

The Man in the High Castle

A Study Guide



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Introductory Materials — *Why teach The Man in the High Castle?*

Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* rose to new prominence when an Amazon Prime original series was adapted from it and as concern about social cohesion, illiberalism, and authoritarianism has regained salience.

The counterfactual 1962 presented by Philip K. Dick encourages us to think about how much we know for sure about how history turned out or would have turned out. The constant (inaccurate) guesses by characters about what the world would look like if the Allies had won the war and the occasional defence of the Axis victory in the book can inspire students to think harder about the wars of our past and present and to take more thoughtful positions on them.

As identity politics have become more important in North American politics, teachers may find an exaggerated case of racism, such as the one presented in *The Man in the High Castle*, to be a useful tool for enabling students to talk frankly about these issues, and this guide provides resources to help encourage just that.

While Liberal Studies Guides encourages Socratic discussion and collaborative learning as regular practice, the unconventional and ambiguous ending of *The Man in the High Castle* creates a perfect opportunity to encourage collaborative learning in your classroom. Reading the final pages aloud and encouraging students to decide among and for themselves what they think the book means can encourage respectful discussion, self-directed and peer-supported learning, and deeper thought about what authors try to accomplish when they write a book.

Curriculum Connections

- Intermediate/Senior Level English
- Intermediate/Senior Level History
- Senior Level Canadian & International Law
- Senior Level Challenge & Change in Society
- Senior Level Canadian & World Issues

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Reading the Book

We suggest exploring this text through **discussion based inquiry**. A few guidelines:

- Students will read the books and prepare their own questions, or explore the reading beginning with questions introduced for the class.
- Possible points for discussion are outlined in the chapter breakdown below, but students should guide the discussion during Socratic seminars.
- Students should be marked on participation in the discussion, respect for differing opinions, and evidence that they've read the book.
- If using Socratic seminars, periodic journals on class discussions should be kept by students for evaluation.
- Teaching material for the classes leading up to Socratic seminars and in line with the points for discussion outlined below follows the chapter-by-chapter breakdown. (Bookmark links will take you between the chapter breakdown and the suggested lessons.)
- As the material in this study guide is based on student-led discussion questions, it may be necessary to experiment with different formats for the discussions. Literature Circles can work quite well, for example. Also worth considering: timed debates, Think/Pair/Share, Word Walls or role playing.

Chapters 1 – 3

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think old American cultural objects are valuable, if Americans are of such a low class?
- What do you think of The Oracle (I Ching)? What do you think its use symbolizes about the culture depicted in the novel?
- What do you think are Mr. Childan's attitudes toward himself, his race, Japanese people, and Nazis?
- Do you think that Mr. Tagomi's beliefs are in line with what Mr. Childan believes Japanese people think about him?
- Why do you think some people have moved into the mountains, while others have stayed near the coast?
- Do you think people are more or less equal in the mountains? More or less prejudiced? Why?
- What do you think Mr. Bayes thinks of his gift from Mr. Tagomi?

Passages for Socratic Discussion

Chapter 2: “And then, too, he might see a slave... never have place of any sort again, among those who saw.”

Chapter 2: “In a way, Childan thought, I would almost enjoy carrying my own bags... One had to blame the Germans for the situation.”

Chapter 2: “But Africa. They had simply let their enthusiasm get the better of them... it's the dream that stirs one.”

Chapter 3: “Miss Davis said, ‘Did they hurt you much?’... someone else was approaching it with a towel over her arm.”

Chapter 3: “She said to the younger of the truck drivers, ‘Where are you in from?’... He brought the fork out and held it.”

Chapter 3: “Watching him, Juliana thought, It's idealism that makes him bitter... Brrr. She shook herself.”

Exercises

Changes in language over time:

Share with your students the **English-to-English Translation Sheet** (available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) to discuss the way that language changes over time.

- Do you think the way that English has changed in *The Man in the High Castle* as a result of the Japanese influence is believable?
- If so, what about the changes make them believable?
- If not, why don't you believe it?
- Why don't you think more German has been incorporated into how English is spoken?
- What would be different in the United States in *The Man in the High Castle* compared to the United States today in terms of the changes in language?

Dealing with discrimination:

If your class has access to a computer lab, or your students are able to access computers reliably, share the game **The Cat in The Hijab** (linked at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with them and ask them to play it.

