

**UNIT
8**

**THE STRANGER BY ALBERT CAMUS – FROM THE
POINT OF VIEW OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
LITERATURE AND IDEAS/PHILOSOPHY**

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: STRUCTURE :
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8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall;

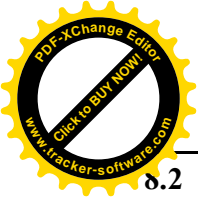
- discuss *The Stranger* written by Albert Camus,
- discuss the plot and characterization in *The Stranger*,
- get the idea of relationship between Literature and Ideas/philosophy and interpret *The Stranger* from that perspective.

On completing the unit, you will;

- get an idea about *The Stranger* as a novel,
- be able to know how to interpret a *The Stranger* from philosophical perspective,
- acquire knowledge of appreciating *The Stranger* with its relationship with ideas.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Stranger is a novel written by Albert Camus, published in French as L'Étranger in 1942. The novel discusses the universal predicament of human being i.e. our existence in the world. Camus considers *The Stranger* as a platform to explore absurdity, and interrogates the meaning of life of our existence. The central idea that Camus wishes to convey is that the significance of human life is only understood at the point of death. The novel communicates the fundamental philosophy that accurate perception of life is obtained only when a person faces possibility of death. Through literary medium, the novel correlates literature with philosophy.



8.2 THE STRANGER – AT A GLANCE

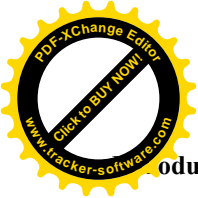
A literary piece of writing reflects the society and it gives voices to the ideas of an author. It has, to some extent, certain autobiographical incidences in it. The narrator of the novel, Meursault is depicted as indifferent to worldly affairs, including sorrows of mother's death and love of a woman. Camus considered the Absurd to be a fundamental and even defining characteristic of the modern human condition. The notion of revolt refers to both a path of resolved action and a state of mind.

8.2.1 About the Author :

Albert Camus (1913–1960) was born in French Algeria to a Pied-Noir family. *The Stranger* is written by Camus which narrates tragedy and suffering. His father had died in World War I. The growing bloodshed of World War II forced a questioning of life and its meaning. Camus witnessed ill-treatment of native Algerians during the French occupation of Algeria, which had begun in the first half of the 19th century and, after World War I, was opposed by a growing nationalist movement. This conflict can be visualized in Meursault's killing of 'the Arab' the only name he uses to refer to Raymond's mistress's brother. The murder has been read by some as a metaphor for the treatment of Algerian Muslims by the colonizing French. Camus published *The Stranger* at a time when Algerians were demanding political autonomy with increased forcefulness; although France did extend some rights during the 1940s, ongoing conflicts and failed French promises of more independence culminated in the outbreak of the Algerian War in 1954.

Albert Camus was a French–Algerian journalist, playwright, novelist, philosophical essayist, and Nobel laureate. Though he was not professional a philosopher, he made important contributions to a wide range of issues in moral philosophy in his novels, reviews, articles, essays, and speeches which include terrorism and political violence to suicide and the death penalty. He is often described as an existentialist writer, though he himself disavowed the label. He began his literary career as a political journalist and as an actor, director, and playwright in Algeria. His famous novels are *The Stranger* (1942), *The Rebel* (1951) and *The Plague* (1947.) In his works, he introduced and developed the twin philosophical ideas—the concept of the Absurd and the notion of Revolt—that made him famous. The Absurd can be defined as a metaphysical tension or opposition that results from the presence of human consciousness—with its ever–pressing demand for order and meaning in life—in an essentially meaningless and indifferent universe. It consists of an attitude of heroic defiance or resistance to whatever oppresses human beings. In awarding Camus its prize for literature in 1957, the Nobel Prize committee cited his persistent efforts to “illuminate the problem of the human conscience in our time.” He was honored by his own generation, and is still admired today, for being a writer of conscience and a champion of imaginative literature as a vehicle of philosophical insight and moral truth. He died in 1960.

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8.2.2 Plot of the Novel :

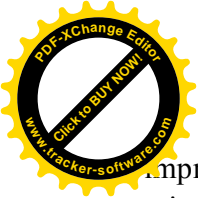
The narrator of the novel is Meursault, who is a young man living in Algiers. The novel begins with the receipt of a telegram informing death of Meursault's mother. He takes a bus to Marengo, where his mother had been living in an old persons' home. When he reaches there, he speaks to the director of the home. The director allows Meursault to see his mother, but Meursault finds that her body has already been sealed in the coffin. He declines the caretaker's offer to open the coffin.

