

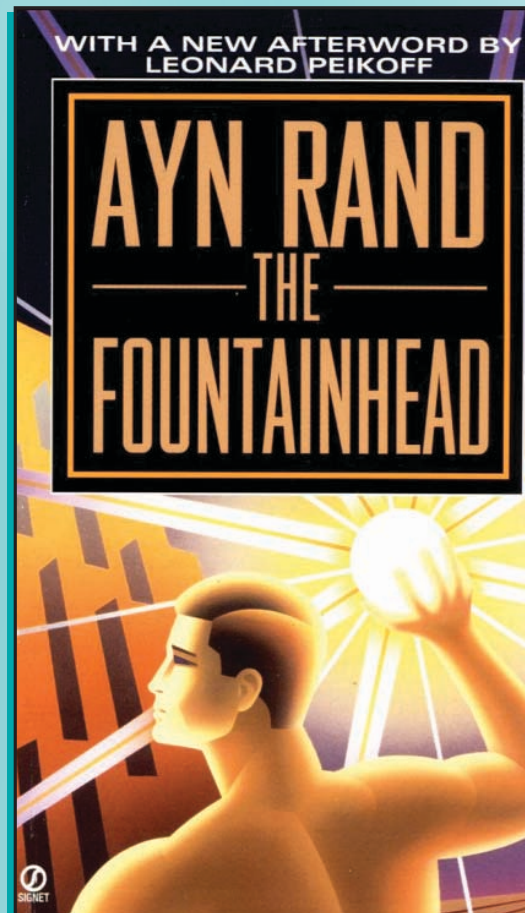


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET EDITION OF

AYN RAND'S

# THE FOUNTAINHEAD

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## INTRODUCTION

Ayn Rand (1905-1982) was born in Russia and educated under the Communists, experiencing first-hand the horrors of totalitarianism. She escaped from Russia in 1926 and came to America because it represented her individualist philosophy.

*The Fountainhead*, published in 1943, was Ayn Rand's first great success. It was a best seller then and continues to sell very well today. It was made into a popular movie in 1949 starring Gary Cooper as Howard Roark and Patricia Neal as Dominique Francon.

*The Fountainhead* has achieved the status of a modern classic because it dramatically concretizes the theme of independence versus dependence, between following one's own ideas or following those of others. This is of particular importance to high-school students who are eager to assert their independence from their parents and need a code of ideas and values to guide them. The student needs to know to what extent he must follow his parents, when it is his right to assert himself against them, when and if he is being improperly influenced by peer pressure, and that it is his right to resist it. He needs to discover that social pressures pushing him toward unsatisfactory career and marriage choices are not irresistible forces defining his life—that he can oppose them successfully and often should. And he needs to discover that unthinking rebellion against the standards of others—being different just to be different—is as abject a form of dependence on them as blind allegiance.

*The Fountainhead* appeals strongly to the young—and I have seen this appeal year after year, with my own high-school students—not only because its theme is independence but also because it presents “a noble vision of man's nature and of life's potential” (from Ayn Rand's Introduction to the novel). That Ayn Rand was able to integrate these issues into a plot structure that crackles with conflict can be explained only by the school of writing to which she belongs: Romantic Realism. She is a Romantic in that she projects men as they might be and ought to be. Although not many men may be currently living up to the ideal of independence, they have the capacity to do so, and a reason why: their success and happiness depend on it. In this, she fundamentally differs from the Naturalist school of fiction, which is content merely to present men as they are. (For further elaboration, see Ayn Rand's *The Romantic Manifesto*.) Ayn Rand is a Realist in that her heroes are possible and deal with the crucial real-life problems of today; her heroes are never relegated to historical costume dramas, other worlds, or flights of fantasy.

For all the literary and intellectual achievements of *The Fountainhead*, it is but an overture to Ayn Rand's greatest achievement: *Atlas Shrugged*. For your advanced students, who appreciate *The Fountainhead* and who are looking to go further, there is good news: *Atlas Shrugged* covers in detail the sophisticated themes that *The Fountainhead* begins to explore.

## OVERVIEW

### PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

HOWARD ROARK is the main character in *The Fountainhead*. He is a struggling young architect in the United States of the 1920's and 1930's. Roark is an early designer in the modern style. He is a brilliant, innovative genius, but his designs are often rejected by clients who want them to conform to traditional standards. Roark's refusal to compromise causes him to lose many commissions.

