jim gives him the book on the historical basis of the Bible (p. 123), Chad doesn’t read it. He says he is looking for the truth, yet is he afraid of finding answers? Discuss.

“How Do I Love Thee?”

Chad believes that love isn't love without commitment (p. 140). Do you agree? Discuss.

Toward the end of the journal, Chad links this same idea with religion (p. 147). Do you agree?

Early in the novel, Aaron and Jennifer's future situation is foreshadowed (p. 50). Later, Chad wonders if Jennifer became pregnant in order to trap Aaron (p. 131). If this is true, discuss the ramifications this has for their future marriage.

“Games People Play”

Do you agree that people sometimes lie and with little reason (p. 127)? Compare this with his view of advertising and the pornography trade (p. 128).

Chad brings up the point that people like to complain (p. 80). What's the benefit to complaining? What's the harm?

Chad develops a life philosophy: look for the truth. Others, he says, want only to keep moving (p. 93). Others want to be the life of the party, like Bob Swanson. Has your life philosophy changed as you have matured?

Chad seems to believe that he needs to work things out for himself. Is this true of everyone? Or can we learn from others' experiences?

“Don't Discuss Sex, Religion, or Politics at the Dinner Table”

What do you think about Pastor Jim's view of premarital sex (p. 84)?

What do you think of Chad's various religious questions? Have you wondered the same things?

What do you think about Chad's questions about abortion? (p. 131) Is it a question of choice, or is it really a question of when is a human being considered human?

Chad begins to consider death when he looks ahead to his future. (p. 177-78) Thinking about death is a necessary step in growing up. What are your views?

The theme of true love vs. lust and the theme of manipulating others merge in the pornography article. (p. 119) Are we influenced by what we see? Should there be the limits on free speech?

“Nothing but the Truth”

Chad seeks to be honest with himself (and with us, the readers). There are many “actors” in the book, not just the ones on stage. Look back at the various characters. Who are the actors and how do they get into trouble because of it? Who escapes getting into trouble? Are there any patterns?

People have presuppositions and prejudices. Consider the editorials, class cliques, Chad's own assumptions about others, and his own self-image. Does Chad's self-image limit himself? Look at what the counselor says to him near the end of second quarter. Is the counselor right? Discuss.

By discarding his presuppositions about himself, Chad is able to re-invent himself. Is this easy to do? What may hinder us from changing ourselves?