Throughout the night, Meursault keeps watch over his mother's body. The talkative caretaker stays with him but Meursault does not like it much. Meursault smokes a cigarette, drinks coffee, and dozes off. The next day, before the funeral, he meets with the director again. Thomas Perez, an old man who had grown very close to Meursault mother, will be attending the funeral service. But Perez has difficulty keeping up and eventually faints from the heat. Meursault reports that he remembers little of the funeral. That night, he happily arrives back in Algiers.

Meursault goes to the public beach for a swim. There, he meets Marie Cardona, his former co-worker and they two make a date at the movie theatre. And spend the night together. Marie leaves Meursault before he wakes up in the morning. Meursault spends the whole day in the balcony watching people passing on the street. The next day is a Monday and Meursault returns to his routine work and has his lunch with his friend Emmanuel. At night near his apartment, Meursault meets Salamano, an old man who lives in his building and owns a mangy dog. Meursault also meets his neighbour, Raymond Sintes, who is widely rumored to be a pimp. Raymond invites Meursault over for dinner. After dinner, Raymond narrates how he beat up his mistress after he discovered that she had been cheating on him. Later, he got into a fight with her brother. Raymond wants to torment his mistress even more in revenge, but he needs Meursault to write a letter to lure his mistress back to him. Meursault agrees and writes the letter.

The next Saturday, Marie visits Meursault at his apartment. She asks Meursault if he loves her, and he replies in negative. At that time they hear shouting coming from Raymond's apartment and arrival of a policeman there. The policeman slaps Raymond and summoned him to the police station for beating up his mistress. Later, Raymond asks Meursault to testify on his behalf, and Meursault agrees. That night, Raymond runs into Salamano, who laments that his dog has run away.

On Marie's marriage proposal, Meursault replies indifferently but they become engaged. Meursault, Marie, and Raymond go to a beach house owned by Masson, one of Raymond's friends. They enjoy swimming at the beach and have lunch there. That afternoon, Masson, Raymond, and Meursault run into two Arabs on the beach, one of whom is the brother of Raymond's mistress. A fight breaks out and Raymond is stabbed. After tending to his wounds, Raymond returns to the beach with Meursault. They find the Arabs at a spring. Raymond considers shooting them with his gun, but Meursault talks him out of it and takes the gun away. Later, Meursault shoots Raymond's mistress's brother, for no apparent reason. Meursault is



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imprisoned. His lawyer is disgusted at Meursault's lack of remorse over the crime that he committed and also at Meursault's lack of grief at his mother's funeral. Later, the magistrate brandishes a crucifix and demands that Meursault put his faith in God. Meursault refuses saying that he is atheist. The magistrate dubs him "Monsieur Antichrist."

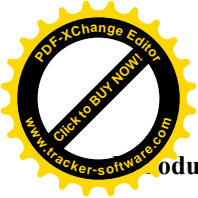
One day, Marie comes to see Meursault in prison. She is hopeful that Meursault will be acquitted and that they will get married. As he awaits his trial, Meursault slowly adapts to prison life. His isolation from nature, women, and cigarettes torments him at first, but he eventually adjusts to living without them. He manages to keep his mind occupied, and he sleeps for most of the time.

Meursault is taken to the courthouse full of Spectators and members of the press for Meursault's trial. The subject of the trial quickly shifts away from the murder to a general discussion of Meursault's character, and of his reaction to his mother's death in particular. Meursault is charged as a person lack of grief or tears. Marie confesses that the day after his mother's funeral she and Meursault went on a date and saw a comic movie. During his summation the following day, the prosecutor calls Meursault a monster and says that his lack of moral feeling threatens all of society. Meursault is found guilty and is sentenced to death by beheading.

There is a sudden change in the behavior of Meursault. He returns to prison to await his execution. He struggles to come to terms with his situation, and he has trouble accepting the certainty and inevitability of his fate. He imagines escaping and he dreams of filing a successful legal appeal. One day, the chaplain comes and urges Meursault to renounce his atheism and turn to God, but Meursault refuses. Meursault suddenly becomes enraged, grabs the chaplain, and begins shouting at him. He declares that he is correct in believing in a meaningless, purely physical world. For the first time, Meursault truly embraces the idea that human existence holds no greater meaning. He abandons all hope for the future and accepts the "gentle indifference of the world." Meursault's acceptance makes him happy.

SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE 1

1. What does Camus consider *The Stranger* is about ?
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2. In which field did Camus contribute ?
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3. When did Camus win Nobel Prize in literature ?
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4. Narrate the incidence of Meursault's journey to attend his mother's funeral in your own words.

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5. Describe in brief Raymond's encounter with the Arabs.

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6. Why does Meursault shoot the brother of Raymond's mistress ?

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SAY TRUE OR FALSE.

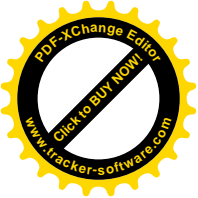
1. Originally, *The Stranger* is written in Spanish language.
2. Meursault marries Marie.
3. At the end, Meursault commits suicide.
4. Raymond is stabbed by an Arab.
5. Salamano laments that his dog has run away.

8.2.3 Characterization :

Literature is reflection of life and characters in any text portray vivid personalities with peculiarities in their character.

Meursault : In the novel, Meursault is a protagonist and narrator. The title of the novel – *The Stranger* – refers to him. Meursault is a detached figure, emotionally indifferent to others including to his mother and his lover, Marie. He does not have any emotional attachments with anyone including his mother and Marie. He does not care that his mother is dead, or that Marie loves him. He rejects the moral order of the society. He does not think of hiding his lack of feeling by shedding false tears over his mother's death. Because of this kind of attitude, the society considers him as an outsider, a threat, even a monster. He is put on trial as he kills a man, “the Arab,” for no apparent reason. Later on, the focus of Meursault's murder trial shifts away from the murder itself to Meursault's attitudes and beliefs. Meursault's atheism and his lack of outward grief at his mother's funeral represent a serious challenge to the morals of the society in which he lives. As a result, he is considered as an outsider.

But at a micro level, Meursault is neither moral nor immoral. He may rather, be considered as amoral—he simply does not make the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in his own mind. When Raymond asks him to write a letter that will help Raymond torment his mistress, Meursault agrees because he is indifferent to such matters. After his encounter with the chaplain, he concludes that the universe is, like



The Stranger by Albert Camus – from the point of view of Relationship between Literature and Ideas/philosophy

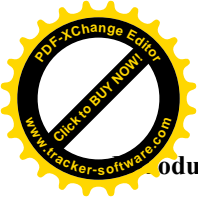
him, totally indifferent to human life. He decides that people's lives have no grand meaning or importance, and that their actions, their comings and goings, have no effect on the world. When Meursault accepts “the gentle indifference of the world,” he finds peace with himself and with the society around him. Through the character of Meursault Camus conveys the reality of human nature and condition.

Marie Cardona : In the novel, Marie is a former co-worker of Meursault whose affair with him starts immediately after the funeral of Meursault mother. Marie is young and high-spirited lady. She delights in swimming and the outdoors. Meursault's likes her because of her physical beauty. Marie delights in physical contact similar to Meursault. She enjoys the act of sex. However, unlike Meursault's physical affection for Marie, Marie's physical affection for Meursault signals a deeper sentimental and emotional attachment. Though Marie is disappointed when Meursault expresses his indifference toward love and marriage, she does not end the relationship or rethink her desire to marry him. There may be an element of pragmatism in Marie's decision to marry Meursault. When they are not together, Meursault does not take much interest in Marie, and so Marie enjoys a lot in this freedom of relationship. She tries to support and remain loyal to Meursault when he is arrested and put on trial.

In the context of Camus's absurdist philosophy, Marie's loyalty represents a mixed blessing, because her feelings of faith and hope prevent her from reaching the understanding that Meursault attains at the end of the novel. The author implies that Marie, lacking the deeper understanding of the universe that Meursault has attained, is less “enlightened” than Meursault.

Raymond Sintes : Raymond is a local pimp and Meursault's neighbour. He suspects that his mistress cheats him and so to punish her, he asks Meursault to help. There is a sharp contrast in character of Raymond and Meursault. Meursault is detached person whereas Raymond behaves with emotion and initiative. Additionally, whereas Meursault passively reacts to the events around him, Raymond initiates action. He is also violent, and beats his mistress as well as the two Arabs on the beach, one of whom is his mistress's brother. Raymond uses Meursault in his schemes. However, he helps Meursault during trial which shows his loyalty.