While Roark struggles, PETER KEATING, his rival, rises to the top of the architectural profession. He is a mediocre architect, but gives the public exactly what it is used to. Borrowing from other architects, including Roark, Keating sells out any standards he has ever held in order to reach his goal of winning the approval of other people by any means.

Roark's main antagonist in the novel is ELLSWORTH TOOHEY, who is the architectural critic of influence in New York. Toohey, the arch villain in the novel, denounces Roark for his genius and his integrity, but Toohey's campaign to discredit Roark is not seen through by most people.

GAIL WYNAND is Toohey's employer. He is the talented publisher of the New York Banner, who uses his newspaper to pander to the lowest public taste and thereby gain popularity and power. Meeting Roark, who he admires, he is forced into the most agonizing decision of his life: to continue to curry favor with the masses or live instead according to his own standards.

DOMINIQUE FRANCON is the brilliant, passionate woman who loves Roark, but who is convinced that Roark's genius has no chance in a corrupt world. Roark is the catalyst for the resolution of her conflict in the novel.

**UNDERSTANDING...****HOWARD ROARK**

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Howard Roark pursues his vision of architecture with an unswerving dedication and morality that has made him an inspiration to readers. The action of the novel centers around the opposition to him from many people, all of whom are variations on the basic theme of the novel. There are three major sources of opposition to Roark: (1) from the tradition-dominated elements of society (Peter Keating); (2) from the antipathy of active powerlusters who reject his ideas in life and hate the independence for which he stands; and, (3) from the two figures who love him but have unresolved conflicts which cause them in different ways to oppose Roark (Wynand and Dominique).

At the opening of the novel, Roark is expelled from the prestigious Stanton Institute of Architecture. The scene between Roark and the Dean of the school establishes the conflict of tradition versus innovation. The Dean views Roark as a rebel who opposes all the rules of architecture. He claims that all rules of design come from the great minds of the past, i.e., from other people. Roark disagrees, stating that “what can be done with one substance must never be done with another. No two materials are alike. No two sites on earth are alike. No two buildings have the same purpose...Every form has its own meaning. Every man creates his meaning and form and goal. Why is it so important—what others have done? Why does it become sacred by the mere fact of not being your own? Why is anyone and everyone right—so long as it's not yourself?” This disagreement is crucial to an understanding of *The Fountainhead*, for the book's central conflict is between people who are reality-centered and people who are centered instead on other people.

A development of this theme is the case of the Manhattan Bank Building. The board hires Roark to design the building, ruining Roark's plan by adding a Classic motif. As the Chairman of the Board explains: “In this way, though it's not traditional architecture of course, it will give the public the impression of what they're accustomed to.” Roark tries to explain “why an honest building, like an honest man, had to be of one piece and one faith; what constituted the life source, the idea in any existing thing or creature, and why—if one smallest part committed treason to that idea—the thing or the creature was dead; and why the good, the high and the noble on earth was only that which kept its integrity.” The Chairman replies, “There's no answer to what you're saying. But unfortunately, in practical life, one can't always be so flawlessly consistent.” Morality to Roark is practical. To the Chairman, practicality requires one to compromise one's standards to be popular with others. Roark refuses to change his design, on moral grounds, and loses the job. It is this point that eloquently explains the personality of Peter Keating.

Keating rises in his profession by two means: deception and manipulation. Keating is quite willing to be “practical” in order to get commissions. He aspires to be successful as an architect—but the crucial point is that he does not aspire to do good work in architecture. Keating is a mediocrity, but that doesn't matter to him, because he is able to convince his public that he is great. How people perceive him is Keating's fundamental concern. For instance, he becomes an architect in the first place, not because he loves to build, but because it will gain him “social respectability.” He works for Guy Francon, who teaches him how to impress clients by matching ties with socks and wines with foods. He gives up Catherine Halsey (whom he loves) for Dominique Francon (whom he fears) because Dominique's beauty and connections will impress people.

