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2015-2016 BIC Teaching Guide

Marta Moore Editor

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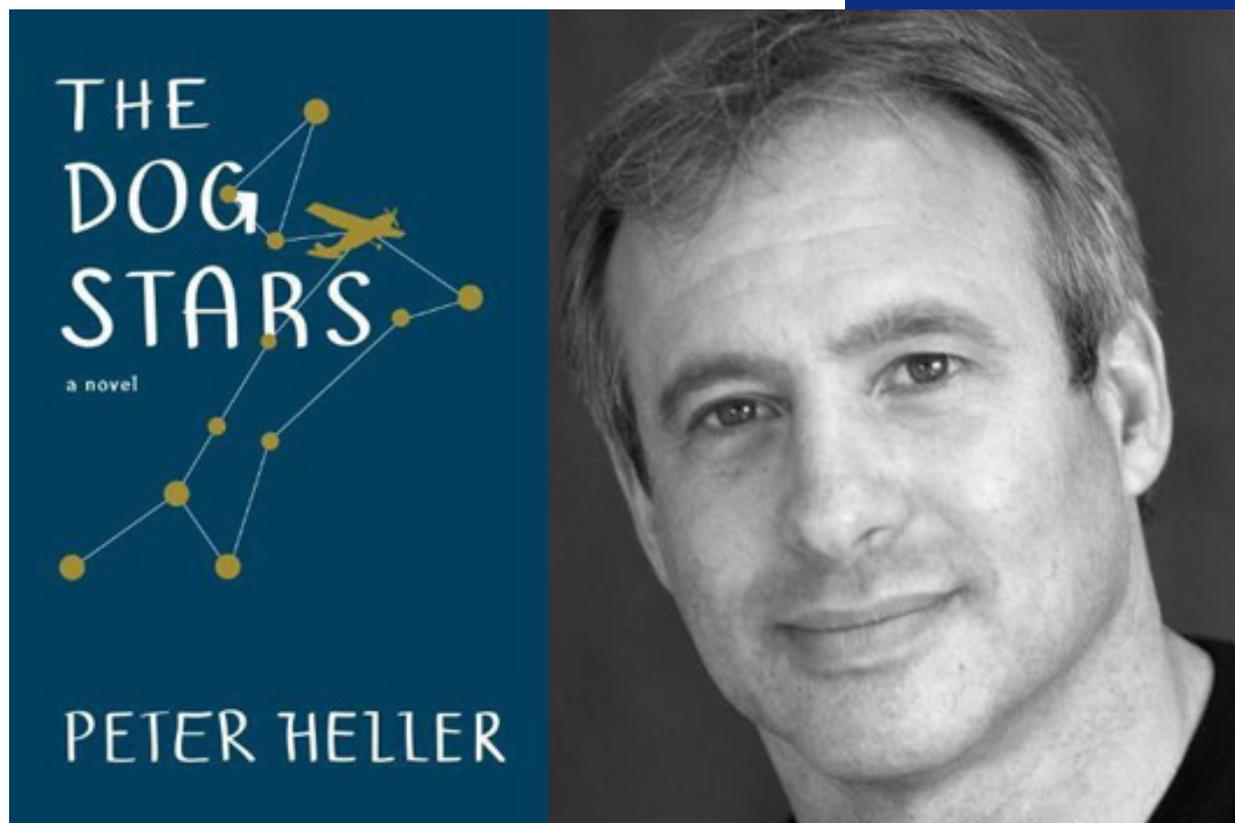
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BOOK-IN-COMMON TEACHING GUIDE

2015-2016

Collin College Book-in-Common Committee



2015-2016 BOOK-IN-COMMON

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GENERAL INFORMATION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

From the author's website (<http://www.peterheller.net/about/>):

Peter Heller is a longtime contributor to NPR, and a contributing editor at *Outside Magazine*, *Men's Journal*, and *National Geographic Adventure*. He is an award winning adventure writer and the author of four books of literary nonfiction. He lives in Denver. Heller was born and raised in New York. He attended high school in Vermont and Dartmouth College in New Hampshire where he became an outdoorsman and whitewater kayaker. He traveled the world as an expedition kayaker, writing about challenging descents in the Pamirs, the Tien Shan mountains, the Caucasus, Central America and Peru. At the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he received an MFA in fiction and poetry, he won a Michener fellowship for his epic poem "The Psalms of Malvine." He has worked as a dishwasher, construction worker, logger, offshore fisherman, kayak instructor, river guide, and world class pizza deliverer. Some of these stories can be found in *Set Free in China*, *Sojourns on the Edge*. In the winter of 2002 he joined, on the ground team, the most ambitious whitewater expedition in history as it made its way through the treacherous Tsangpo Gorge in Eastern Tibet. He chronicled what has been called The Last Great Adventure Prize for *Outside*, and in his book *Hell or High Water: Surviving Tibet's Tsangpo River*.

