

# **Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters Study Guide**

**Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters by Michel de Montaigne**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

[Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Book 1 of Essays: Chapter 1 \(Introductory Materials\).....5](#)

[Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 2.....6](#)

[Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 3.....7](#)

[Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 4.....8](#)

[Book 2 of Essays : Chapter 5.....9](#)

[Book 2 of Essays : Chapter 6.....10](#)

[Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 7.....11](#)

[Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 8.....12](#)

[Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 9.....13](#)

[Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 10.....14](#)

[Book of Essays 3 : Chapter 11.....15](#)

[Book of Essays 3 : Chapter 12.....16](#)

[Travel Journal : Chapter 13.....17](#)

[Travel Journal : Chapter 14.....18](#)

[Travel Journal : Chapter 15.....19](#)

[Book 5, Letters: Chapter 16.....20](#)

[Book 5, Letters : Chapter 17.....21](#)

[Characters.....22](#)

[Objects/Places.....26](#)

[Themes.....30](#)

[Style.....33](#)

[Quotes.....36](#)



Topics for Discussion.....38

## Plot Summary

This is a translation of the works of one of the world's most well respected Frenchman. He lived during the waning era of feudalism on the European Continent. He has compiled a number of essays ranging in length from that of an entire book to far shorter ones, more along the lines of a brief essay. The shorter ones heavily outnumber the longer ones. There is one work, the Apology of Raymond Sebond, which is well over a hundred pages. The author espouses his views and through doing so himself. His purpose is to express himself: while simple, the idea is fabulous. He wants to share himself with readers. His main target audience was people who would miss him after his death. As such, he felt himself able to write his opinions with minimal censorship.

The editors have laboriously translated this sizable manuscript. Through this act of love, vast descriptions of ideas have been ordered by both the author and the editors. There is a general chronological order to the essays. The arrangement of the topics does not appear on the surface to have any deeper connection. The subjects vary from the education of children to philosophy and military tactics. There are innumerable anecdotes, some of which come directly from the author's life whereas others show Montaigne's own educational background. He has apparently read or listened to lectures about many classical figures. The means of his learning about these has not been cited. He grew up in a privileged household: amongst other things, this meant gentleness and education. There may well have been books and educated instructors. [Empowering women to tutor their own children was used by some as a primary argument to educate girls and women. For others, this was really the father's duty.]

One of the most prominent works within the body is a defense of Christianity called an Apology to Raymond Sebond. This essay is so extensive that there are two summary chapters devoted to this one essay. There is sizable Travel Journal and then a set of Letters that come after the Essays. The entire work is delightfully interesting to readers for numerous reasons. It is a treasure for the rather informal education. In a pinch it could be used as a textbook but it is very clear that the author does not have this usage in mind.



# Book 1 of Essays: Chapter 1 (Introductory Materials)

## Book 1 of Essays: Chapter 1 (Introductory Materials) Summary and Analysis

The edition used to create the book summary is the Stanford University Press edition translated by Donald M. Frame and first published in 1943. This is an English edition, but the original was created in French of the 16th century. There are two Introductions to the work, both written by Donald Frame. During the first of these, his primary intention is to introduce Montaigne himself; a brief biography is provided. In the second introduction, there is a greater discussion of the work of translation.

Michel Montaigne was born to a noble family in 1533. He was born into the late Medieval Period, when feudalism dominated Continental European politics. One of the main ways that this appears for the place position of the readers is that given areas were under strange rule. For example, a province in France might be under the rule of a German Prince. An English town might be controlled by a contingent of French soldiers and nobility. Once he had become an adult, this manifested in the form of religious civil wars within the nation. Because of these conditions he was arrested in Paris, France in 1588 because he was a political moderate who was loyal to the King. Montaigne's purpose in writing this entire collection of works was a personal one. He admits this, but it is not a confession. It is important to him that others realize that this is really why. One of the author's best friends, La Boetie, is mentioned. He died before the author, and was greatly mourned. There a story about a change in his sexual behavior. He was reported to have had a two-year bout of promiscuity from 1565 - 1567. At the end of this, he married upon the recommendation of his father. He is also said to have not spoken well of marriage, but to have been a reasonably responsible husband in actual practice. Together with his wife 6 children were born, but of all of these, only one of them even lived past infancy. His father died in 1568 - bequeathing his title and estate to his son Michel Montaigne.