He is an example of a man who never develops values. He is what Ayn Rand calls a “second-hander:” He surrenders his capacity for judgment to other people, and therefore, he focuses not on what he thinks, but on what others think. He designs by copying the masters of the past. Further, he gets Roark to help him whenever he needs it, taking all credit for the design himself, and then repays Roark by publicly denouncing him. Keating is dependent, as a parasite is, on Roark, on the masters of the past, on the gullibility of the public. Keating rises because certain people support him; and as with all parasites, he falls when the host organisms withdraw their support. Toohey supports Keating for two reasons: (1) so that the leading architect in the country will be under spiritual control; and, (2) to help destroy Roark.

**ELLSWORTH TOOHEY**

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Toohey is the antithesis of Howard Roark. He is the selfless altruist whose entire life revolves around other people; specifically, he wants to rule others by preaching that the individual must sacrifice himself to the group. For example, as a vocational advisor at a New York college, he gains control of his young charges by making them renounce their guiding passions, subsequently filling their now-emptied souls with his own advice and guidance. He postures to the public as a saint of “humanitarian love”—while using this creed to help establish a Big Brother dictatorship, in which everyone

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selflessly obeys the State, with Toohey as the intellectual ruler behind the throne. With this end in mind, he schemes to gain control of the Wynand papers, worming his hand-picked followers into key positions, preparing for the big showdown with Wynand.

Toohey is consistently evil. He is a parasite like Keating, but he is worse because he is not after success in some career, but after power and destruction of others. He has a vested interest in the dependency of followers. An independent person neither needs him nor will listen to him. Therefore, Roark represents his greatest enemy. Roark cannot be ruled. This is the reason why Toohey cannot stand Roark or stop him, cannot even touch him at a fundamental level. For Toohey is master only of dependent personalities. All of Toohey's scheming is powerless against the independent judgment of the rational individual.

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## **GAIL WYNAND**

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Wynand rises out of the New York slums to a position of wealth and power through hard work, determination, and brilliance. A man of tremendous creative drive, he is frustrated and angered by the incompetence he encounters in his rise. Receiving responses of "you don't run things around here" to any good new idea he gets, Wynand sets out to make certain that he does indeed run things. Believing that dominance over others is the only way that real values can be achieved in a world he regards as corrupt, he sets out to dominate public opinion through his newspaper chain—which is aimed at the lowest common denominator among men. He accepts the idea that to be successful he must sacrifice his ideas and play to the prejudices of his readers. All of his innovative talents are then devoted to making his scandal sheet, the *Banner*, the most influential newspaper in New York. Wynand, the man of potential independence, becomes Wynand the demagogue, pandering to the mob in return for their support.

All of Wynand's real, private judgments are excluded from the content of his newspaper finding expression only in his private art gallery and in the selection of his wife, Dominique, and closest friend, Roark. Wynand's nature is such that he must admire and love Roark; but the *Banner*'s nature is such that it must oppose and denounce Roark. Wynand mistakenly thinks he can use his power to support Roark, but he finds out otherwise. Wynand believes he must sacrifice his integrity to gain power. One chooses to be either a corrupt success or an honest failure; to Wynand there is no other alternative. This same assumption is shared by Dominique Francon in a different form. It brings her into desperate conflict with everything she loves, especially Roark.

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## **DOMINIQUE FRANCON**

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Dominique is an impassioned idealist. She is capable of positive emotion only for the noble, the pure, the exalted. Unfortunately, Dominique regards the world, not as an exalted place where greatness will flourish, not even as an indifferent place where greatness will occasionally rise only to be ignored, but as a malignant place where the rare instances of greatness will be ruthlessly crushed. Hence, she throws down an air shaft a statue of a Greek god which she cherishes, and she joins with Toohey in an attempt to destroy the career of the man she loves. Both are acts of mercy killing—the attempt to kill quickly and painlessly that which has no place in a malignant world. Dominique is idealism combined with pessimism—love of the noble conjoined with the conviction that the noble has no chance in the world. She lives her life in fear that the things she loves are in danger of imminent destruction.

Like Wynand, she believes that one must choose between corrupt success and noble failure. Unlike Wynand, she repudiates such a success, opting instead to take no value from a corrupt world. In effect she withdraws from the world, her first-rate mind unused in any serious attempt at a successful career. After the agony of the Stoddard Temple trial, she removes herself from active participation in the ongoing struggle. Only with the Cortlandt dynamiting, years later, does Dominique once again take an active role in the conflict of the drama. Then she observes that Roark can make a success of himself on his terms, and that Keating, Toohey, and Wynand ultimately fail.

