

Siddhartha: Study Guide

Basic Plot Questions (Samples)

The Brahmin's Son

- ★ Why does Siddhartha leave home?
- ★ Who accompanies him? Who does he leave behind?

With the Samanas

- ★ What do the Samanas seek to deprive themselves of, and what do they seek to eliminate?
- ★ Why are the Samanas “mistaken?”

Gotama

- ★ Why do Govinda and Siddhartha part ways?
- ★ Why doesn't Siddhartha stay with Gotama?

Awakening

- ★ What sort of epiphany does Siddhartha experience?

Kamala

- ★ What does Kamala represent?
- ★ What steps does Siddhartha take to win her affection? What do these changes indicate?
- ★ Why is it important that Siddhartha dreams about Govinda changing into a woman?

Amongst the People

- ★ What two “worlds” must Siddhartha inhabit during this phase of his life?
- ★ Why does Siddhartha believe he and Kamala cannot love one another?

Samsara

- ★ How is the samsara cycle evident in this chapter?
- ★ Why does Siddhartha treat so much of life as a game?
- ★ What “traps” Siddhartha?
- ★ What plot revelation lies at the end of the chapter?

By the River

- ★ Why doesn't Siddhartha commit suicide?
- ★ Can you describe his meeting with Govinda? What is special about Govinda's appearances?
- ★ How do Siddhartha's clothes reflect the changing circumstances of his existence?

The Ferryman

- ★ What has Vasudeva learned from the river, and how/why has he learned it?
- ★ How does Kamala die?

The Son

- ★ What are some differences between Vasudeva's and Siddhartha's approaches to caring for mini-Siddhartha?
- ★ Why does Siddhartha want to keep his son by the river?
- ★ What is the symbolic meaning of the abandoned oar?

Om

- ★ How does Siddhartha's view of other people – not the ones he's close to, but the general public – shift throughout the novel?
- ★ Do you understand the scene with the faces by the river?

Govinda

- ★ Who – what – does Siddhartha become by the end of the book?
- ★ What do we learn about knowledge – i.e., can all knowledge be taught?
- ★ How does Siddhartha advise the desperate Govinda?
- ★ What is Siddhartha's final gift?

Themes and Motifs

- ★ Love
- ★ Unity
- ★ Generational Divide
- ★ Peace
- ★ Suffering
- ★ Searching
- ★ Enlightenment / Knowledge
- ★ Cycles
- ★ Identity
- ★ Poverty / Wealth
- ★ Transformation / Transience
- ★ Teaching
- ★ Excess
- ★ Control
- ★ Compromise
- ★ Compassion
- ★ Cruelty
- ★ Consequences
- ★ Social Status
- ★ Relationships
- ★ Independence
- ★ Sleeping / Awakening (Rebirth)
- ★ Defiance
- ★ Superficiality

Characters

- ★ **Siddhartha**
 - ∞ *The main character in the story*
- ★ **Govinda**
 - ∞ *Siddhartha's childhood companion*
- ★ **Gotama**
 - ∞ *An individual who has achieved nirvana*
- ★ **Vasudeva**
 - ∞ *The ferryman who plays a bigger role near the end*
- ★ **Kamaswami**
 - ∞ *A merchant who teaches Siddhartha the principles of business*
- ★ **Kamala**
 - ∞ *The courtesan Siddhartha meets after leaving the Samanas*
- ★ **The Brahmin**
 - ∞ *Siddhartha's father; a member of the highest Hindu religious caste and a town leader*
- ★ **Siddhartha's Son**
 - ∞ *The boy Siddhartha conceives with Kamala and attempts to raise*

Concepts and Terms

- ★ **The Three Universal Truths**
 - ∞ *Anicca (impermanence)*
 - ∞ *Anatta (impersonality or non-self)*
 - ∞ *Dukkha (suffering)*
- ★ **The Four Noble Truths**
 - ∞ *Suffering exists*
 - ∞ *Suffering is caused by human desire*
 - ∞ *Suffering can be eliminated by eliminating desire*
 - ∞ *Eliminate desire by following the Eightfold Path*
- ★ **The Eightfold Path**
 - ∞ *Right View: Understand the Four Noble Truths*
 - ∞ *Right Aspiration: Care about all living things*
 - ∞ *Right Speech: Speak truthfully, kindly, respectfully, and properly (obscenity not allowed)*
 - ∞ *Right Bodily Action: Follow the Five (or Ten) Moral Precepts (Buddhist moral codes)*
 - ∞ *Right Livelihood: Your work shouldn't harm anything that lives*
 - ∞ *Right Endeavor/Effort: Concentrate on meditation; control unnecessary negative thoughts*
 - ∞ *Right Mindfulness: Give full attention to whatever you are doing as you are doing it, and give your best effort at all times*
 - ∞ *Right Concentration: The mental discipline necessary for reaching enlightenment*
- ★ **The Samsara Cycle**
 - ∞ Birth
 - ∞ Suffering
 - ∞ Death
 - ∞ Rebirth
- ★ **Various Buddhist/Hindu Terms**
 - ∞ Karma
 - ∞ Maya / Satyam
 - ∞ Om
 - ∞ Nirvana
 - ∞ Bodhisattva

Symbols

- ★ Water / The River
- ★ The Oar
- ★ Snakeskin
- ★ Birds (especially the songbird)
- ★ Forests / Trees
- ★ The Gaze
- ★ The Kiss
- ★ The Hut

Big Questions (Requiring Interpretation)

- ∞ What sort of cycles do you see in Siddhartha?
- ∞ What do the characters' names signify?
- ∞ What does the Buddha's life have to do with the book?
- ∞ In what ways is Siddhartha's journey similar to "walking the Eightfold Path"? In what ways is it different?
- ∞ What sort of patterns do you notice in Siddhartha's relationships with others?
- ∞ Can you break Siddhartha's path to enlightenment down, step by step?
- ∞ What does the novel have to say about the nature of human potential?
- ∞ What sorts of extremes – philosophically, socially, etc. – does Siddhartha "swing between?" What defines each stage of his life as he swings between them?
- ∞ How do you interpret the ending?
- ∞ Can you reach nirvana without experiencing life? Why/why not?
- ∞ Can we find spiritual enlightenment and wisdom over the course of a lifetime? How?