

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Catch-22

by

### Joseph Heller

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### Book Information

Joseph Heller, Catch-22  
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Book Level: 7.1  
Interest Level: UG

Yossarian is a hero endlessly inventive in his schemes to save his skin from the horrible chances of war, and his efforts are perfectly understandable because as he furiously scrambles, thousands of people he hasn't even met are trying to kill him.

**Topics:** Adventure, Life Changes; Classics, Classics (All); Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, ALA Outstanding Books for College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Wars, World War II

### Main Characters

Aarfy a flier who enjoys driving Yossarian crazy during missions

Appleby a flier who excels at everything he does

Captain Flume Chief White Halfoat's tent-mate who is scared the Chief will slit his throat in his sleep and lives in the woods to be safe

Captains Piltchard and Wren the joint squadron operations officers who love flying missions

Chaplain Tappan the chaplain on the island who desperately misses his wife and children and who often finds himself intimidated by others

Chief White Halfoat a Native American who believes he will die from pneumonia and eventually does

Clevinger a man in Yossarian's squadron who thinks Yossarian is crazy and who disappears into a cloud on one of his missions

Colonel Cathcart the superior officer who keeps raising the number of missions the men have to fly before they can go home

Colonel Korn the officer Colonel Cathcart goes to for advice

Colonel Moodus General Dreedle's son-in-law  
Dobbs a flier who wants to murder Colonel Cathcart

Doc Daneeka the squadron's doctor; a man who is bitter because he had to leave his booming practice on Long Island to join the service

Dunbar one of Yossarian's squadron buddies who ends up disappearing

ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen a man who goes AWOL every chance he gets and loses his rank each time

General Dreedle the officer that Colonels Cathcart and Korn are always trying to impress

General Peckem the man who replaces General Dreedle in the end of the book

Havermeyer a lead bombardier who is one of the best in the squadron

Hungry Joe a flier who has nightmares every time he completes his missions and is waiting for his orders to go home

Huple Hungry Joe's tent-mate who has a cat that likes to sleep on Hungry Joe's face

Kid Sampson a young man in Yossarian's squadron who is killed by McWatt's plane

Major --- de Coverley the squadron executive officer about whom no one knows any concrete information and who plays horseshoes, kidnaps Italian laborers and lines up apartments for the men

Major Major an insecure man who makes himself a recluse because everyone shuns him

McWatt a pilot who loves to fly with daring and who commits suicide after one of his tricks

Milo the man in charge of the mess halls and also runs an intricate international bartering syndicate

Mudd the dead man in Yossarian's tent whom Headquarters won't acknowledge because he hadn't officially checked in before he was killed on a mission

Nately a young man in Yossarian's squadron who is in love with a woman of ill repute in Rome

Nurse Cramer Nurse Duckett's best friend

Nurse Duckett Yossarian's girlfriend for a time during the story

Orr Yossarian's tent mate who is constantly crash-landing into the water on his missions

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**Scheisskopf** a lieutenant who loves organizing parades

**Snowden** a man on Yossarian's crew who is wounded by flak and dies as Yossarian watches

**Wes and Gus** Doc Daneeka's two helpers who know little about medicine

**Whitcomb** the chaplain's assistant who despises the chaplain and does everything in his power to make him look bad in the eyes of his superiors

**Yossarian** the main character in the story; a young man who finds himself stationed on an island close to Italy flying as a bombardier during World War II and is trying desperately to stay alive

### Vocabulary

**gentian violet** a purple dye used primarily as a biological stain and bactericide

**infallible** incapable of failing

**musette** a small canvas or leather bag with a shoulder strap

**syndicate** an association of people formed to transact some business

### Synopsis

Yossarian is a bombardier stationed on an island near Italy during World War II. Flying doesn't bother him until the men in his squadron start getting killed. At the beginning of the book, the reader finds Yossarian in the hospital because he is avoiding combat. His main goal is to make it back home alive. He has realized he is not immortal.

As the story progresses, we discover what has happened to traumatize Yossarian. During one of his missions, a crewmember, Snowden, was seriously wounded. Yossarian treated a wound in his leg only to discover the worst wound was hidden inside Snowden's flak suit. When Yossarian unzipped the suit, Snowden's insides were exposed, and he died. Since then, Yossarian has not been the same.

One of the big problems for Yossarian is that Colonel Cathcart keeps increasing the number of missions the men in his squadron need to fly before they are allowed to go home. Yossarian does

everything he can think of to avoid flying missions, until finally he just refuses to fly.

Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn come up with a plan to satisfy everyone. They make a deal with Yossarian that he will be their pal and say good things about them, and he can go home. Yossarian accepts this deal at first, but then he has second thoughts.

As Yossarian talks to the chaplain about this deal, he realizes it is not what he wants to do. When the chaplain brings him the news that their friend, Orr, was not dead after all but had rowed to Sweden and was now free of the service, Yossarian himself is determined to escape. He runs away, leaving the chaplain behind to persevere.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Why did Colonel Cathcart keep raising the number of required missions?

*He thought it was a way for him to be noticed by his superiors.*

#### Literary Analysis

Explain the central conflict in *Catch-22*.

*Yossarian is scared to fly missions and is trying to come to grips with his feelings.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Why was the woman beating Orr over the head with her shoe?

*Most likely he had paid her to do it so he would be seriously injured and sent home.*

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## Constructing Meaning

What is Catch-22?

*It seems to be anything that would keep Yossarian or any of the "good guys" in the story from getting what they really want. It points out how ridiculous some rules and regulations really are.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Yossarian is a bombardier in World War II. We don't know a lot about what this job entailed. Ask the students to research what type of plane or planes he would have flown in, how many men would have been on the crew, and all the duties each of them had. Was it a risky job? What was the average number of missions the men truly had to fly?

**Understanding the Author's Craft** An all-knowing narrator told this story in the third person. Ask the students to rewrite a portion of a chapter from Yossarian's point of view. Then ask them to discuss if it would have been easier to follow the story if it had been written in that fashion. Was it confusing when the story flipped between so many characters? Why did the author choose to write it the way he did?

**Recognizing Feelings** It seems that the experience with Snowden is what caused Yossarian's feelings about flying to change so drastically. Ask the students if there has been an event in their lives that has caused their feelings to change. Was it something good or bad? Has this feeling stayed with them?

**Understanding Sequence** The way this story is told, it is challenging to figure out the true sequence of events. Gather the students into a group and have them create a timeline for this story. Draw a line on the board and have the students write the main events of the story on cards. Then arrange the cards in sequence and tape them to the line. There will probably be a lot of discussion regarding when things happened.