The gorge — three times deeper than the Grand Canyon — is sacred to Buddhists, and is the inspiration for James Hilton's Shangri La. It is so deep there are tigers and leopards in the bottom and raging 25,000 foot peaks at the top, and so remote and difficult to traverse that a mythical waterfall, sought by explorers since Victorian times, was documented for the first time in 1998 by a team from *National Geographic*.

The book won a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*, was number three on *Entertainment Weekly's* "Must List" of all pop culture, and a *Denver Post* review ranked it "up there with any adventure writing ever written."

In December, 2005, on assignment for *National Geographic Adventure*, he joined the crew of an eco-pirate ship belonging to the radical environmental group the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society as it sailed to Antarctica to hunt down and disrupt the Japanese whaling fleet.

The ship is all black, sails under a jolly Roger, and two days south of Tasmania the engineers came on deck and welded a big blade called the Can Opener to the bow—a weapon designed to gut the hulls of ships. In *The Whale Warriors: The Battle at the Bottom of the World to Save the Planet's Largest Mammals*, Heller recounts fierce gales, forty foot seas, rammings, near-sinkings, and a committed crew's clear-eyed willingness to die to save a whale. The book was published by Simon and Schuster's Free Press in September, 2007.

In the fall of 2007 Heller was invited by the team who made the acclaimed film *The Cove* to accompany them in a clandestine filming mission into the guarded dolphin-killing cove in Taiji, Japan. Heller paddled into the inlet with four other surfers while a pod of pilot whales was being slaughtered. He was outfitted with a helmet cam, and the terrible footage can be seen in the movie. *The Cove* went on to win an Academy Award. Heller wrote about the experience for *Men's Journal*.

Heller's most recent memoir, about surfing from California down the coast of Mexico, *Kook: What Surfing Taught Me about Love, Life, and Catching the Perfect Wave*, was published by The Free Press in 2010. Can a man drop everything in the middle of his life, pick up a surfboard and, apprenticing himself to local masters, learn to ride a big, fast wave in six months? Can he learn to finally love and commit to someone else? Can he care for the oceans, which are in crisis? The answers are in. The book won a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*, which called it a "powerful memoir...about love: of a woman, of living, of the sea." It also won the National Outdoor Book Award for Literature.

Heller's debut novel, *The Dog Stars*, was published by Knopf in August, 2012. It was the Apple iBooks Novel of the Year, Hudson Booksellers top fiction pick of the Year, and an *Atlantic Monthly* and *San Francisco Examiner* Best Book of the Year. It was critically celebrated and a breakout bestseller, and has been published in eighteen languages.

His second novel, *The Painter*, is coming from Knopf in May, 2014. Two months before publication, *Publishers Weekly* gave it a coveted Boxed and Starred review, calling it "masterful", and Amazon has picked it as a Top 20 Big Spring Book.

ABOUT CANIS MAJOR (THE GREAT DOG)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS

GLORIA COCKERRELL — BOOK-IN-COMMON STUDY GUIDE: *THE DOG STARS*

1. How does the way in which Cima and her father view Hig when he intrudes into their dwelling place parallel the way that Hig and Bangley view outsiders who try to approach the airport in which they reside? How does this view differ from what it would likely be in a pre-apocalyptic world, and why?
2. What strengths and weaknesses do the characters whom the reader has come to know have that will help and/or hinder them as they build a new society? Give some example situations and explain your answers.
3. What differences are there in the manner in which the characters in the small community at the airport will build a society from its beginning and the way that people began societies originally? Given that the Technological Environment is “the expectations of a society,” what differences exist because of knowledge of technology on the part of the modern community members?
4. How well did the author bring together a group of people who are suitable to begin society anew? Is his method contrived, or does the manner in which the characters at the airport came together seem natural to the story line? Explain your answer.

