

2

Lesson Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Historical and cultural contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the heart of the novel. Studying these contexts and appreciating the intricate details of the time and place assist us in comprehending the motivations of the characters. In this lesson, use cultural and historical contexts to begin to explore the novel.

During the war, artists, writers, poets, philosophers, and musicians gathered in Paris. Hemingway's Europe hosted American expatriates pursuing inventive forms of expression, challenging traditions, and idealistically embracing a new century. Inevitably, these young thinkers would influence one another through friendship, collaboration, or antagonism.

The American poet Ezra Pound, changed Irish writer James Joyce's life by inviting him to come to Paris. Pound, as well as the American writer Gertrude Stein, would also become a mentor to Hemingway. Pound's work, like Hemingway, would be characterized by concise, clear language that rejected ornament.

Extending such minimalism, the Surrealist Movement came to life in Paris. Visual artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and René Magritte sought to free the human voice, by disposing with ideas crafted, revised, and carefully shaped through reason. In 1924, "The Surrealist Manifesto" claimed that automatic responses may hold more truth than statements filtered through layers of reason and revision. A culture, or the collective unconscious, might be revealed, so they thought, through "automatic responses."

Discussion Activities

Read and discuss Reader's Guide essay "Hemingway and the Lost Generation." Play the Surrealist game "exquisite corpse." Go to www.exquisitecorpse.com to see samples and learn to play.

Writing Exercise

Henry experiences remorse at neglecting to visit Abruzzi, the priest's hometown. He feels guilty about ignoring the priest's advice. This guilt reflects an internal conflict between following a religious path and following the path where "we did not do the things we wanted to do; we never did such things" (p. 13). Could Hemingway be foreshadowing the outcome of the novel? In which direction might Henry's life unfold? Write a few paragraphs about what you think might happen, based on this fork in the road.

Homework

Read Chapters VIII-XII (pp. 41-78). How does the main character's point of view emerge in Book One? At this point, is the narrator a hero? Why or why not?