- What did playing *The Cat in The Hijab* teach you about what it is like to have a visible marker that makes you different?
- How do you think this is similar to the people of different races in *The Man in the High Castle*?
- Can you think of examples in *The Man in the High Castle* of people trying to change how they look to avoid discrimination?
- How do you think discrimination is different if it's for something you can't see?

Chapters 4 – 6

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think counterfeit items become a problem? Do you think they can be stopped?
- Do you think Frank Frink has lost faith in himself, or do you think there's another reason he's reluctant to go into business on his own?
- What do you think of the moving-line hexagram that foretells of both success and terrible calamity?
- What do you think of the fact that Mr. Childan is able to have the gun verified as a fake so quickly?
- Why do you think Juliana can get along so well with Joe, even though he was on the other side of the war?
- Why do you think Joe is so fascinated with *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*?
- What does the Japanese briefing about likely new German leaders reveal about their attitude toward the Nazis?

Passages for Socratic Discussion

Chapter 4: “Did you ever think of going into business on your own?” Frink, taken by surprise... kept their attention on the mere technical problems.”

Chapter 4: “Childan picked up the gun and stood... ‘Tell no one. This is absolutely confidential.’”

Chapter 5: “When he hung up he realized, with a start, that Rita had come out... He picked up the lighter with the long scratch along its side.”

Chapter 5: “At the bookcase she knelt. ‘Did you read this?’... ‘Even if there had been no Pearl Harbor.’”

Chapter 5: “When Mr. Tagomi returned – carrying a glass... ‘So I can hardly speak for Germany.’”

Chapter 6: “The new *Life*, she saw, had a big article called, *Television in Europe*... the little dried up old man who ran the drugstore asked.”

Chapter 6: “‘Would you tell me about it?’ Juliana asked, as he returned... The little empire in the Middle East... the musical-comedy *New Rome*.”

Chapter 6: “‘They’re just babbling,’ she said... His enigmatic grimace chilled her.”

Exercises

The Jews in Shanghai and the Japanese in China

Mr. Tagomi mentions the Japanese receiving an order from the Germans during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai to exterminate the Jews there. There was a large Jewish population in Shanghai during World War II, and the Japanese, while they put them into a camp, did not kill them. Share with your students the resources on the Jews in Shanghai and the Japanese in China available at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca.

- What did the treatment of the Jews in Shanghai by the Japanese and the actions of the Japanese Vice Consul in Lithuania tell us about the Japanese officials in the war?
- What does the Shanghai Nazi Party leader's reaction to the treatment of the Chinese by the Japanese in Nanjing tell us about the Germans in the war?
- What are the parallels between the two cases?

A new Fuhrer!

Based on the Japanese briefing, which German politician do you think...

- The Japanese should hope takes control of the German Empire?
- The Americans should hope takes control of the German Empire?
- If your answers are the same, do you think that they are the same because the Japanese and the Americans are natural allies, or is it just a coincidence? Why?
- If your answers are different, what do you think makes you think that their interests are not the same?

Chapters 7 – 9

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think Mr. Childan has such trouble getting along with Paul at supper?
- Why do you think the Kasouras are so much more appreciative of American culture than Mr. Childan?
- Do you think Mr. Childan becomes angrier as the Kasouras express more appreciation for American culture? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What is Abwehr?
- What do you think of the German Consul's attitude toward the German government? What do you think it reveals about German governance?
- Can you make any comparisons between the Japanese attitude toward their government and the German attitude?
- What do you think of Reiss' musing that the trial and death of Hitler was grander than their victory?
- What do you think a trip away with Joe symbolizes for Juliana?
- Do you think Childan is interested in the Edfrank Jewelry because he liked it, or because he thinks his customers will? Or do you think it's something else?

Passages for Socratic Discussion

Chapter 7: "‘I would like to know,’ Robert said, ‘what he supposes.’ ... I kept the proper expression. He could not properly tell."

Chapter 7: "‘Robert,’ Paul said, ‘since you were born and raised here...’ He ate with more enjoyment."

Chapter 8: "How that man can write, he thought. Completely carried me away... But this book, Reiss thought, is dangerous."

Chapter 9: "His account simply did not convince her. Perhaps he had not been in North Africa at all... He said nothing. He merely went on reading."

Chapter 9: "I wonder if it will sell, he wondered. Very unlikely... Even more airtight!"

Exercises

Novels about alternative presents:

Paul and Betty describe *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* as a novel that deals with an alternate present. *The Man in the High Castle* is set in the same year that it came out, so it was also a novel dealing with an alternate present.