JOAN KENNEDY – STUDY GUIDE: *THE DOG STARS* BY PETER HELLER (A NOVEL)

English

1. What is the relationship between Hig and Bangley?
2. Why do Hig and Bangley need a “perimeter”?
3. What is Hig’s and Bangley’s “plan” for survival? How successful has it been?
4. What role does friendship play in the novel?
5. How does helping the Mennonites impact Hig psychologically?
6. Who is Melissa? Do the events surrounding her story seem plausible?
7. Compare Hig’s character to Bangley. What are their attitudes toward the situation?
8. What is Hig’s perspective as he flies over the earth’s landscape? What style does Heller use when depicting the flying scenes? How is flying “life” for Hig?
9. What is Hig’s attitude toward fishing? What are the implications? How is his father connected to fishing? What role does this play for Hig?
10. What role does memory play in Hig’s apocalyptic world?
11. What psychological “escape” mechanisms does Hig pursue? Why?
12. How is nature depicted throughout the novel?
13. What is the relationship between Hig and his dog Jasper?
14. Discuss the introduction of the characters Pop and Cima in Book 3. How do they function within the story’s plot?

General Discussion:

1. What is a pandemic? What is its origin in the novel? How has it affected life on earth?
2. How has society’s infrastructure disintegrated because of the pandemic?
3. Define apocalyptic literature. What are some examples?
4. Discuss the moral implications of survival in a post-apocalyptic world.
5. What is Heller’s style throughout the novel? Discuss the language that Heller uses to convey the story. What effect and purpose do the various styles serve?

6. Discuss Heller's ability to evoke "catharsis" in his readers with the events surrounding the dog Jasper.
7. Why do you suppose Heller chose the title *The Dog Stars* for his novel?
8. Discuss the concept of "teamwork" in Hig's and Bangle's world.
9. What generates humor in chapter 5?
10. What are the philosophical reflections at the end of Book I?
11. Does Heller offer any possibility of "hope" within the novel?
12. Why does Heller imply that Arabs have survived the pandemic?
13. Discuss the implications of the Li Shang-Yin poem at the end of the novel in the context of the post-apocalyptic world of Hig.

AMY RULE – STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How significant are relationships between humans and pets? Can an animal friend fully substitute for human contact? What do animals provide or not provide that humans do?
2. Is it important to embrace less contemporary technologies such as CB radios, HAM radios, Morse code...as preparation for a possible event as detailed in the novel? What about books or even photographs? Are we depending too much on technology to "store" the items we may "need" in the event modern technology is inaccessible?
3. Is it better to remain in a comfort zone throughout life or to take a risk into the unknown?

**SHIRLEY MCBRIDE – QUESTIONS FOR BOOK-IN-COMMON PROJECT
2015 – 2016**

Title of the book: _____

Author _____

Copyright Date: _____

What is the author's web site? _____

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I, PAGES 3-48

1. Notice that the story is written in first person. Who is the speaker and main character?
2. As you read Chapter I, make a list of what the speaker reveals about himself and his situation.
 - a. For example, on the opening page, Hig says that he is sad. Why is he sad? What things have "left"?
 - b. What book in the Bible does Hig recommend? What is that book about?
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.
3. Comment on Heller's style in revealing his main character and his situation.
4. Who or what is the Beast? How is the Beast vital to Hig's survival?
5. Where do Hig and his "neighbor" Bangley live?
6. What are their "jobs"? How do their individual jobs complement each other and contribute to their survival?
7. What had killed almost everyone on earth?
8. How long has it been since this horrific event?
9. What is revealed about Hig's previous life before the event?
10. Summarize Hig's and Bangley's survivalist life style.
11. Who is Jasper?

12. Are you shocked to realize that part of their survival is to make sure that no one finds them, not even if the approaching individuals include a nine-year-old boy?

CHAPTER II, PAGES 49-51

13. What is revealed in this short chapter?

14. Who are the Mennonites?

CHAPTER III, PAGES 52-59

15. What is significant about the opening line in Chapter III? Why would someone in Hig's situation have "a need to tell"? What does Hig see as a benefit to telling his story?

16. Can you think of books that have been written by someone who lived through a tragic situation?

17. How important is fishing to Hig? In his life, what does fishing seem to symbolize?

CHAPTER IV, PAGES 60-89

18. Chapter IV reveals another survivalist skill. What is it? What foods does Hig grow?

19. In the beginning, how did Hig get the seeds for the crops he grows? In Hig's situation how important is it to have gardening skills? And seed-saving skills?