In 1581 Montaigne was commissioned to be the Mayor of Bordeaux. He served two terms in office. This went reasonably well, except for one very serious problem that may or may not have been caused by the sewage system. There was a plague at Bordeaux while he was the Mayor. It was so bad that literally 50% of the population died from the disease. This obviously discolored the reputation of his time as the Mayor.

# Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 2

## Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

The first section of the book is structured as a group of numbered essays. When the book begins, the essays are coming from 1572 AD/CE. At this point the Prince of Wales has obtained jurisdiction over at least one French region in a perfect example of feudal governance. Each essay is brief, numbered and titled by the topic to which it pertains. Montaigne's mother came from a Spanish Jewish family - if only because she was the best match they could find in the same economic class. Her children were raised Catholic - this included the author. One element of the European wars of these eras was religious. The main conflicts were between the Catholics and the newly formed Protestant branch of Christianity incited by the likes of Luther and Calvin, and furthered greatly by Gutenberg and his daring willingness to print The Bible - even in common languages and sell it to the common people. Readers may take this freedom for granted, but profound sacrifices were made for it to be possible.

The author writes about courage, mercy, malice and combat. One man, who was leading a large number of troops was moved to mercy when he found three hold-outs fighting hard at a losing battle. This leader had already taken the town and large portions of the opposition were literally dead at the hands of his men. While this is not a universal response, it is what happened in at least one case. In an entirely different case, a man called Emperor Conrad had subdued a Bavarian duke. The Emperor chose to be merciful by letting the women and children go. To his astonishment, the women brought the men with them. Conrad is reported to have had a change of heart and to have grown more merciful towards the opposition once he learned that. Here, this radical action on the part of the women had good results. The final detail noted here is that the effect upon individuals in the face of the bravery of their opposition is decidedly strong but undetermined in the direction it turns them. There have been cases where the opposition's courage called leniency and other cases where it resulted in unremitting violence to overcome that very valor.

Essay #3 is entitled: Our Feelings Reach Out. Here, there is a strange matter of diplomacy, and about what is right and what is not. There is another anecdote - Montaigne uses many case examples to draw conclusions or to give the basis for an abstract principle. In this case, he writes that a soldier had to choose whether to gather the bodies of fallen comrades or to chase after more of the enemy. He selected to round up the bodies of his fellows, but because he did so, a great many of the enemy escaped. Those opponents are known to have attacked the city of Athens, Greece later. The last theme described in these essays is one slender thread that winds through #4 & 5 and others. It is the role of deception. Deceit was viewed by some as a necessary and integral part of warcraft whereas for others deceit epitomized all that was unfair and unjust. For the latter, war has lots of rules, all of which must be followed for any progress to be possible.



# Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 3

## Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

This continues directly from the previous. The use of deceit often entails the need of a good memory and great care often must be taken to preserve a consistent story line. Montaigne writes that one of the best ways to dislodge a falsehood is to repeatedly bring the liar back to a particular topic. The more the topic covered has been lied about, the more effective this concentration upon it is. This is in part due to the difference between what is solid and what is not - this is especially true in the cases where it can be proved or well supported by the strength of evidence. During the 9th essay, Montaigne points out that some men despise lying more than any other type of transgression. Readers are apt to be well aware that this bothers people to different degrees and judgments about it are also influenced by the motives of the deception. A minor deceit to avoid rudeness or cruelty or to preserve familial unity would be viewed as different from the kind of lie used purely for the purposes of robbery or to set up a trap for another. Nevertheless, he claims, "lying is worse than it may seem...[it is] an accursed vice" (p.23).