Raymond draws Meursault into conflict with ‘the Arab’ and eventually Meursault kills the Arab in cold blood. Raymond becomes the catalyst in Meursault's downfall as well as enlightenment. Raymond gives Meursault the gun that Meursault later uses to kill the Arab. The murder by Meursault and his subsequent trial bring about Meursault's realization of the indifference of the universe. A good deal of ambiguity exists in Raymond's relationship with Meursault. On the one hand, Raymond convinces Meursault to help him in his schemes to punish his mistress, and to testify on his behalf at the police station. On the other hand, Raymond seems to feel some loyalty toward Meursault. He asserts Meursault's innocence at the murder trial,



attributing the events leading up to the killing to “chance.” It can be said that Raymond begins his relationship with Meursault intending only to use him, and then, like Marie, becomes drawn to Meursault's peculiarities.

Meursault's Mother : Madame Meursault's death begins the action of the novel. Three years prior, Meursault sent her to an old persons' home. Meursault identifies with his mother and believes that she shared many of his attitudes about life, including a love of nature and the capacity to become accustomed to virtually any situation or occurrence. Meursault decides that, toward the end of her life, his mother must have embraced a meaningless universe and lived for the moment, just as he does.

The Chaplain : A priest who attends to the religious needs of condemned men, the chaplain acts as a catalyst for Meursault's psychological and philosophical development. The chaplain seems threatened by Meursault's stubborn atheism. Eventually, Meursault becomes enraged and angrily asserts that life is meaningless and that all men are condemned to die. This argument triggers Meursault's final acceptance of the meaninglessness of the universe.

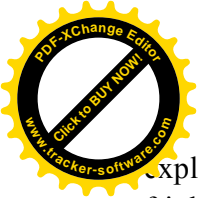
Salamano : One of Meursault's neighbors. Salamano owns an old dog that suffers from mange, and he frequently curses at and beats his pet. However, after Salamano loses his dog, he weeps and longs for its return. His strong grief over losing his dog contrasts with Meursault's indifference at losing his mother.

The Arab : The brother of Raymond's mistress. On the Sunday that Raymond, Meursault, and Marie spend at Masson's beach house, Meursault kills the Arab with Raymond's gun. The crime is apparently motiveless—the Arab has done nothing to Meursault. The Arab's mysteriousness as a character makes Meursault's crime all the more strange and difficult to understand.

8.2.4 Theme of the Novel :

Any literary text conveys some fundamental and universally accepted ideas. *The Stranger* conveys a strong resonance of Camus's philosophical notion of absurdity. In his works, Camus asserts that in general, individual lives and human existence have no rational meaning or order. But it is very difficult to accept this notion and so people constantly attempt to identify or create rational structure and meaning in their lives. The term ‘absurdity’ describes futile attempt of the humanity to find rational order where none exists. Neither the external world in which Meursault lives nor the internal world of his thoughts and attitudes possesses any rational order. Meursault has no discernable reason for his actions viz. to marry Marie and to kill the Arab.

Society nonetheless attempts to fabricate or impose rational explanations for Meursault's irrational actions. The trial sequence in Part Two of the novel represents society's attempt to manufacture rational order. The prosecutor and Meursault's lawyer both offer explanations for Meursault's crime that are based on logic, reason, and the concept of cause and effect. Yet these



Explanations have no basis in fact and serve only as attempts to defuse the frightening idea that the universe is irrational. The entire trial is therefore an example of absurdity—an instance of humankind's futile attempt to impose rationality on an irrational universe.

The novel conveys ‘Meaninglessness of Human Life’. Camus argues that the only certain thing in life is the inevitability of death, and because all humans will eventually meet death, all lives are all equally meaningless. Meursault gradually moves toward this realization throughout the novel, but he does not fully grasp it until after his argument with the chaplain in the final chapter. Meursault realizes that, just as he is indifferent to much of the universe, so is the universe indifferent to him. Like all people, Meursault has been born, will die, and will have no further importance. Only after Meursault reaches this seemingly dismal realization is he able to attain happiness.