20. How does Hig store food so that the vegetables last all year? With whom does Hig share some of his garden's bounty?

21. What does Hig share about planting potatoes and staking beans? In previous generations, nearly all families grew a garden. Look up "victory gardens." Today home gardening is making a come-back. Do you know people today who raise a few vegetables in backyard gardens? What are some reasons for the gardening trend today?

22. What had happened to Hig's wife Melissa? What details are revealed in this chapter? What shocking detail is revealed?

23. Hig makes tea. What does he use?

24. What commodity is saved for treating cuts?

25. What details are revealed about Jasper?

26. Where does Hig get fuel for his plane?

27. What is the “monthly treat”? What detail is revealed about this treat? What happens when Hig stopped to get the treat? Does Hig kill the men?

CHAPTER V, PAGES 90-95

CHAPTER VI, PAGES 96-108

28. This chapter begins by describing Hig’s camping and fishing trip into the mountains. Jasper is with him. What details are included? Who always gets the first fish?

29. What details show how much Hig loves Jasper?

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I, PAGES 111-159

30. As Hig’s grief continues, what does he do on the third day since he lost his “heart”? What do you think Hig means by this expression? In what other touching ways does Hig show his grief?

31. Hig is pursued by nine men. How does he learn they are behind him?

32. Who and what rescues Hig from the men?

33. Hig visits the Mennonite families to drop off the cases of Sprite. What does a little girl do when she learns that Jasper has died?

CHAPTER II, PAGES 160-169

34. After Hig returns from the mountains with the deer, he leaves again on a plane trip. When this chapter opens, what does Hig see from the plane that gets his attention?

35. What figures does Hig see?

36. When the older figure sees Hig in his plane, what does he do? Why?

CHAPTER III, PAGES 170-184

CHAPTER IV, PAGES 185-236

37. The two new characters are introduced and developed. Who are they?

38. The couple feed Hig a meal. What foods do they serve him? What food has he not had in years that he obviously enjoys?

39. Hig learns that the couple have an ideal ranch where they have survived for many years. Why do they now want Hig to fly them out in his plane?

40. When they leave, which two animals does Cima want to take with them on the plane?

BOOK THREE:

CHAPTER I, PAGES 239-271 CHAPTER II, PAGES 272-300 CHAPTER III, PAGES 301-320

41. Hig's story with these two new characters continues. What events happen in Book Three? Do you see changes in Hig? What are they?

42. How does the novel end? How do you think it should end?

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- A. Is this the first "end-of-the-world" novel you have read? What did you like best about it? What did you like least? What survival realities are presented?
- B. What emotions are expressed, especially by Hig, in the novel?
- C. What skills help Hig and the others survive?
- D. What do you think were the hardest things that Hig and others had to cope with?
- E. Can you imagine you and your family living in Hig's situation? What would be the hardest things you and your family would have to deal with in a survival scenario?
- F. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Heller's writing style as he creates Hig?

RYAN FLETCHER — PETER HELLER'S *THE DOG STARS*: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you characterize Hig?
2. How is Hig similar and different to Bangley?
3. Why do you think the novel begins at an airport? Is it significant? Why?
4. What is one major theme in the novel? Why is it important to the story?
5. How does Hig's wife die? What does this scenario signify for the reader?
6. How would you describe Heller's writing style? Does it reflect some aspect of the story? Why?
7. What does the post-apocalyptic novel teach the reader about civilization and humanity?
8. Do you think Heller's interpretation of life after the pandemic is realistic? Why or why not?

MARTA MOORE – CONNECTING *THE DOG STARS* WITH YOUR STUDIES IN OTHER CLASSES

A good novel can stimulate our thinking about many topics. Below are prompts that you can use to write about how *The Dog Stars* connects with what you are studying in your other classes. Feel free to create another prompt in a subject that interests you.

- Graphic Design:
 - Respond to the book cover-- What makes it effective for selling the book? To what extent does it convey the content of the book?
 - What are the characteristics of the font? Why do you think this font was chosen? Is there a font that you would have chose instead?
- Nursing:
 - There are a number examples of nursing or care-giving in the novel. Which ones resonated with you? Why? What lessons for being an effective nurse can be learned from the novel?
 - What difference does the professional training that Cima had make in her ability to provide care, as compared to other characters?
 - What was the impact on the religious community of receiving care from Hig and Cima? What was the impact on other characters in the novel of the care-giving they received?
- Health sciences:
 - What does the public health crisis described in the book say to you about the need for health systems?
 - What should health systems do to prevent a catastrophic event like the one that set the context for the novel?
- Science
 - What are the dog stars? Why do you think the author referred to them in the book's title?
 - What chemistry made the age of the fuel for the plane an issue?
- Public Safety:
 - What do you observe in the novel about confrontations between parties when public order has broken down?
 - What does the world without police described in the novel say about the role of police in our society today?
 - How realistic are the descriptions of offensive and defensive uses of weapons?

