



## THE BIG SLEEP: MOVIE QUESTIONS

### Big Sleep Discussion Questions by Raymond Chandler

**Author Bio:** <http://www.penguinreaders.com/pdf/downloads/par/teachers-notes/TN-TheBigSleep.pdf>

Chandler (1888 – 1959) was born in Chicago but grew up in London and moved to California in 1912. After school, he studied international law and then had a number of jobs, including teaching and bookkeeping. Chandler produced his first novel *The Big Sleep* in 1939. It introduced the now well-known character of Philip Marlowe, a tough but honest private detective. He then went on to write another six novels, three of which are considered to be very important literary works (*Farewell, My Lovely*, 1940; *The Little Sister*, 1949; *The Long Goodbye*, 1953).

Chandler's work greatly interested those within the movie industry and he collaborated with them on several projects including the screenplay for *Double Indemnity* (1944). Six of his novels were successfully made into films including *The Big Sleep* (1946), which starred Humphrey Bogart as Marlowe. Chandler received the Edgar Allan Poe Award for screenplay in 1946 and for novel in 1954. Chandler died in California in 1959.

#### Characters:

- **Philip Marlowe** – A private detective.
- **General Sternwood** – A rich, older, and infirm gentleman with two daughters. Hires Philip.
- **Carmen Sternwood** – The General's youngest daughter. Mentally unstable. Lives with the General.
- **Vivian Reagan** – The General's oldest daughter. Married 3 times. Current husband is missing. Lives with the General.
- **Rusty Reagan** – Vivian's missing, bootlegging husband.
- **Geiger** – Man attempting to collect Carmen's gambling debts from the General. Runs a pornography bookstore. Shot in his home. Body disappears.
- **Bernie Ohls** – part of the D.A.'s office.
- **Owen Taylor** – The Sternwood's driver. Carmen's former boyfriend. Found dead in Ocean.
- **Joseph Brody** – Conman trying to take over Geiger's business. Informer. Agnes' boyfriend.
- **Eddie Mars** – Owner of a gambling joint Vivian frequents. Mob boss.
- **Mona Mars** – Eddie Mars wife. Supposedly ran away with Rusty Reagan.
- **Agnes** – Joseph Brody's girlfriend. Geiger's front woman at the bookstore.
- **Carol Lundgren** – Geiger's driver and friend. Shoots Brody.
- **Lash Canino** – A general cleanup and hit man used by Eddie Mars.



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How did all of Chandler's setting details set the mood of the novel?

*The Big Sleep* is considered to be a classic "hardboiled crime" novel. What makes it hardboiled?

Do you think General Sternwood had given up on being a parent? What would you have done differently?

Marlow comes in contact with thugs, lowlifes, cops, and the rich. Does he speak to everybody the same?

What (if anything) makes Marlowe a charming character?

What did you think of Carmen? Is Carmen just not very smart or does she have health issues that can account for her behavior?

Rusty Regan, the missing, bootlegging husband, always carried 15 grand on his person. What does that say about him?

Why do you think Chandler never lets us see Rusty Regan, alive or dead?

If you could go back to 1939, would you want Marlowe's job? What job would you want?

What does it say about Marlowe that he is a private investigator instead of a police officer?

There were a large number of characters and many of them ended up dead. Did you ever have trouble following along?

Why does Vivian keep the truth about Carmen and Rusty from her father?

Does Marlowe do the right thing by keeping the secret about Carmen and Rusty?

In thinking of the characters and their socioeconomic status levels in the book, what types of social critique if Chandler trying to make within *The Big Sleep*?

How does Marlowe see women?

Do women have power in this story? If so, what kind?

What kind of a man is Marlowe? Does Marlowe have a code of honor? Do you find him admirable?

What motivates Marlowe in his interactions with General Sternwood? With the Sternwood sisters? With the police? How do his motivations and actions underscore the theme of moral ambiguity recurrent throughout the book?

If this book were written today, how would it be different?

What influence do you think Chandler has had on crime novels?



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This story is set during the Great Depression (1930s), when most Americans were struggling financially. What do you think the author was trying to say when he wrote of the Sternwood family who, despite their money, are terribly unhappy?

“The theme of the book isn't between good and evil, but between evil and less evil. For in the end, the hero of the story becomes part of the corrupt society “the great nastiness’ himself.” What do you think of this statement?