Essay #10 includes a note on the cultural practices of Turks, showing the diversity of Montaigne's topics. They cauterize wounds in a way that causes scarring. They have made a fashion of viewing the scars as signs of beauty. Much further on, Montaigne asserts that fathers universally assert their paternity of sons and that they will do this with full awareness of the flaws of that son. Essay #28 is about friendship whereas in essay #38, Montaigne writes about emotions. He observes that it is possible to laugh and cry about the same thing. He explains that this is because entirely different passions within a person are aroused - giving different reactions to the same thing. In the next essay, Montaigne writes about solitude and how helpful it is for any individual to nurture self-awareness with uncensored thinking - if only while in solitude. Here, the association of privacy and uncensored thought are intimately connected. Later, in essay #44, there is an anecdote about how a man called Parmenio had to awaken Alexander the Great for battle on one occasion. This is followed by a brief report of how two men suffering from suicidal thoughts were apparently completely cured by getting some much needed sleep.



# Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 4

## Book 1 of Essays : Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Essay #46 takes readers into the beginning of the second hundred pages of the book. Another anecdote is recounted. This one is about surnames. Henry the duke of Normandy - son of King Henry II of England hosted a feast for nobles of France. He had the guests divided and grouped by surname. Through doing so, it was discovered that they had more than 100 Williams' in attendance.

In yet another rather drastic change of topic, the author tells about war horses. This occurs in Essay #48. There was a Spanish Order of Knights the members of which were all under orders to refrain from ever riding mules. No explanation is given, which does not mean there isn't one. The information about war horses continues and is of differing natures. Human soldiers did at desperate times resort to drinking the blood or even urine of horses for survival. The other reports are simply about how challenging war horses are to tend and to control, in general. Extra time had to be allotted, in many cases, to get the horses ready for the battle field. The justification given is that the war horses were not very "tame." Doubtless many might have said the same of the soldiers.





## Book 2 of Essays : Chapter 5

### Book 2 of Essays : Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Book 2 - Essays 2 begins on page 239. The first essay is three-pages long, making it one of the longer ones. Montaigne writes of vices. "But although they are equally vices, they are not equal vices" (p.244). This is ample so-called food for thought for many readers. Not surprisingly, the essays in this second book are simply numbered. They are generally ordered by their date. The first are from 1572. Item #8 however, is from 1578. This one is about the Affection of fathers for their Children. Within this essay, he also acknowledges the maternal affections. He writes that parental affections and a good example are invaluable to people to enable them to lead good lives.

Here, the author's use of famous people from the great trail of history shows. He has included a brief piece of verse: "In my opinion he is wrong who thinks/ That an authority by power attained / Is more secure than that by friendship gained" Terence (p. 281). This is but one of many very strong statements Montaigne makes. He also writes that any father who only has his children's affections on the basis of their need of his assistance is in a very sad way. In fact, he doubts whether or not this type of reliance-affection can be real affection, at least according to Montaigne's perception of what love for another is really about. Montaigne explains on the same page that he has been raised very gently by his own parents. Readers may or may not be surprised to discover that gentle child rearing has been practiced by some for centuries. He goes on to claim that the use of violence causes specific character traits or reactions: cowardice and malice are both cultivated by severity and brutality in punishments. Obstinacy is the other main quality this causes.

Montaigne writes about male virginity and marriage. The bias of his male perspective shows but is not exaggerated during this piece. He advises that males remain virginal until they are at least 20 years old, but he does not recommend marriage for anyone younger than 34. He does not actually provide any sound advice for how to handle the 14 years in between. Nor does he make any recommendations for women. He does not write about fears surrounding pregnancy, childbirth and funding the growing offspring. Such things might suggest even more protracted virginity and/or earlier marriage. He also does not touch on how much pregnancy related concerns can prevent sexual relations within marriage if only for financial reasons.



## Book 2 of Essays : Chapter 6

### Book 2 of Essays : Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

During essay #11 Montaigne writes about virtue. He explains that he believes that virtue is more than simple goodness. This "simple goodness" is what occurs when the kindly person goes through life inclined towards further kindness. He differentiates between this and a virtue. To exhibit virtue might be to master a desire for vengeance. He cites a case of someone enraged from being injured - to avenge oneself is the natural instinct. To master this urge and release the feelings without pursuing the revenge to the end would be to exhibit virtue. This, he means, clarifies the difference between the real exercise of virtue and being easy going.