- Early Childhood:
 - What principles of early childhood practice would apply in the post-crisis situation described in the book?
 - How could the encounters with children described in the book inform childcare professionals?
- Geospatial Information Systems (GIS):
 - *Dog Stars* is set in specific locations in Colorado. What insights might GIS bring to understanding the situations in the novel?
 - How could GIS have been used to counteract the spread of disease that is described in the novel?
- Political science:
 - What principles of social organization can be observed in the situations in which little government exists in the novel?
 - What could governments have done to prevent or mitigate the spread of disease discussed in the novel? Do you think that today's governments could do what would be required to stop a crisis like that in the novel?
- Geography:
 - How does the geography of the various locations in Colorado affect the actions of characters?
 - How does geography affect thoughts of the narrator?
- Psychology:
 - What role do pets play in the well-being of Hig? What is the impact on Hig of his dog's death?
 - How do people in the novel act differently in the post-crisis situation in the novel than they did in the "normal" lives that they lived previously?
 - How does being alone most of the time affect Hig's thought processes?
 - Describe the steps along the way in which Hig begins to desire and then find human relationships.
- Philosophy
 - Discuss a "big idea" the author explores in *The Dog Stars*.
- Creative Writing
 - Write a poem or short story that expresses feelings similar to those experienced by Hig.
 - Much of Hig's thoughts are about nature. Respond to an aspect of nature that you experience on a regular basis with a poem or descriptive essay.
 - What poems by other authors capture feelings similar to those expressed by Hig?
- History

- How does the pandemic described in *The Dog Stars* compare with the Influenza Pandemic of 1918?

RACHEL TUDOR – PROSPECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR THE BOOK IN COMMON

1. How are Native Americans depicted in the novel? Does this reinforce or challenge conventional depictions of Native Americans in American literature and popular culture?
2. This question requires outside reading. Compose a short comparison/contrast essay of the novel with the Native American apocalyptic novel *Bearheart* by Gerald Vizenor.
3. What is the social and cultural impact of the absence of a counter-narrative to the homophobic attitudes expressed in the text? Does an author have a responsibility for the social impact of his or her text on an audience?

LINDA SEARS – THE END TIMES: USING THE PROLOGUE OF BOCCACCIO'S *DECAMERON* AS A LITERARY PREDECESSOR TO PETER HELLER'S *THE DOG STARS*

When the end seems to be near, how have people responded? In the prologue to his *Decameron*, the late medieval Italian writer Boccaccio gives us an eye-witness account of what it was like to live in a time when the end must have seemed at hand. Throughout the late medieval period, the bubonic plague, also called the Black Death, ravaged Europe. Because they did not know the actual cause for the spread of this illness, the people did what they often do in times of uncertainty they tried to find answers that made sense of the insensible. Here is what Boccaccio tells us in just a few years after the plague hit his city of Florence in 1348:

. . . there made its appearance that deadly pestilence, which, whether disseminated by the influence of the celestial bodies, or sent upon us mortals by God in His just wrath by way of retribution for our iniquities, had had its origin some years before in the East, whence, after destroying an innumerable multitude of living beings, it had propagated itself without respite from place to place, and so, calamitously, had spread into the West.

From this quotation, we learn that the people did not know anything about the actual cause, which was primarily infected fleas biting host rats and then biting humans after the rat hosts had died. The discovery of bacterial infections was still many hundreds of years away, the invention of microscopes was several hundred years in the future, and even these microscopes would have been far too weak to see tiny bacterial cells. Given this lack of knowledge, the only facts Boccaccio does have are that the plague had come from the East and had killed multitudes of people. One must remember that Boccaccio would have been one of the more educated people of his time, giving us an accurate picture of what the most knowledgeable could comprehend at this point. The actual rate of death is difficult to determine; estimates are around a third of the population of Europe. Urban areas connected to trade routes were most hard hit since the rats traveled on ships and diseases of all kinds spread quicker in dense, closely

populated areas. In Tuscany, the Italian region where Florence is the capital, around 60% of the population succumbed in the cities (Sayre 199). One can imagine how it may have felt as if the end were coming when a third to a half of the population was sick, dead, or dying.

