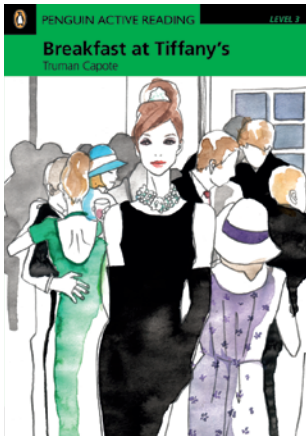




# Breakfast at Tiffany's

Truman Capote



## About the author

Truman Steckfus Persons was born in New Orleans in 1924. He changed his name to Truman Capote when his mother re-married a Cuban businessman, Joe Capote, in 1933. His childhood was not an easy one for the family had money problems and was constantly traveling. The young Capote was not interested in academic subjects, but he was highly intelligent, unusual, and had promise as a writer. He published his first short story, *Miriam*, in 1942 and followed this with a string of successful novels such as *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), and *In Cold Blood* (1966). Capote's style and focus changed throughout his life and can be divided into three periods. His earlier books focus on rural life and family tragedies, the middle period on the chemistry of love and eccentric people, and the third period on using prose to describe non-fictional events. Capote is remembered for his extravagant lifestyle as well as his literary achievements. He died in 1984 in California.

## Summary

The book is about a writer's friendship with a wild young woman called Holly Golightly in 1940s New York. Men pay Holly for sexual favors, she drinks and takes drugs and her life is completely disorganized, but the writer is fascinated by her. They do not have an amorous relationship but he cares for her deeply and wants to protect her from herself and the outside world. She eventually disappears from his life when she travels to South America to escape the police after being arrested as an accomplice in a drug conspiracy.

**Chapters 1–2:** The story begins with the narrator, who is a writer, looking back over a period in his life in the early forties in New York, and his acquaintance with a young woman called Holly Golightly, who had lived in the same apartment block. One day he goes to see an old friend, Joe Bell, in his bar and Joe tells him a story about Holly. Mr. Yunioshi, a Japanese photographer and also a previous tenant in the same block, had been to Africa and had seen a woodcarving of a woman who bore a striking resemblance to Holly. The story then goes back in time. The narrator is living in the apartment and Holly rings his bell to get in because she is always forgetting her keys. He begins to take an interest in her and discovers she has a lot of male company and stays out very late at night. One night, Holly enters his room through the window, escaping from a violent man in her room, and they spend the night talking. She tells him she visits a man in prison called Sally Tomato every week, and is paid to do so by a dubious lawyer called Mr. O'Shaughnessy. Sally gives her a weather report, obviously a coded message, and she relays it to the lawyer in return for a hundred dollars.

**Chapters 3–4:** One evening, Holly invites the writer to her flat for drinks. There he meets a Hollywood agent called O.J. Berman. Berman tells him a little about Holly's past and her involvement in the movie business and that he is convinced she is crazy. The apartment then begins to fill up with men. Holly had had a half serious relationship with one of the men, Rusty Trawler, a child-like effeminate millionaire. Holly tells the writer of her fondness for the jewelry store, Tiffany's, where she goes when she feels afraid. Suddenly a woman, Mag Wildwood, bursts into the room and demands to know, in a stuttering voice, why Holly is monopolizing all the men. The men show interest in Mag but while she is out of the room, Holly implies that Mag has some sort of disease and when she returns they avoid her. The next day, the writer sees a foreign-looking man bringing suitcases into the house. That evening he overhears a conversation between Mag and Holly. Mag is talking about her Brazilian boyfriend, José, who works for the Brazilian government. A few days later, Holly takes the writer to lunch. They talk about their lives and then Holly decides to buy a present for her brother Fred, who is a soldier. Instead of buying something, she steals it. As time goes on the writer sees less of Holly as she, Mag, José, and Rusty form their own social group.



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**Chapters 5–6:** Holly throws a party and gives the writer a very expensive birdcage as a gift. Holly tells him about a recent holiday Mag, Rusty, José and she had gone on to Florida. The group split up and she and José went to Havana, leaving Mag to suspect they were sleeping together. A big argument then breaks out. Holly criticizes the writer's work, and he implies she is not his intellectual equal and that she is sexually promiscuous. The following morning he retrieves the birdcage from the trash. They do not speak to each other for a long time afterwards. One day the writer meets Holly's fifty-year-old husband, Doc Golightly. Doc tells the writer about Holly's past. Her real name is Lulamae, her parents had died, she and her brother had lived like wild children before Doc's family adopted them, and finally she had run away from him and his loving family. Doc then goes to Holly's house and they have a friendly reunion, but even though he wants her to go back home with him, she declines.

**Chapters 7–8:** The writer sees a newspaper headline announcing that Rusty Turner had married his fifth wife. He assumes that the woman is Holly but he later discovers that it is Mag Wildwood. When he arrives home, Holly is going crazy in her room, breaking furniture and glass. José arrives, accompanied by a doctor, and Holly is sedated. Holly had just received a note from Doc informing her that her brother, Fred, had been killed in the war. José moves in to live with her. In the following months, Holly's behavior changes. She doesn't go out, except to go to the prison, she starts to cook and to take care of her apartment, she talks about marrying José and that she is pregnant and they are going to Brazil. The narrator and Holly see each other regularly when José is out of town. One day they go horse riding and the narrator's horse goes out of control. Holly comes to the rescue and before he faints, he declares that he loves her.

