*Capote*

[*Capote*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379725/); United Artists, 2005; Directed by Bennett Miller; Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener, and Chris Cooper; Rated R. [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjvBYqp8b6U).

Summary:

*Capote* is the true story of the famous (and infamous) writer Truman Capote; more specifically, the film chronicles the genesis and completion of Capote’s most famous work, the “nonfiction novel” *In Cold Blood*. In 1959 four members of a family in Kansas were murdered by two men—Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. Truman Capote read about the murders in the newspaper and decided they would be the subject of his next book. He travelled to the Kansan town of Holcomb with his childhood friend, Harper Lee—author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—to interview the police, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, and the townspeople. The film follows these relationships as well as Capote’s association with one of the two captured murderers—Perry Smith. Directed by Bennett Miller (*Moneyball* and *Foxcatcher*), the film received five Oscar nominations in 2005; Philip Seymour Hoffman won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Capote.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* Outside/Inside. Capote is a social insider in places like New York City, yet he experiences what it means to be on the outside in Holcomb, Kansas.
* Assumptions. “Ever since I was a child,” Capote tells Nancy Kenyon’s best friend, “folks have thought they had me pegged, because of the way I am, the way I talk. And they’re always wrong.”
* Pride/Jealousy. Capote is proud of his unwritten/unpublished book—“Sometimes when I think of how good my book is going to be, I can’t breathe”—but visibly jealous of Harper Lee.
* Violence. The film uses description, anticipation, and extremely quick shots to portray the murders rather than visually dwelling on it.
* Legacy. The title cards at the film’s conclusion read:
  + - * *In Cold Blood* made Truman Capote the most famous writer in America. He never finished another book.
      * The epigraph he chose for his last, unfinished work reads: “More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones.”
      * He died in 1984 of complications due to alcoholism.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the film communicate a sense of place, particularly with the town of Holcomb?
2. What does Capote mean when he says, “It’s as if Perry and I grew up in the same house. And one day he stood up and went out the back door, while I went out the front”?
3. What do you think about how Capote’s homosexuality is portrayed in the film?
4. Why did *In Cold Blood* make Capote the most famous writer in America?
5. Does Capote cross any moral boundaries as he attempts to find out from Perry what happened the night of the murders?
6. What is the difference between sympathy and empathy? Does Capote have one rather than the other with regard to Perry?