Essay #12 is the longest one in the entire body of writings. This is the Apology for Raymond Sebond. Montaigne begins by explaining that his father liked education; he valued and appreciated it very much. As a direct consequence, he often had people of this type over to the estate as guests. Then Montaigne introduces knowledge of a book. The work was written in an unusual manner; it was primarily Spanish, but the author had tended to use the Latin method of word endings. Montaigne's father was able to decipher the book, and had observed that the ideas contained were quite good and so he valued it, despite its evident oddity. Montaigne explained that Lutheran's ideas were growing more powerful. Next he explains why it is that such drastic alterations of ideas should not generally be freely strewn amongst the people. Too many of the common people are simply followers and all it will do is to sow strife and confusion which won't ultimately help anyone. This is Montaigne's basic argument. Readers may or may not be offended by this.

Montaigne explains that this book is very powerful defense of Christianity against atheism. Montaigne became more thoroughly acquainted with the contents of the book because his father asked him to translate it into French. Montaigne does not hide at all that he loves and admires his father very dearly. He claims that it would not ever be possible for him to disobey any request made by his father, so complete is his adoring submission to this figure. So, he did this. He learned the work well by doing so. Many of the ideas are suspected of coming from Saint Thomas Aquinas, the mind and ability to think theologically is deeply honored. Montaigne exhibits worldliness when he writes of various religions. He actually calls them equal in the main, and admits that one must seek what is special about Christianity. He asserts that it is virtue, that makes the real difference. Christians, real Christians, he claims succeed at being better than the others through the experience of virtue. Readers may or may not find this surprising from a 16th-century Frenchman.

# Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 7

## Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

This is a continuance of the Apology to Raymond Sebond. As already stated, this is the longest of the single pieces in the entire collection of writings. Montaigne reviews the book by Raymond Sebond in a manner that includes some criticisms. This is actually a discursive method, of a specific type. He writes of objections that can be made against Sebond's work and then he refutes them in a step by step manner. This resembles a methodology used by Saint Thomas Aquinas, a man whom the author clearly greatly admired. The first of these contains an objection that Sebond does not show Christianity as having any superiority to various types of paganism. Further, the objection runs that it does no good to attempt to support Christianity with rational judgments as the religion is dependent upon faith and inspiration for its justification. Montaigne is proud to point out that he knows of at least one man who was brought back to Christian belief by the arguments made by Sebond.

There are first and second objections with headings to set them apart from the others. There are several more headings during the course of this essay of more than 100 pages. They give some definition to the argument presented on behalf of Christianity. On page 334 he mentions that swaddling clothes are actually unnecessary. He notes cases where the mothers raise their babies without ever using binding fabrics. He does not directly point out that this has some correlation to an objection that Jesus Christ was wrapped in swaddling clothes shortly after his birth. This is somehow a means of averting any direct criticism of Holy Virgin Mary the Mother of God. Soon thereafter he writes, "...there is more difference between a given man and a given man than there is between a given animal and a given man" (p. 342). Shortly thereafter he describes the cleverness of the hedgehog, which is to temporarily shore up the burrow at the opening from whence the wind is coming. This primitive means gives him the ability to have some control of the weather and greater control of the warmth and ventilation systems within the burrow.

## Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 8,

### Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 8, Summary and Analysis

Much further one, amongst the essays, which have been shorter again, there is one entitled Of Evil Means employed to a Good End. The least disturbing example that he provides during this two page essay is how a politician forced a serving class of people to get very drunk. The purpose of this evil was to show to the classes just over them in the social hierarchy how offensive and disturbing this condition could be, in an effort to put the higher class of people off of getting too drunk themselves. What follows is a bit of analysis. At this point, readers have made it through the first half of the book. The essays are one mode of the author's well formed expressions. He has included numerous, short quotations from diverse, famous men of history.