Perhaps most interesting about what Boccaccio writes are the two reasons he gives for the massive amounts of death and suffering: the wrath of God, who wishes to punish humanity for sinning, or the influence of the stars. From one perspective, humanity is at fault for sinning and so deserves its punishment. In the other, fate is the cause, and people are mere playthings of the stars, which, being distant and eternal, have no concern for them. Although God's just anger may have been frightening, how much worse was it to think there was no cause that human agency could change? Yet, to think God was punishing the wicked, most certainly could have led those who were spared to have looked upon the dead and dying as having earned their misery rather than viewing them as innocent victims who merited sympathy.

In either case, the effect was devastating, not only because of the losses of human lives, but for the emotional toll that the plague's presence took on people's feelings for one another. Boccaccio tells us that distrust ran through the populace:

Tedious were it to recount, how citizen avoided citizen, how among neighbors was scarce found any that shewed fellow-feeling for another, how kinsfolk held aloof, and never met, or but rarely; enough that this sore affliction entered so deep into the minds of men a women, that in the horror thereof brother was forsaken by brother nephew by uncle, brother by sister, and oftentimes husband by wife: nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children, untended, unvisited, to their fate, as if they had been strangers.

The ties that had hitherto bound people together were torn. The fear of getting the disease destroyed the natural sociability that had led to the city of Florence to flourish previously.

According to Boccaccio, responses among the populace not yet ill varied. Some believed it best to shun others and live in modesty so as to create a barrier between themselves and the suffering, "holding converse with none but one another, lest tidings of sickness or death should reach them, and diverting their minds with music and other such delights as they could devise." Perhaps, by living modestly, they thought God would spare them. Others believed it better to live life to the full, to gather in places indiscriminant of whether they had belonged to others or not. These people seemed to mock the misery around them, "resorting day and night, now to this tavern, now to that, drinking with an entire disregard of rule or measure, and by preference making the houses of others, as it were, their inns, if they but saw in them aught that was particularly to their taste or liking. . . ." Strangers invaded others' homes, and lawlessness was the result. The social order and rules of civilization that one should abide by to maintain peaceful co-existence were breaking down. Boccaccio tells us that the people who had kept the order in the past or had tended to the sick were themselves sick, dead, afraid to dispatch their duties, or had left.

Those who sought to escape the city, and had the resources to do so, went to their countryside villas like the ten young people that the rest of the Decameron follows. These, Boccaccio states, were "negligent of all but themselves" and so abandoned the city that had nourished them, viewing it as a God-forsaken place. They reverted to a simpler existence away from the clamor, the bustle, and the life of the city. In the countryside they created a little world apart that could, for a short time, hold the horror of death at bay. By telling stories, they escaped into imaginary lives until the plague burned itself out. Had the bubonic plague been even more virulent, like its variants the pneumonic and septicemic plagues, then much larger numbers of the urban populations would have succumbed, the loss of European civilization would have been the result, and the anarchic, sparsely populated world of Heller's novel become a reality.

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Sayre, Henry. *Discovering the Humanities*. 3rd ed. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. 2015. Print.

Questions to consider:

1. How are the responses of the people in Boccaccio's times like those of Heller's novel?
2. How would you respond to a pandemic of the nature that afflicted Florence?
3. Why might the people of Florence think they were being punished by God?
4. Why might they think that the stars were responsible?
5. Which response makes more sense to you and why?
6. How does Hig attempt to make sense of the world he is in? What about the other characters?
7. How does Hig escape from the reality he is thrust into?
8. When do you wish to escape from hard times?
9. How do you do so?
10. How does Hig create a sense of order in his world?