**Chapters 9–10:** That evening the newspapers are full of the story of Holly's arrest on drug charges. She is accused of delivering secret coded messages from Sally Tomato to the so-called lawyer, Oliver O'Shaughnessy. Joe Bell and the writer decide to contact some of Holly's rich friends to help her with the legal expenses. They get through to O.J. Berman who tells them he has employed a good lawyer, and that Holly would be home very soon. The writer next sees Holly in hospital, where she is recovering from a miscarriage. He gives her a letter from José telling

her he can't see her again owing to her reputation. Holly says she is determined to go to Brazil all the same, because she does not want to testify against Sally Tomato.

**Chapters 11–12:** The writer and Joe Bell discuss the possibility of stopping Holly from going to Brazil. The writer then collects some things from her apartment, including her cat, and returns to the bar. Joe, who is obviously in love with her, tries to convince her to stay and then hides in the bathroom to cry. Holly and the writer get into a car, which Joe had arranged, and travel to the airport. On the way Holly stops the car and sets her cat free on the streets of Harlem. She changes her mind soon afterwards and tries to look for it. The writer promises her he will return and find her cat. Months later the writer receives a card from Holly in Buenos Aires. She is seeing a Spanish man and seems happy. He later sees her cat. It is living in a nice house and the writer hopes that Holly too has at last found a place where she belongs.

### Background and themes

**Stability versus freedom:** Holly is continually trying to escape from situations in which she feels trapped. She leaves the comfortable home of her husband Doc, and goes to New York and then leaves New York to go to Brazil. She compares herself to a wild animal and hates anything associated with captivity such as birds in cages and giving her cat a name. The writer, on the other hand, is content to have a place of his own and to try to make a career for himself.

**The diversity of love and desire:** The relationships in the book are diverse. Some are based on mutual needs, such as Holly's involvement with Berman, which is financial, with Rusty, which has some strange sexual overtones, and José, which is purely sexual on his part. Her relationship with the writer is the purest because it is not based on desire or needs, but on an honest friendship.

### Discussion activities

#### Before reading

- Predict:** Tell the students that the book is about a woman called Holly Golightly and in groups, ask them to predict the answers to these questions: *How old is she? What type of pet does she have? She knows a writer of books, is she his wife, girlfriend or friend? Was she happy when she was a child? What does she do for a job? Does she like parties? Does she break the law and if so, how?*



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## Chapters 1–2

**While reading** (p. 7, after “That was her favorite song.”)

- 2 **Discuss:** Put the students in groups and tell them they are going to discuss music. Then write *rock and roll* on the board and ask the students for suggestions of other types of music. Write them on the board, adding some of your own. Then ask them to discuss the following questions: *What type of music do you like? Who are the best singers and groups of each type of music? What is the best type of music to listen to when you are studying / dancing / eating in a restaurant / working? Do you think modern music is better than the music in the past? What type of music do your parents listen to?*

## After reading

- 3 **Write and ask:** Write *Where in Africa did Mr. Yunioshi see a wood carving?* on the board and elicit the answer (In Tococul). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 1–2. Now have students stand up and interact, asking and answering each other's questions.

## Chapters 3–4

**While reading** (p. 18, after “Get on a plane and come back here.”)

- 4 **Role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to act out the telephone conversation between O.J. Berman and Holly. Encourage the student playing Berman to pretend to be angry, and the student playing Holly to be a bit crazy. See Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.

## After reading

- 5 **Discuss:** Remind the students that Mag is worried about marrying a foreigner and going to live in a foreign country. Put them in small groups to consider the following questions: *Would you like to live for a time in a foreign country? What country would you like to live in and why? What would you miss about your own country? How would your life be different? What problems could you have living in this country? Do you think you would like the food?*

## Chapters 5–6

**While reading** (p. 34, after “In February, Holly went on a winter trip with Rusty, Mag, and José Ybarra-Jaegar.”)

- 6 **Discuss:** Put the students in groups of four and ask them to think about an exciting trip or holiday they have been on. Tell them to think about the following questions: *Where did you go? How did you travel? Who did you go with? What happened on the trip? Were you excited/frightened/worried/angry about anything? Where did you stay? Was it expensive? What was the food like?*

- 7 (p. 41, after “Doc wanted me to go with him.”)  
**Role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to act out a role play between Doc and Holly. Doc tries to make Holly come home and she gives him reasons why she can't.

## After reading

- 8 **Write and guess:** Write *The writer saw the birdcage on the table* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (bed not table). Now students choose a sentence from Chapters 5–6 and rewrite it changing one word. Students interact, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

## Chapters 7–8

**While reading** (p. 45, after “When I arrived at the station, I bought a newspaper.”)

- 9 **Write:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to write a newspaper article about Rusty Trawler's marriage to Mag Wildwood. Tell them to describe the two people, invent stories about Rusty's previous wives and describe the plans for the wedding party.

## After reading

- 10 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *job, shoulder, blood, Texas, baths, 500 dollars, boats, notebook*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 7–8.

## Chapters 9–10

### After reading

- 11 **Discuss:** Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *Are there a lot of problems with drugs in your country/city? Why do some young people start using drugs? How can other people help them? Do you think the drug laws in your country are right? Should people who use drugs always go to prison?*
- 12 **Game:** Put the following categories on the board: *Famous people in history, Sportspeople, Movie people, Singers and groups, Politicians, Business People*. Ask the students to write down all the names they can think of in each category. They then read out their suggestions. Then play the twenty questions game. One student thinks of a famous person. The rest of the class has to ask him/her questions to guess who they are. The student can only respond yes, no or sometimes. The class can ask twenty questions. See Discussion activities key for possible questions.

## Chapters 11–12

### After reading

- 13 **Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and ask them to make a list of all the main characters in the book. Then ask them to talk about each character, their personalities and what they did, and to grade them 1 to 10 on whether they were a good person or not.