## **WHILE READING THE NOVEL**

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### **THE CLIMAX OF THE NOVEL**

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The climax of *The Fountainhead* is Roark's dynamiting of the government-sponsored Cortlandt Homes housing project, which Roark designed secretly at Keating's request—on condition that his design be faithfully followed. Government bureaucrats then deface and ruin the design. The climax resolves all the major conflicts. For Roark, the dynamiting is his

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assertion of the creator's right to that which he creates versus the second-handers who wish to control his work—and ultimately his life. (Note that Roark had no recourse to the courts because he is not permitted to sue the government, and he dynamites Cortlandt to set up a test case, not as an act of anarchy.) For Keating, the Cortlandt affair means the final exposure and collapse of his second-hand method of living. For Dominique, her choice to help Roark with the dynamiting means she has finally understood that evil is impotent and cannot fundamentally hurt the good. For Wynand, his failed attempt to use the Banner to promote, for once, his own values, to defend Roark, brings him face to face with the inescapable contradiction that one cannot achieve noble ends by corrupt means. For Toohey, the trial is a test of whether he has succeeded in his lifelong quest to inculcate collectivism. Roark's acquittal and Wynand's closing of the Banner leave Toohey helpless. Toohey cannot shackle the creators such as Roark, if they are willing to fight openly and proudly for their rights.

## PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES IN ROARK'S SPEECH

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Ayn Rand wrote in her letter "To the Readers of *The Fountainhead*:"

"*The Fountainhead* started in my mind as a definition of a new code of ethics—the morality of individualism. The idea of individualism is not new, but nobody had defined a consistent and specific way to live by it in practice. It is in their statements on morality that the individualist thinkers have floundered and lost their case. They had nothing better to offer than vulgar selfishness which consisted of sacrificing others to self. When I realized that that was only another form of collectivism—of living through others by ruling them—I had the key to *The Fountainhead* and to the character of Howard Roark.

The key statement to the whole conception of *The Fountainhead* is in Roark's speech: 'I wished to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others. It had to be said. The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrificing.' All the rest of the book is a demonstration of how the principles of egoism and altruism work out in people and in the events of their lives."

Howard Roark is an egoist—an exponent of rational self-interest. He thinks for himself, using his reasoning mind. Reason is that attribute that distinguishes man from the animals and the proper egoist from the altruist. Ellsworth Toohey is an advocate of altruism, "the doctrine which demands that man live for others and place others above self."

The egoist creates in order to survive and to flourish. "The creator's concern is the conquest of nature. The parasite's concern is the conquest of men." Ayn Rand chose architecture as the career of her hero because she says "a builder is one of the most eloquent representatives of man's creative faculty." The antithesis of a builder is a destroyer, a dependent, a second-hander. Altruism demands unthinking dependency and obedience to the norms established by others or by the ruler. Men who live by it must become parasites. Thus the historical struggle between the individual and the collective. Whether the collective is the church, the state, the race, or the proletariat, the clash is always between the "common good" which holds that it has a right to each man's life and productive achievement versus the individual who holds that he has a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Howard Roark states at the trial that "the only good which men can do to one another and the only statement of their proper relationship is—Hands off! Now observe the results of a society built on the principle of individualism. This, our country...It was based on a man's right to the pursuit of happiness. His own happiness. Not anyone else's. A private, personal, selfish motive." The antithesis of our free society is one based on collectivism, such as Communist Russia or Nazi Germany. Roark says, "Now, in our age, collectivism, the rule of the second-hander, and second-rater, the ancient monster, has broken loose and is running amuck...It has reached a scale of horror without precedent. It has poisoned every mind. It has swallowed most of Europe. it is engulfing our country."

The tampering of Roark's design of Cortlandt homes is an example of altruism. Some faceless men on an architectural committee decide to change his plans for no reason except that the individual, the creator who has done the thing and the work, has no right to the product of his labor. This is sacrifice in practice. Once he has done his job, his work is considered public property, his rights are sacrificed to the collective. Roark fights these men by destroying his own creation on the principle that since he built it, then he must have the right to keep what he has built. To shackle creators, to count on them to innovate, design, produce, but then to expropriate their creations for others who did nothing to earn it, is a great injustice. The independent minds, the Galileos, the Edisons, the Aristotles, carry the rest of mankind forward on their backs. This is the message of Roark's speech and the significance of the title, *The Fountainhead*. The meaning is: the ego is the fountainhead of human achievement and progress. The ego is the individual man's reasoning mind.