The Stranger shows Meursault to be interested far more in the physical aspects of the world around him than in its social or emotional aspects. This focus on the sensate world results from the novel's assertion that there exists no higher meaning or order to human life. Throughout *The Stranger*, Meursault's attention centers on his own body, on his physical relationship with Marie, on the weather, and on other physical elements of his surroundings. For example, the heat during the funeral procession causes Meursault far more pain than the thought of burying his mother. The sun on the beach torments Meursault, and during his trial Meursault even identifies his suffering under the sun as the reason he killed the Arab.

The Stranger by Albert Camus – from the point of view of Relationship between Literature and Ideas/philosophy

SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE 2

1. “Meursault is a detached personality, indifferent to happy and sad events of life.” – Justify this statement in the light of character of Meursault.

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2. Describe the relationship between Marie Cardona and Meursault.

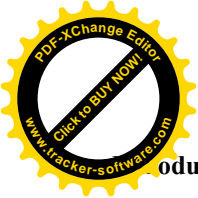
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3. How does Raymond use Meursault in schemes ?

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4. Narrate Salamano's attachment with the dog.

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5. Write a detailed note on major themes of the novel.

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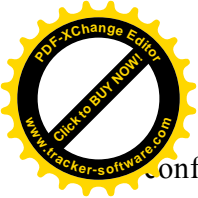
FILL IN THE BLANKS.

1. Meursault sent his mother to _____ before three years of her death.
2. Meursault interested far more in the _____ of the world around him than in its social or emotional aspects.
3. Meursault killed _____ .
4. _____ acts as a catalyst for Meursault's psychological and philosophical development. the chaplain.

8.3 THE STRANGER : LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

In *The Stranger*, Camus has applied American style of writing. Simple, short and precise sentences, depiction of characters ostensibly without consciousness. Camus is a philosophical writer in the sense that he has (a) conceived his own distinctive and original world-view and (b) sought to convey that view mainly through images, fictional characters and events, and via dramatic presentation rather than through critical analysis and direct discourse. He is also both a novelist of ideas and a psychological novelist. Though he was baptized, raised, and educated as a Catholic, Camus seems to have been a natural-born pagan who showed almost no instinct whatsoever for belief in the supernatural. Even as a youth, he was more of a sun-worshipper and nature lover than has piety or religious faith.

In existentialism, it is widely viewed that life starts without any specific reason, and is lived through with lack of energy and desire, and ends by chance. It is defined as irrational, meaningless and absurd. Immediate perception of life seems different but ultimate stance of life is similar to each other in terms of lack of energy and desire. Moreover, existentialism claims itself to be superior on basis of human freedom characterized by freedom of choice and moral responsibility of deeds, and thus it liberates human life from determinism. Apparently the existentialists tend to enjoy absolute freedom independent of any external influence, and they even feel that psychologically but in practice we see that they are controlled by their sense of sincerity and autonomous quality. It can be observed here that the rationality and legitimacy of human will depends on taking moral responsibility of an action. It means, to the existentialists, freedom, a manifestation of psychological quality, functions as the sole principle of moral values guided by personal sincerity and autonomy. But if freedom includes the concepts like “personal sincerity” and “autonomy,” defined through social essences, it becomes no longer uncurbed exercise of human will rather it works like an illusion of freedom under a kind of self-imposed regulations. Albert Camus, despite being an existentialist, does not want to define life as such rather he takes life as it is which must be lived through, suffered, defied yet cannot be explained adequately. Meursault, the protagonist reflects



Conflicts in terms of his existence and essence of society. Though he apparently seems to be psychologically free, he cannot wield his freedom under social realities. Moreover, through his trial the novelist implies that social essence stands against individual freedom and feelings. The judicial system appears to be fake and biased where justice as a the system is a sarcasm and not interested in the murder he committed; rather the system is considering him as a threat based on some peculiar traits. His non-conformity to the current codes has been the real cause behind his execution, and it takes to another point that legal system is not here to judge right and wrong, rather to ensure conformity and to nail peculiarity with the best possible steps.

The Stranger by Albert Camus – from the point of view of Relationship between Literature and Ideas/philosophy

SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE 3

1. Explain the following : A. Existentialism B. Absurd

2. Discuss the major philosophical ideas are explored in *The Stranger*.

3. On the basis of *The Stranger*, write in your own words about relationship between literature and philosophy.

SAY TRUE OR FALSE.

