

## The Stranger Background Notes - Albert Camus

- Novel shows absurdity of human condition
- Born 1913 in French Colonial Algeria
- Albert raised money so he could go to college but dropped out due to tuberculosis
- Became political journalist – wrote about World War II for anti-German resistance movement
- Developed his **absurdity theory**
  - Life has no rational meaning – cannot resort to religion, faith or a school of thought to find a higher meaning of our existence. The only certainty is that man will die, however he should not commit suicide.
  - One should not despair but rather embrace the absurdity of life and live to the utmost.
    - By giving up the idea of hope for a better future, one can experience joy without expectations and do not have to follow rules.
  - He wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus*, about Sisyphus, a character in Greek mythology who defied the gods by putting death in chains and planning an escape from the underworld after death, so he was punished for eternity to push a rock up a mountain that would fall so he would have to repeat the task over and over again. Camus saw a metaphor for modern life through this myth. – *The Stranger* is a fictional version of this myth.
  - Camus found figures that embraced the absurdity of life
    - Don Juan – serial seducer – lived for one passionate experience after another and enjoyed the moment
    - The actor – depicts one life after another with no illusions of fame or that the character will last forever.
    - Conquerors – choose action over contemplation
  - Camus applied his philosophy to Mersault, a character that thinks very differently from everyone else including reacting to his mother's death in a matter of fact way. He is also tried for not responding with correct human emotions. Society wants to condemn him.