Readers of today may notice how few references there are to women and that he has not quoted the works of famous women. This is part due to the nature of the history. While there was some history of matriarchy within Europe, it had mainly faded. According to contemporary knowledge of history, conditions for women tend to be more restrictive when there is a great deal of warfare that depends upon a male soldiery. The predominance of matriarchy within the European nations faded out with druidry and certain armaments - possibly metal smithing technologies in Britain, where the reasons for the change are unknown in the Grecian realm. The Cretans were known to be one of the longest hold-outs of matriarchy in addition to having been notorious for their use of deceit in the Grecian territories. In both cases, the written tradition seems to have occurred during a cultural transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. During the past century or two, there has been tremendous progress towards a more egalitarian society which has obvious signs of both patriarchal and matriarchal forms of social organization simultaneously functioning in the society.



## Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 9

### Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

It is worth making a few remarks to contrast the perspective of the reader with that of the author's position in the context of history and culture. The reality that the current German Chancellor is a woman recently elected in the very dawn of the 21st century means the Queen of England, Elizabeth II is no longer the only woman on top in Europe. There are rarely Catholic women priests and this is still a point of contention within the Catholic Church, but many of the Protestant churches have accepted women clerics - in some cases this has been a reality for a century, in some cases a few decades. Both Catholic Christianity and Protestant Christianity are found in the nations of modern Europe, but this has come with tremendous political pressure to practice mutual tolerance. There has not been outright warfare about this for centuries but most contemporary readers have been educated in the reality of the warfare that was a living reality during Montaigne's life. At this point in the book Montaigne does not seem to have any desire to overtly undermine or devalue women. At the same time, he does not champion women nor use them for textual references. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that he respected women and the traditional female roles. It is likely that Montaigne's standard male perspective of social hierarchy focused primarily upon male leadership but he does herald from the same nation as Joan of Arc, and as a Catholic he must have heard at least some of Christ's teachings advocating proper respect for women as free people; Montaigne also knew Mother Mary and other esteemed women of the Church. Here, perhaps we can see that there may have subdominance without disrespect. Montaigne is very obviously well educated. He is quite articulate within the presentation the translator has put together. Vibrant, articulate, and diverse in their topics best summarizes the author's writing style. He is neither condescending nor does he seem to have created the most literary of language.



# Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 10

## Book of Essays 2 : Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

As previously stated, it is only the Apology to Raymond Sebond, which is actually a powerful defense of Christianity, that is longer than just a few pages. Again, this incredibly powerful piece of writing is the result of Montaigne's having obeyed his love, to whom he felt a natural and well placed servility as befitting of a son. He uses an ancient model for rhetoric and philosophical debate within the work, but in a far simpler form than that found in Aristotle's *Summa Theologica*. Lucretius is the most often quoted ancient writer during this essay. After the Apology, Montaigne writes a sizable sequence of essays on points of morality and ethics. Each of these is brief. In every way, Montaigne emphasizes the need for the use of both actions and words. Thrown in amongst these, are other historical pieces, such as the essay entitled *Of the greatness of Rome*. The text turns to page 500 and beyond during the essay entitled *Of presumption* - which is also lengthier broaching 20 pages or so.

Book 3 of the Essays begins on a leaf of paper that has intentionally been left without a page number. There are 13 essays in Book 3. The book runs from page 599 to 857. The first of these is Essay 1: *Of the useful and the honorable*. It opens with a brief quotation of an another scholar called Terence. His opening text follows from the quote. In this manner, he has created a natural kind of connection. This shows the normal tendency for people to interact, including the human desire to be able to interact in a more lively manner with historical figures and their knowledge. Such as it is, he shares this gracefully.

*Of repentance* touches on an important and relevant subject matter. He starts by admitting that he is not perfect himself. Next, he asserts in no uncertain terms that he believes that individuals can make as much spiritual progress through a commoner's life than through one of more fame, fortune, adventure or prosperity. He also admits that despite a general consistency, he does contradict himself at times. He claims that despite this, he believes that he does not and cannot contradict the truth. Here he is indicating a belief in truth as an objective reality.