- a. Camus was an atheist.
- b. In existentialist philosophy, it is widely viewed that life starts without any specific reason.

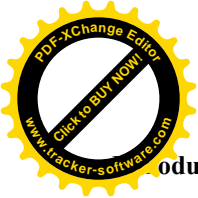
8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt;
 he life and work of Albert Camus,
 detailed study of the novel *The Stranger*,
 relationship between philosophy and ideas with reference to *The Stranger*.

8.5 KEY WORDS

Novel : it is a fictitious prose narrative of book length, typically representing character and action with some degree of realism.

Existentialism : is a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of will.



Absurdism : the belief that human being exists in a purposeless, chaotic universe.

Pagan : a non –Christian

8.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Camus, Albert | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://www.iep.utm.edu/camus/> 1/19

<http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2023%20Issue1/Version-10/E2301103034.pdf>

https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1093&context=utk_chanhonoproj

<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/stranger/>

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/49552.The_Stranger

ANSWERS

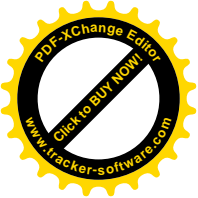
Self-Evaluation Exercise 1

1. Camus considers *The Stranger* as a platform to explore absurdity, and interrogates the meaning of life of our existence.
2. In which field did Camus contributed a wide range of issues in moral philosophy in his novels, reviews, articles, essays, and speeches which include terrorism and political violence to suicide and the death penalty
3. Camus won Nobel Prize in literature in the year 1957.
4. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words. A sample is given here.)

Meursault receives a telegram of death of his mother. He takes a bus to Marengo, where his mother had been living in an old persons' home. When he reaches there, he speaks to the director of the home. The director allows Meursault to see his mother, but Meursault finds that her body has already been sealed in the coffin. He declines the caretaker's offer to open the coffin.

5. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words. A sample is given here.) That afternoon, Masson, Raymond, and Meursault run into two Arabs on the beach, one of whom is the brother of Raymond's mistress. A fight breaks out and Raymond is stabbed. After tending to his wounds, Raymond returns to the beach with Meursault. They find the Arabs at a spring. Raymond considers shooting them with his gun, but Meursault talks him out of it and takes the gun away. Later, however, Meursault returns to the spring to cool off, and, for no apparent reason, he shoots Raymond's mistress's brother.
6. Meursault shoots the brother of Raymond's mistress because he stabbed Raymond.
7. Say true or false.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. false | 2. false | 3. false |
| 4. true | 5. true | |



SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE 2

The Stranger by Albert Camus – from the point of view of Relationship between Literature and Ideas/philosophy

1. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words. A sample is given here.) The protagonist and narrator of *The Stranger*, to whom the novel's title refers. Meursault is a detached figure who views and describes much of what occurs around him from a removed position. He is emotionally indifferent to others, even to his mother and his lover, Marie. He also refuses to adhere to the accepted moral order of society. After Meursault kills a man, “the Arab,” for no apparent reason, he is put on trial. However, the focus of Meursault's murder trial quickly shifts away from the murder itself to Meursault's attitudes and beliefs. Meursault's atheism and his lack of outward grief at his mother's funeral represent a serious challenge to the morals of the society in which he lives. Consequently, society brands him an outsider.
2. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words. A sample is given here.) A former co-worker of Meursault who begins an affair with him the day after his mother's funeral. Marie is young and high-spirited, and delights in swimming and the outdoors. Meursault's interest in Marie seems primarily the result of her physical beauty. Marie does not seem to understand Meursault, but she feels drawn to Meursault's peculiarities nevertheless. Even when Meursault expresses indifference toward marrying her.
3. Raymond uses Meursault in beating his mistress and in fight with his mistress' brother.
4. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words.)
5. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words.)
6. Fill in the blanks.
 1. old persons' home.
 2. physical
 3. an Arab
 4. the chaplain.

SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE 3

1. Explain these Terms : A. Existentialism B. Absurd (Students are required to read the concept and elaborate in detail in their own words.)
2. Discuss the major philosophical ideas explored in *The Stranger*. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words.)
3. On the basis of *The Stranger*, write in your own words relationship between literature and philosophy. (Students are required to read the novel and elaborate in detail in their own words.)
4. Say true or false.
 - a. true
 - b. true

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