- Do you think that Philip K. Dick saw things in the real world of 1962 worth criticizing?
- In groups, look up things that were going on in 1962 that might mirror some of the things happening in the book.
- Choose one comparison and explain how you think Philip K. Dick comments on it through his novel.

Banned books, banned ideas:

Share with your students the resources on banned books available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca.

- Do you think that banning books is an effective way of suppressing ideas?
- Do you think that books can be banned if the ideas in them are popular?
- Do you think that books can be subversive?
- Do you think that speech, art, or music can be subversive?

Share with your students the statement, **Free Inquiry on Campus: A Statement of Principles by Over One Hundred Middlebury College Professors** (available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) or, as an alternative, the University of Chicago's **Statement on Principles of Free Expression**.

- Do you think the professors are right that the only way to fight wrong ideas is to allow them to be expressed?
- Do you think that free speech and open debate would be a better or worse way for the Nazis to fight the ideas in *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*?
- How do you judge what makes something “better” or “worse”?
- Why do you think it's better or worse than banning the book?

Chapters 10 – 12

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think the Abwehr is operating separately and opposed to the SD (Sicherheitsdienst)? (If your students don't know what these terms mean, have them work together to figure it out and answer this question.)
- Why do you think the world in *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* has TVs even for poor people in Africa? What is different in the world in the book?
- What more do we learn about the factions within the German government in this chapter?
- What change happens to Mr. Childan in his conversation with Paul?
- What does the revelation of Operation Dandelion mean for the world in the book?

Passages for Socratic Discussion

Chapter 10: “I must take action. I can wait no longer... At least he had done something, at last. What a relief!”

Chapter 10: “Presently, Joe said, ‘In some ways it’s not a bad book.’ ... She couldn’t answer. It was too funny.”

Chapter 11: “An unfamiliar voice said, ‘Consul, this is the Ausland Fernsprechamt at Nova Scotia... ‘Wants to know if you can give them scenic posters of Austria for their class.’”

Chapter 11: “Paul opened the box, brought out the pin and began inspecting it... But Childan’s; ah, that regrettably had the earmark of being unending.”

Chapter 11: “Bowling, Childan said, ‘I will follow your advice.’ ... ‘All right,’ Robert Childan said. They shook hands.”

Chapter 12: “He wondered in this instance if the oracle would be of any use... We can only wait, hoping that finally he will recover and not succumb.

Exercises

The inevitability of war?

Share with your students the TED talk or transcript, **Steven Pinker – The Surprising Decline in Violence** (available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca). Think about what Joe said about the inevitability of war 100 years after the end of World War II.

- Who do you think is right, Joe or Steven Pinker?
- Do you believe that war has declined? If so, does this make future war more or less likely, or does it have no effect?
- If you believe war has declined, what do you think has changed compared to the past? If you do not, explain why you think the explanations for the decline of violence that some people offer are wrong.
- Do you think Steven Pinker can offer any insight into why Germany might be ready to go to war again with Japan in *The Man in the High Castle*? If so, what do you think the insight is? If not, what do you think is the real reason?

How does the world change?

Share with your students the worksheet on social change (available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca).

- What do you think of Joe's explanation of "the theory of action" under fascism? Do you think that's how things change?
- How does it compare to the other methods of social change in the handout?
- What do you think is the best way for characters unhappy with the world in *The Man in the High Castle* to change it?

Chapters 13 – 15

Discussion questions:

- Do you think Juliana and Frank are still in love? If so, why do you think they've separated?
- Do you think Juliana could have done something other than kill Joe?
- Do you think Juliana had a chance to stop the assassination attempt on Abendsen? Do you think she succeeded?
- What does the gun represent to Mr. Tagomi? Do you think he can really free himself of it?
- Has Mr. Childan's attitude changed? If so, how?
- What do you think it says that the American-made art can touch the Japanese characters so deeply? Is it something you think they would have expected earlier in the story?
- Mr. Tagomi experiences a hostile reaction when he visits a diner. Do you think he deserves this reaction based on his behaviour toward Americans? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Mr. Tagomi refuses to turn over Frank Fink to the Nazis?
- Do you think Wegener will succeed in fighting Operation Dandelion?

Passages for Socratic Discussion

Chapter 13: "As they searched for a good hotel, Juliana kept glancing at the man beside her... Frank, she thought. Help me. I'm in something I don't understand."