Mainly he writes of the struggle of repentance and the challenge of definition. He thinks that matters not within our own control cannot be repented but individuals might still feel regret because of the difference between one's own character and awareness that there are others who do not suffer from the same limitations of character as oneself.



# Book of Essays 3 : Chapter 11

## Book of Essays 3 : Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins during the third essay. Here, the author is showing off his own education yet again. He refers to the elder Cato, stating, "He had a mind so equally versatile for all things that whatever he was doing, you would say that he was born for that one thing alone" (p. 621). He cites the ancient writer Livy as the source of this comment. Liviticus wrote one of the first official histories of the city of Rome. During the 5th essay, Montaigne writes a bit more about marriage and about what he is really like. He actually claims that he would have avoided marrying Wisdom if she had given him the option of being her husband. Soon thereafter, he admits that he has proven to be a better husband - or a more faithful and dedicated one than he had foreseen. He describes the situation as having simply somehow submitted himself to the arrangement so much that there are no longer any of the troubles that might arise from struggle or rebellion against constraints which the marriage imposes upon the rest of his life. In this sense, the author is really saying that for him being married is rather like his being French in that, by virtue of actually being a Frenchman, this being French has caused him to not be any other nationality. It's just that he's married. Then, in a puzzling twist of fate, he writes of the suggested attitude for women in marriage. It is recommended that a woman serve her husband as her master while simultaneously guarding against him as one would against a traitor in their midst. The source of this piece of advice is Anonymous. He writes that while one man may pay brief visits to many women, one woman is sexually capable of and often wants or even needs far more than what any one man can or will do with and for her on any given day. This makes for certain challenges in relating that are based in reality. He writes further that women know far more about love than men do, as the girls are trained for becoming wives and mothers from early childhood. While boys and men are taught of many other things, the girls, through being so restricted, are in the end so much the better educated to manage relationships such as those of a marriage. Of sexual relations, he writes more during the 5th essay. It may be worth noting that he does write actively against a style of relationship presently viewed as criminal and abusive in all or most cases: that of a sexual relationship between a grown man and a boy. He has learned of these from his readings of the ancient Greeks, for whom this was a serious issue.



# Book of Essays 3 : Chapter 12

## Book of Essays 3 : Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

This is separated out as an entirely unique book within the greater work. There is an extensive note from the editor. This explains a number of basic things about the actual situation. One factor is that the author has not written the Travel Journal for the purposes of publication. The editor then makes it apparent that Montaigne was just like everybody else in certain ways. Typical of the worldly person, his main motivation for the journeys written about herein was generalized curiosity. He went to make himself a bit more worldly; he went there because he wanted to. He traveled to a number of places in 1580 - 1581. The journey ended with Montaigne's return to Bordeaux for the purposes of serving the town as the Mayor.

The editor explains that the Travel Journals offer another inroad to intimacy with Montaigne. Here, he claims that readers can share in an almost voyeuristic attitude because when he wrote these they had not been intended for publication. In reality, the editor is a fan who shares in many of the same indulgent fantasies as others might. The gulf of centuries makes it impossible to experience a so-called meet and greet with Montaigne or even to attend one of his public meetings. As such, readers are reduced to this ultra-distant somewhat unreal desire to relate to a man who has not been amongst the living for hundreds of years. These nonfiction writings are to blame, and they offer something of a salve in that they do allow for some kind of truthful knowledge and experience of Montaigne's essence.

The first portion of the Journal is noted as having been written by the secretary in the French of the time. The voyage was from September 4 - 28 of the year 1580. The topics written of vary. They include public baths with a culture that encourages bathing multiple times per day but dissuades women known to be sexually promiscuous or purely financially motivated from spending time at those same baths. There are oaths of loyalty made to the king in the areas through which they pass. Then there is a discussion of how the Germans have been traditionally used in parts of Europe for establishing and maintaining discipline amongst the social order. Montaigne's secretary is writing of how this can be encouraged in the present at the time of the writing - 1580 AD/CE.