DEBRA ST. JOHN – POLITICAL SCIENCE QUESTIONS: *THE DOG STAR*

TERMS

survivalists	GPS	U.S. Forest Service
infrastructure	politics	Mennonites
Mormons	stereotyping	Auto-Immune Deficiency (AIDs)
political ideology	exigencies	epiphany
“reach across the aisle”		emergency frequency

BOOK ONE

1. What weapons do Hig and Bangley have? What do they view themselves as? What are the necessities to sustain their lives? What do you think the homeless need to survive? What conditions do they face on the streets?
2. What has happened to the country’s infrastructure? What is the current condition of the United States infrastructure? How does it compare to other industrialized nations? Has there been in legislation addressing our bridges, highways, communication grids, dams, or power plants? What problems could arise based on your finding regarding the infrastructure in the U.S. without funded remedy? What federal government department is charged with oversight?
3. Why did Hig say “we have no politics”? What are politics? What is the difference between politics and government?
4. Flags have been replaced with a red union suit, what happen to the flag? What is the proper protocol for the American flag? What does its reuse tell us about the situation?
5. Hig depends on his GPS when flying. Who originally developed the GPS? For what purpose?
6. What significance does Hig’s enjoyment of the television show “Life After People” has? Why are movies about the end of civilization are so popular?
7. As a society we are always concerned with the intake of too many calories. Why was the cooking oil important to the “druids”?

8. Hig recalls his first flight training. What did he like about it? Why? What has changed?

9. Many people had the "blood sickness." How were they treated by Hig and Bangley? When the AIDs epidemic began in the United States in the 1980s, what were the early opinions about those who had the virus? How did the Reagan government react in the beginning? What did the news media report about AIDs?

10. Hig would kill for Coke®. Why? What things (not beliefs) do we as a nation risk lives to protect in the Middle East and elsewhere? What non necessities do individuals commit crimes to obtain currently?

11. Throughout the book, Hig refers to many name brands. List all you can find (a minimum of 5). Why is branding such large part of America society? How does it impact our purchasing and the economy?

12. Bangley, uses the term "A-rabs", why does he phrase it in that manner? What is the first response many Americans have to the term? Why? It is justified?

13. According to Hig, what tears a nation apart? Why? Why does he talk of the error of connectedness? What is he referring to when he states "cracks in the union...over principle?" In what ways do the political ideology and political parties principles impact the success of the United States?

14. Why is it important to maintain memory? Why do we dread our loose of memory? What is Alzheimer's?

15. What does Hig say the equation multiplying the years and dividing by the desire to live is? Today, everyone worries about time (being on time, having enough time, having the "right" watch or way to measure time), why?

16. Why does Hig has so much grief over Jasper, yet can kill humans? How do we as a nation see people killed or dying everyday and grieve more over our pets? What does this say about us as a society?

BOOK TWO

1. A little girl who has the "bad blood", give Hig a flower, what is the significance? During the Viet Nam war so called "hippies" put flowers in the barrels of the national guards' rifles and wore them in their hair. What was the significance of those acts? Read "The Last Flower" by Henry Thurber, what is the lesson?
2. Hig recalls his conversation on a ski lift with a man whom advises him to follow the Bible word for word. How does Hig interpret his comments? Who shall inherit the earth? What did the man consider the "Right side" of the Bible? What does the statement "The left side was written by Jews" imply? Currently, many religious groups (evangelicals etc.) are associated with the "Right" politically and have implied those on the "Left" cannot be Christians. What does such statement do to our union? What does it say about the separation of church and state references in Art. IV of the Constitution and the First Amendment?
3. Hig declares he does not feel anything and is glad to be numb? Why? What does he say the difference between the living and the dead maybe? What does this tell us to value? What does it say about our material wants?
4. What does Hig's realization that someone else might be anxious for his approval, that they could be scared of him tell us about ourselves; our lack of willingness to reach out to others and accept them? The realization that we are all the same should have strong ramifications for society. How?
5. What are the concerns and benefits of being connected to others; to nature; to other nations?
6. How many sentences does it take Hig to sum-up his life? Can you give a summation of your life in seven sentences? Try.
7. At the dinner table, what does Hig consider to be a privilege? What does fellowship with others bring to our well-being. When the U.S. Congress uses the phrase "reach across the aisle" to reach with each other mean? What benefit could such a gesture possibly bring?

8. What were Hig and his wife waiting for according to Chapter IV of Book II? Politicians talk about the next election and what they will do; then often nothing changes. What are they waiting for? What can you as a citizen do to get our government to realize the "now" of life?
9. In 1955, scientists were developing atomic weapons and contemplating the various scenarios, what did the people of America fear? What does the reference to the "red phone" mean? What can unresolved misunderstanding produce? What are the foreign policy fears today? What is the role of the Department of State; The Department of Defense?
10. Hig had an epiphany regarding what the old man wanted from him. What is an epiphany? What is it's worth?