Chapter 13: "Presently, Joe said, 'In some ways it's not a bad book... She couldn't answer. It was too funny.'"

Chapter 14: "In any case the war, Operation Dandelion, will sweep us all away... Destiny. I must keep this thing."

Chapter 14: "'Sir,' Childan said, 'allow me to show you what has come in.' ... Black beneath, bright and light-filled above. 'Thank you,' Mr. Tagomi said."

Chapter 14: "Mad dream, Mr. Tagomi thought. Must wake up... The doors swung together behind him; he stood once more on the sidewalk."

Exercises

Mental health resource:

Both Juliana and Mr. Tagomi suffer traumatic experiences culminating in their killing Nazi agents. This is a valuable opportunity to discuss mental health with your students if you choose. Resources on trauma and panic attacks are available at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca.

Can you punch a Nazi?

Both Juliana and Mr. Tagomi kill Nazi agents.

- Do you think that Juliana and Mr. Tagomi were in danger for their lives when they killed the SD agents and Joe?
- Do you think that Juliana did the right thing? Why or why not?
- Do you think that Mr. Tagomi did the right thing? Why or why not?

On the day of President Donald Trump's Inauguration, Richard Spencer, a white nationalist who led his supporters in a Nazi salute while supporting President Trump's victory, was punched in the face on camera. This kicked off a debate: "Can you punch a Nazi?"

Choose a resource to share from **Can you punch a Nazi?** at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca to share with your class. (Richard Spencer denies he is a Nazi, a term he considers particular to the 20th century. For simplicity's sake, we recommend having a class discussion that assumes that they are considering someone who is definitely a Nazi, like Joe or the SD agents.)

- Do you think it's OK to punch a Nazi? If so, when, and why? If not, give your argument for not punching them.

Bring again to your class' attention the statement by Middlebury College Professors on free speech and the worksheet on social change.

- Do you think that free speech can be an alternative to punching Nazis? Why or why not?
- What are some other alternatives to violence?
- Do you think that the characters in *The Man in the High Castle* can oppose the Nazis with free speech? Why or why not?
- Do the characters in *The Man in The High Castle* have any alternatives to violence? Explain why or why not.

Cumulative Exercises

Dealing with the ending through collaborative discussion:

The end of this book is ambiguous and may be confusing. Read the following excerpt from chapter 15 aloud in your class and ask the students to discuss what they think Juliana's revelation means.

Chapter 15: “In your book,’ Juliana said, ‘you showed that there’s a way out...’ ‘Believe,’ Juliana said. He shook his head no. ‘Can’t you?’ she said. ‘Are you sure?’”

Final assignment/essay questions:

1. Do you think that it's likely that our ideas of race could expand to become as important in our lives as they are in *The Man in the High Castle* after a war, or do you believe that the idea of racial equality is something that naturally advances?

To support your argument, refer to passages in the text that you believe show why Philip K. Dick thought race would become so important and explain why you believe they are right or wrong.

2. What do you think of the end of the book? What does it mean to say that the Axis lost the war in the world of *The Man in the High Castle*? Do you think that Juliana and *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* are right that the Axis lost the war?

To support your argument, refer to passages in the book that you believe show why the Axis powers are still winning or why they ultimately lost.

3. Why do you think that none of the things that people imagine would be different if the Allies had won the war in the book are true in the real world? What do you think Philip K. Dick is illustrating with these stories?

To support your argument, use at least two of the imagined scenarios from the book and research what really happened that was different.

4. The alternative reality of 1962 is meant to make people think harder about how we know when “the good guys” win a war. Write an essay on how and if we can know if the good guys won a war, drawing on examples from *The Man in the High Castle* and real history.

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Liberal Studies Guides help teachers engage their students when discussing literature through study guides and cross-curricular resources made freely available for classroom use. We also offer free workshops on using the Socratic method with secondary students of all levels.

Our study guides break down novels into lessons with ideas for discussion, exercises, and assignments. We tie our guides together with additional resources on our website, LiberalStudiesGuides.ca, including ready-to-use worksheets, to encourage the discussion of current events, history, music, philosophy, and economics to help tie the lessons to the real world.

Although our guides are aimed at English classrooms, the supplementary resources may be useful for history, music, drama, communications studies, economics, philosophy, and social studies.

Liberal Studies Guides is a project of the Institute for Liberal Studies, a non-partisan educational charity. We believe that encouraging discussion in the classroom helps to better equip students to discuss the problems facing Canadian society.



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