

# In Cold Blood Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *In Cold Blood is a new form of journalism that is referred to as a “nonfiction novel,” which tells, as if it were a novel, the story of how Dick Hickock and Perry Smith conspired, prepared, and killed the Clutter family in rural Kansas in the fall of 1959, and what it took for the police to catch them so they could be brought to justice by hanging in 1965.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



One cold night in Kansas in the year 1959, all four members of the Clutter family were brutally murdered in their home. Each member was found in different rooms, tied up with fatal gunshot wounds to the head. There was little evidence to suggest a motive, let alone any suspects.

Local authorities had never seen anything like this, and they certainly weren't prepared for the media frenzy that followed. Very quickly the mysterious murders became national news and captured the attention of American novelist and screenwriter Truman Capote.

Capote was so intrigued, in fact, that he traveled with his friend novelist Harper Lee to the small farming town of Holcomb, Kansas, to write about the murders. Here he talked to people in the town and followed the investigation closely.

His groundbreaking nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* details the crime from beginning to end in great detail. It was an instant success and became the second-best-selling true crime novel in history.

Here is the story of the murder in just 3 lessons:

1. The murder of the Clutter family was tragic and horrific.
2. The killers made the mistake of returning to Kansas for a con job and that's when, with the help of the memory of an inmate, the police caught them.
3. The men quickly found there was no money in the home and the situation got brutal fast.

Curl up in your favorite reading chair and let's get into this terrible story of murder and suspense!

## **Lesson 1: Tragedy and horror struck a small Kansas community when Dick Hickock and Perry Smith murdered the Clutter family.**

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Normally, the Clutter family was at church every Sunday. But on this particular Sunday in 1959, they didn't show up, causing a concerned neighbor to call them. When they didn't answer, she and a few other neighbors decided they would stop by to check on them.

Things appeared normal from the outside. **But when they looked through the window and saw food untouched on the table and the contents of a purse strewn on the floor, they knew something wasn't right.**

Susan Kidwell let herself in to investigate and soon found the gruesome scene of 16-year-old Nancy Clutter tied up and murdered in her bedroom.

They called first responders and soon they found the other members of the family, each bound with their mouths taped shut. All four had been shot in the head, and Mr. Clutter had his throat slit as well. The scene was horrendous, and no one could understand why.

To make things worse, the police had no leads whatsoever.

## **Lesson 2: The memory of an inmate combined with a mistake by Hickock and Perry was just what the police needed to close the case.**

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As time passed the police didn't make much progress. Eventually, the station reached out to the public for information. A radio program playing information about the case at a Kansas State Penitentiary jarred the memory of one of the inmates, giving them essential information.

Floyd Wells recognized the Clutter name immediately and realized he knew exactly who had done this. He once shared a cell with a man named Dick Hickock. He recalled telling a very interested Dick all about Mr. Clutter, a wealthy man whom he had once worked for. Dick had a particular interest in a safe in the Clutter home and wanted all the details.

Floyd came forward with what he knew, and soon the story unraveled.

Dick had befriended a man named Perry Smith in prison. **Dick saw Perry as a “natural killer” and he believed he could use his lack of conscience to his advantage.**

After their release, Perry said he would accompany Dick to Kansas, though he wanted to see an old friend rather than be part of the heist. But when they got there, the friend was gone, so Perry decided instead to go with Dick to the Clutter home that night.

It seemed like they would get away with it too, except they made the mistake of going back to Kansas after the murders. Dick returned to con a shopkeeper by giving a blank check that would never clear.

But the shop owner was suspicious and took down his license plate as they drove off. Finally, police had found the murderers. They soon tracked them down to Las Vegas, and took them into custody.

After collecting other evidence such as matching food prints and finally confessions, the two were condemned to death and eventually executed for their crimes.

### **Lesson 3: The murders took place after the men discovered there was no cash or riches to steal.**

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So what actually happened on that night in Holcomb? It turns out that Perry gave an astonishingly detailed confession of the murders. They arrived a little after midnight and snuck through an unlocked door on the side of the house.

Floyd told Dick where a safe with the family’s money would be. Yet when the two men searched the house silently there was no safe. Their plan changed and they shook Mr. Clutter awake and demanded he tell them where the safe was.

Mr. Clutter informed them that not only did he not have a safe, he didn’t even have much money inside the house. This made Dick come unhinged. Perry and Dick gathered up the rest of the family at gunpoint and tied them all up in a different room in the house.

After this, they pondered what they should do from here. The plan was not to leave any witnesses, but Dick was hesitant. This made Perry annoyed, and he decided he would “call Dick’s bluff” and admit his cowardice.

**Perry asked Dick for the knife and slit Mr. Clutter’s throat. Mr. Clutter started struggling furiously and almost freed himself, but Perry shot him in the head.**

After this, Perry and Dick shot the other three members of the family. When it came time for the trial, however, they kept ambiguous in confessions about who killed who.

With only a few dollars of cash and a couple of small items from the house, they rode off into the night.

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## **In Cold Blood Review**

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Murder is awful and fascinating at the same time. Although I do always wonder what in the world would possess any human being to take the life of another. I found *In Cold Blood* was both interesting and tragic, and, while the story is so sad, it might inspire you to make some changes that could improve your chances of survival if you ever find yourself in the presence of a murderer!

## **Who would I recommend the In Cold Blood summary to?**

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The 37-year-old mom who loves to hear stories about true crime, the 64-year-old that wonders why some people kill others, and anyone who is a fan of suspenseful stories of criminal actions.