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**AFTER READING THE NOVEL****SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Dominique Francon loves Roark and struggles to destroy him. Why?
2. How does Howard Roark exemplify the fact that reason must be used to solve man's problems, rather than relying on others' judgments or one's emotions? Why is the dynamiting of Cortlandt not an example of irrationality?
3. Keating gives up art for architecture and Catherine Halsey for Dominique Francon. Why are these major betrayals for him, necessitating his failure in life?
4. What is Toohey's ultimate purpose in trying to control the Banner ?
5. How do Keating's and Roark's paths to success differ? Which one in the end is the real success?
6. Why does Toohey ultimately fail in his manipulations against Roark?
7. What does Ayn Rand mean by the terms "first-hander" and "second-hander?"
8. Why does the courtroom verdict at the Cortlandt trial mean the psychological destruction of Gail Wynand?
9. If you had the opportunity to meet Howard Roark what would you ask him?
10. Is Roark a moral man, a practical man, both, or neither?
11. What does Ayn Rand mean by individualism, and why are the Founding Fathers of the U.S. individualists?
12. Why does Roark say that the refusal of the Manhattan Bank Building contract is "the most selfish thing you've ever seen a man do?"

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Visit the Ayn Rand Institute's website. Set your URL to: [www.aynrand.org](http://www.aynrand.org)

**ESSAY CONTESTS**

Essay contests on both *The Fountainhead* (for 11th and 12th graders) and *Anthem* (for 9th and 10th graders) are sponsored annually by the Ayn Rand Institute. 47 prizes in all are awarded, with the top prize a cash award of \$5,000. For complete details, write the Ayn Rand Institute at PO Box 6004, Inglewood, CA 90312

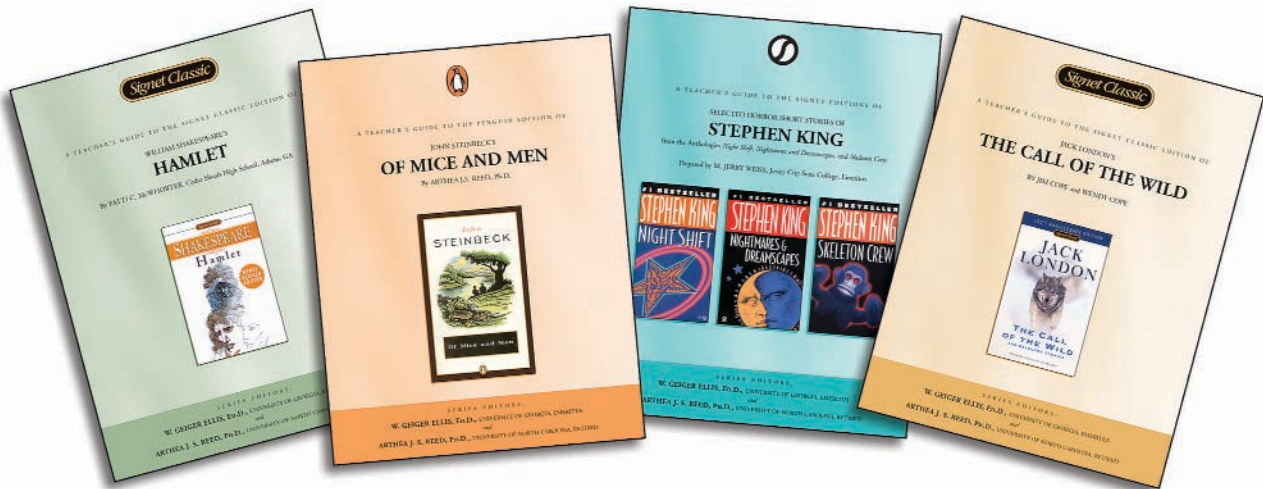
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE**

This teacher's guide has been prepared by DR. MICHAEL S. BERLINER. Dr. Berliner taught philosophy and philosophy of education at California State University, Northridge, where he served as Chairman of the Department of Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education. He regularly used *Anthem* in his introductory courses to illustrate the meaning of independence. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University and is currently Executive Director of the Ayn Rand Institute.

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