**Siddhartha Discussion Questions**

**The Brahmin’s Son**

1. Hesse does not describe the setting in detail—why not?

2. Describe the life of Siddhartha and his family at the outset of the novel.

3. How is an “average” Brahmin described?

4. Why is Siddhartha dissatisfied?

5. Look at the reasons for Siddhartha’s discontentment (5-6). How do other religions answer these questions?

6. Discuss this quote: “One must find the source within one’s own Self, one must possess it. Everything else was seeking—a detour, error.” (7)

7. Discuss this quote: “[T]his was his thirst, his sorrow.” (8)

8. Why is asceticism attractive to Siddhartha?

9. Discuss this quote: “[Samanas were] lean jackals in the world of men. Around them hovered an atmosphere of still passion, of devastating service, of unpitying self-denial.” (9)

10. Discuss Govinda’s role as a foil to Siddhartha.

11. Why does Siddhartha remain respectful to his father?

12. To understand this chapter, is it necessary to have any background knowledge about Buddhism? What assumptions does Hesse make about his readers?

13. What is the tone of this chapter and how is the tone relevant to the theme?

14. Discuss point-of-view—how much do we know about the characters’ thoughts?

15. According to the text, what were the religious practices at this time?

16. Discuss gender roles in this chapter (note: no women are present).

**With the Samanas**

1. In the second full paragraph on p.13, what diction suggests that the Samana way is not a good one?

2. Debate the arguments of Govinda and Siddhartha in this chapter. What are Govinda’s arguments and thesis? What is Siddhartha’s?

3. Discuss this quote: “What I have learned so far from the Samanas, I could have learned more quickly and easily at every inn in a prostitute’s quarter, amongst the carriers and dice players.” (16)

4. What is “the way”? (18)

5. Why does Gotama, the Buddha, appeal to Siddhartha?

6. When the oldest Samana yells at Siddhartha (23), what comment does Hesse make?
7. Discuss this quote: “I have no desire to walk on water. Let the old Samanas satisfy themselves with such arts.” (24)

8. At the end of both Chapters 1 and 2, Siddhartha takes a leave—compare these two situations. How does Siddhartha manipulate the situation to achieve his goals? Does the listener truly capitulate?

9. Why is severe asceticism not an answer for Siddhartha?

10. Why was this experience necessary for Siddhartha? What does he learn?

Gotama

1. What is the significance of saying that Gotama’s features are “perfect”? (28)

2. Sometimes the Buddha looks at Siddhartha and sometimes he lowers his eyes (34-35). What is the significance of this gesture?

3. Are Siddhartha’s arguments to Gotama fair? Why aren’t they persuasive?

4. How does the Buddha dismiss Siddhartha? How is the end of Chapter 3 different from the previous chapters?

5. Discuss this quote: “[Gotama] has robbed me, yet he has given me something of greater value.” (36)

6. How much knowledge does Hesse assume the reader has about Buddhism? Why doesn’t he provide more information about Buddhism?

7. In the end, why doesn’t Siddhartha follow the Buddha? Does this fact suggest that the Buddha’s teachings are wrong?

8. Why does Govinda? Does this fact suggest Govinda is wrong/limited?

9. To this point, is Siddhartha a static character or a dynamic character? Is Govinda?

10. What is the relationship between knowledge and spirituality?

Awakening

1. Define the “Self” as used on page 38.

2. Explain Siddhartha’s decision in the second paragraph on page 39. What are the practical consequences of this decision?

3. Why, in Siddhartha’s realization about the world, does Hesse not use any imagery? (39)

4. Discuss this quote: “Meaning and reality were not hidden somewhere behind things, they were in them, in all of them.” (40)

5. Why does Siddhartha need to be “alone”? (41)

6. What is the “awakening” or realization in this chapter?

7. How does Siddhartha relate to the world differently in this chapter?

8. Predict where Siddhartha is going at the end of this chapter.

9. Why is Hesse intentionally vague about doctrine/dogma?
10. Is the tone consistent to this point of the text or does Hesse seek to make the reader feel something different in this chapter?

Kamala

1. How has Siddhartha’ relationship to nature changed? (45)

2. What is the connection between the Buddha’s ideas and Siddhartha’s ideas?

3. Explain how everyone are “children” (49)

4. What is the “inner voice” (50) Why doesn’t Siddhartha yield to temptation?

5. Contrast the grove (52) to nature at the beginning of this chapter.

6. Again in this chapter, Hesse uses the motif of lowered eyes. What is the connection between this practice and the theme?

7. Is the relationship between the necessity for “material” wealth as an entrée to Kamala’s knowledge similar or different from the requirement to become a Samana? Why does Siddhartha agree to become rich first?

8. What does the diction on 58-59 show about Siddhartha?

9. Discuss the different meanings of “value” (59) to Siddhartha, Govinda, Buddha and others in the text.

10. What is the significance of reading and writing? What implications does Siddhartha’s use of literacy have for Hesse’s theme?

