



Passing Through Paradise Study Guide

Chapter 1: The novel is called *Passing through Paradise*, yet some of the town's residents--mostly adolescents--called the town Purgatory. What do you think of when you hear/think of the term "Purgatory"?

Chapter 3: The author, John Schreiber, has described this book as a love story. What elements of love have surfaced so far?

Chapter 4: Angela puts "her foot in her mouth" at the end of this chapter. Have you ever experienced something like this? Is it better to apologize or just forget about it?

Chapter 6: At different times, Angela says "Looking back . . ." Are the two narrative voices (Angela at 9 and Angela at 19) effective? (Schreiber calls this a stereo effect.)

Chapter 7: Discuss the major students in the novel so far. (Tina, Jane, Shelley, Robert, Chet, Duane). Which ones do you empathize with? Which ones do you not?

Chapter 9: Paradise residents are viewed as narrow-minded and not open to change. Discuss how this is true in human nature. Discuss how their narrow-mindedness has affected the town over time.

Chapter 10: The theme of "masks" is highlighted in chapter X. Discuss in what ways people wear masks. What mask does Jack wear? What masks do other characters wear?

Chapter 12: What additional kinds of love have surfaced so far?

Chapter 15: Why do Larry Bates and Coach Oldenburg resist change? Are their reasons more similar or more different?

Chapter 18: Many of the characters have "something" that helps them deal with traumatic events in their lives? Jack? Angela? Tom? Robert? Rick Manitou (later in chapter 21). Do hobbies help us deal with traumatic stress? Or do they help us put our lives into perspective? Discuss your own hobbies and how they help you deal with stress.

Chapter 20: Jack Kiln says that if there is a Purgatory, it is this life. Discuss what Jack means by this.

Chapter 21: Change is a major theme in this novel: the changes that towns go through, that families go through, that cultures go through. (Look at Mrs. Manitou's talk with Angela in chapter 21.) Discuss how you embrace or resist change.

Chapter 22: Andrew Johanson has a difficult time balancing what he wants to do and what he needs to do in order to survive as a businessman. Discuss his dilemma. Is this political balancing act found in all professions?

Chapter 23: There are many supporting characters in this novel. Coach Oldenburg (How does he deal with Chet's death?) Mr. Hanson and Mrs. Walker (Why their affair?), Mr. Oatley (Why is he upset when he comes back "home"?), Miss Bloombury ("One man's treasure is another one's trash?") How do these characters deal with change?

Chapter 24: Dealing with injustice is another theme in this novel. Tina tries to deal with injustice. Jack and Rick Manitou help Warren Gallagher deal with vandals. Even the injustice of America's treatment of Native Americans is alluded to. Discuss how we as individuals can deal with injustice.

Discuss what aspects of love have appeared in the novel.

Chapter 25: Jack says that what we really want is mercy. Discuss what he means by this. Do you agree?

Mrs. Putnam says that teaching is love and war. Is this also true of parenting? Of family life in general?

Miss Bloomsbury finally restores the doll. (and what does her reading of science fiction say about her character?) Angela draws a link between this, her father's helping others, and her willingness to help Margie. Discuss these acts of kindness or grace. What are the effects of these acts of grace? Do all acts of grace bring about good consequences?

Looking back on the novel:

How are the themes of change and love similar to and different from *Hillcrest Journal*?

How is this novel stylistically different from *Hillcrest Journal*?

Consider what Jack said about Purgatory. In what ways has the town changed and/or purged Jack Kiln and Angela?