BOOK THREE

1. What did the old man consider Hig's patriotic duty?
2. Compare the theories of the origins of the "mass death" happened in the book and the theories of the origins of AIDs.
3. Describe what happened to the news media during the flu pandemic. How important is the news to our lives (well-being, knowledge, since of security, understanding of government actions)?

FINAL QUESTIONS

What has caused the end of human civilization in the novel? Why have the scattered survivors become so savage? Does the post-apocalyptic world Heller presents seem accurate and likely, given the state of the world today?

What does the novel imply about human nature, after the constraints of civilization have been removed? What does it suggest about the possible consequences of the way we are living now?

ONLINE RESOURCES

LIBRARY RESEARCH GUIDE

CREATED BY MINDY TOMLIN

<http://collin.libguides.com/sccbic1516>

ONLINE STUDY GUIDES

CONTRIBUTED BY BETTY BETTACCHI

<http://howtowriteshop.loridevoti.com/2012/12/creative-writing-prompts-for-the-end-of-the-world/>

CONTRIBUTED BY LISA KIRBY

http://www.deschuteslibrary.org/events/novelidea/2014/readers_guide.pdf

CONTRIBUTED BY HELEN MCCOURT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS COURTESY OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

(I found several online study guides with Discussion Questions that were this exact same set)

<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/219374/the-dog-stars-by-peter-heller/9780307950475/readers-guide/>

ONE The prose style of *The Dog Stars* is clipped, terse, often fragmented. Why would Heller choose this way of writing this particular story? In what ways is it fitting?

TWO At the beginning of chapter three, the narrator wonders why he's telling this story. What might be his motivations? Who does he imagine his audience will be?

THREE Hig says that Bangley “had been waiting for the End all his life.... He didn’t do anything that wasn’t aimed at surviving” [p. 71]. He also clearly enjoys killing people. In what ways is Hig different from Bangley? How did “the End” affect him? How does he feel about killing?

FOUR Jasper’s death is a turning point for Hig. How and why does it affect him so powerfully?

FIVE When Cima’s father asks Hig why he came to their canyon—why he flew beyond the point of no return— Hig can’t find an answer. What might have prompted Hig to take that risk? What was he looking for?

SIX Why is Hig’s relationship with Cima so important in the novel? What makes it particularly touching, given what each of them has suffered?

SEVEN *The Dog Stars* is a serious book about a devastating subject, but what are some of its more lighthearted moments? Why is it important that the book have this mixture of tenderness and violence, anxiety and peace?

EIGHT What has caused the end of human civilization in the novel? Why have the scattered survivors become so savage? Does the post-apocalyptic world Heller presents seem accurate and likely, given the state of the world today?

NINE How and why does Hig’s relationship with Bangley change over the course of the novel?

TEN When they decide to take a ewe and a ram with them on the plane, Hig says, “Like the Ark. Here we go” [p. 273]. He says it jokingly, but does the novel offer a sense of hope that life on the planet might continue, post-apocalypse? What other biblical references occur in the novel?

ELEVEN The novel’s ending is ambiguous. Cima, Hig, Bangley and Pops have formed a kind of family, the spruce and aspen are coming back, eagles and hawks are flourishing, but the trout and elk are gone, water is disappearing, and mysterious jets are flying overhead. What might happen next, or in the next ten years, for these characters and the world they live in?

TWELVE Why does Heller conclude *The Dog Stars* with Hig’s favorite poem “When Will I Be Home?” by Li Shang-Yin? Why is this a fitting way to end the story? In what ways is the novel about the longing for home?

THIRTEEN What does the novel imply about human nature, after the constraints of civilization have been removed? What does it suggest about the possible consequences of the way we are living now?

FOURTEEN What similarities does *The Dog Stars* share with other recent dystopian novels like *The Hunger Games* and *The Road*? In what important ways does it differ from them?

VIDEOS

CONTRIBUTED BY RYAN FLETCHER

YouTube Video of Peter Heller discussing his novel, *The Dog Stars*

"One Book One Broomfield- Peter Heller *The Dog Stars*"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VN01LPwCUcw>

CONTRIBUTED BY HELEN MCCOURT

Interview with Peter Heller – courtesy of Deschutes Public Library (length 8 minutes, 4 seconds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aICdyWDeek8>

Expanded presentation by author, Peter Heller – courtesy of Deschutes Public Library (length 58 minutes, 33 seconds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO5-vG1RVW4>