11. What is magic?

12. Is Siddhartha naïve? What are the flaws in Siddhartha’s assumptions?

13. What is the relationship between thought and sensory experiences?

Amongst the People

1. Discuss Siddhartha’s arguments on 64—would you have hired him?

2. Is Siddhartha’s love for Kamala idealized or do situations like this happen?

3. What would Siddhartha do with a different partner who is more selfish?

4. Is Siddhartha a good businessman? Can his approach be copied today?

5. Examine the list on 70 of the petty problems of daily life. Would you make the same list? What is common to all of the items on the list?

6. Discuss this quote: “He did not treat the rich foreign merchant differently from the servant who shaved him and the peddlers, from he bought bananas and let himself be robbed of small coins.” (70)

7. Discuss this quote: “He was sometimes afraid of these thoughts and wished he could also share their childish daily affairs with intensity, truly to take part in them, to enjoy and live their lives instead of only being there as an onlooker.” (71)
8. Define “play” as used in this chapter.

9. What is love according to Siddhartha? According to Kamala? Is Hesse arguing that love is unnecessary?

10. How do thinking, waiting and fasting continue to dominate Siddhartha’s life?

**Samsara**

1. Is Siddhartha’s superiority (77) out of character? What does it suggest about him?

2. What views does Siddhartha associate with the world? (78-79)

3. Why is gambling appealing to Siddhartha? (79)

4. Why does Siddhartha become “old and sick” (80) but Kamala does not?

5. How are ego and superiority motifs for Siddhartha’s life? (83)

6. What is Samsara?

7. Why does Siddhartha leave without saying goodbye to anyone? How is this leaving consistent with his character and goals? Why, in earlier chapters, did he first seek approval before he left, but now he does not?

**By the River**

1. What does “Om” symbolize? (89-90)

2. Why is the imagery on 90 significant?

3. Analyze the meeting of Siddhartha and Govinda. How has their relationship changed? What is Govinda’s view of Siddhartha?

4. Who has accomplished more since they parted: Siddhartha or Govinda?

5. What is “knowledge”? (99)

6. Siddhartha realizes on 99 that his problem has been arrogance/conceit. What actions in Siddhartha’s past were not selfish? Is this a fair criticism? How is Siddhartha’s definition of arrogance different than the denotative meaning?

7. Explain the cycles of life? How is death a “renewal”?

**The Ferryman**

1. What does the river symbolize?

2. Why does Hesse personify the river?

3. How is the ferryman’s speech on 105-06 a key theme?

4. What is the relationship between learning and wisdom?

5. What does “listening” mean?

6. On 113, is Siddhartha now a “Buddha”?
7. Does Kamala find peace? Are her acts similar to a Christian repentance?

8. Explain the situational irony on 114.

9. Explain the significance of the end of the chapter: Why does Kamala die in the same bed as the ferryman’s wife? Why does the son sleep while the funeral pyre is built? How can Siddhartha suffer without sadness?

10. Is the tone of this chapter consistent with the rest of the text?

The Son

1. Why would Siddhartha prefer "sorrow and trouble" with his son instead of happiness? (113)

2. Discuss this quote: “Is it not perhaps a mistake on your part not to be strict with him, not to punish him? Do you not chain him with your love? Do you not shame him daily with your goodness and patience and make it still more difficult for him?” (120)

3. On 119-20, why is punishment consistent with Siddhartha’s beliefs? What are the limits of punishment?

4. Is Siddhartha a good father? How should Siddhartha raise his son in order to teach him morality?

5. Why doesn’t Vasudeva tell Siddhartha to not look for his son? (125)

6. Discuss this quote: “Nevertheless, he went on steadily, no longer to save him, but with a desire perhaps to see him again.” (125)

7. What are the positive and negative aspects of “love”?

8. On 127, does “Om” heal Siddhartha’s sadness?

Om

1. In this chapter, how does Siddhartha finally lose his arrogance and form a connection with men?

2. What is the nature of suffering as part of life? (134-35)

3. Discuss this quote: “It was the goal of all of them, yearning, desiring, suffering; and the river’s voice was full of longing, full of smarting woe, full of insatiable desire. The river flowed on towards its goal.” (134-35) What is the river’s goal?

4. How does Siddhartha finally acquire the knowledge he has sought? (136)

5. Why does Vasudeva go away?

6. Why does Vasudeva go into the woods? What do the woods symbolize?

7. Why does Siddhartha stay?

Govinda

1. What does “seeking” mean? (140)

2. What is the wisdom that Siddhartha imparts about how to live life?
3. What does being a “ferryman” symbolize?

4. Discuss this quote: “In every truth, the opposite is equally true.” (143)

5. How is the potential Buddha present in every sinner?

6. What is the Buddha’s view on time?

7. Explain Siddhartha’s point about the stone. (145)

8. What is the problem with words? (146)

9. Is Nirvana a word only, or also a thought?

10. The illusion of Maya is what? (147)

11. Do Siddhartha and the Buddha disagree?

12. Why does Hesse reveal Govinda’s doubts about Siddhartha? (148)

13. Why does the kiss teach Govinda? (150)

14. Why does Siddhartha smile “mockingly”? (151)

15. Why does Hesse end the book as he does? Is the ending satisfying? Is the ending consistent with the theme?