# Travel Journal : Chapter 13

## Travel Journal : Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Italy, the Road to Rome is the next section. This portion covers October 28 - November 29 of the year 1580. There is a boundary between nations in this region. The difference mainly shows by the change of which language is predominantly used. Italian comes into use in full force near enough to Trent. There is also a German location nearby, and this includes a congregation with a cleric that speaks the German language on a regular basis as part of the ceremonial and standard practices there. The secretary reports that his boss has been surveying the most prominent citizens of the town in order to see who has most helped their own home town. There is then some further discussion of the state of a church construction project and related clerics. There is an unfinished building project: the Church of Our Lady showing the Catholic method for showing respect for the feminine in the religion - which, given the all too famous constraints, is worth noticing.

There is brief mention of a few bishops and one cardinal. A man named Clesius was promoted from being a bishop to being a cardinal at Trent. His name was also closely associated with people of the highest orders, and is described along with an ambassador, a king and some of the other nobility - in this case counts and barons. For those who do not know, these are above knights in rank, and below not only the kings and queens but also the princes and princesses. They are also below dukes and duchesses. The entourage left Trent and carried on their journey. Another highlight is that they actually visited a Church of Saint George. Saint George remains famous as a dragon slayer - a reference to overcoming local pagan religious practices and helping to deepen the connection between the region and the relatively new religion of Christianity. The secretary explains that there remained a good deal of evidence that the Germans had been there, although at this point they were no longer there. These descriptions of the journey to Rome carry on until page 935.



# Travel Journal : Chapter 14

## Travel Journal : Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Finally, the author is able to proudly remark that the group has arrived at Rome, Italy. The journal selection is dated November 30, 1580 - April 19, 1581. Here, the secretary dutifully describes another location where they stayed. He writes that they stayed at a place called the Bear, and that it was a high quality location. Their experience there was quite good. The secretary writes in detail about the gilded leather and he compares the Bear to the Gold Vase. He then writes that Montaigne was impressed by the high proportion of wealthy people there in Rome, but disappointed in that too many of the others spoke to him in French rather than in Italian.

There is an incredibly important paragraph describing their experience of Christmas Mass there in Rome. On this one occasion they are able to participate in the Easter Mass Saint Peter's in Rome. The Pope himself gave the Communion at this service, with a number of cardinals right at his side. The Gospel and Epistle were recited twice, once in Latin and again in Greek. He writes also that the chalice used in this service has an especial protection against poison. In a drastic change of tone, Montaigne is reported to have concluded that Parisian prostitutes are often enough more beautiful than the most prestigious women of Rome. While females readers may find this most disturbing, just keep in mind that unmarried young construction workers are often enough more beautiful in the Summer heat than the most prestigious and wealthiest men of a city or state's leadership. Like it or not, things such as this can be the simple rather painful truth.

Later, the secretary writes of how Montaigne visited the release of one of the nation's most notorious criminals - a man accused of robbery and of murder. This took place on 11 January 1581. The criminal's name was Catena. The secretary reports that everyone was afraid of Catena. He was most infamous for having had two men deny God in a bargain to save their lives and then slaughtered them anyways. The motivation for this decision is not given, but can be surmised to have either been because Catena knew they were lying, or else because they were such cowards. The secretary then divulges information about watching public executions and listening to the preachers who gave sermons immediately afterward. The clerics focused upon deterrence in their efforts.



# Travel Journal : Chapter 15

## Travel Journal : Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Montaigne provides high quality travel writing. The group moves on in their journey, venturing forth from the city of Rome and later returning. The secretary's writing is wonderfully clear and concise. Here is an example: "Urbino, sixteen miles, a town of little distinction, on the top of a mountain of medium height, but lying in all directions according to the slopes of the place, so that there is nothing level about it, and everywhere you have to go up and down. The market was being held, for it was Saturday" (p. 977). There is a later point during which the writer describes the water of a given location. While doing so, he is able to make it very clear that the water is not the same in all places though he does not go on at length as to how and why this is true. There is one story about an unusual individual. His name was Guiseppe. He was something like a dual citizen or a "turncoat" in that, when under duress he became a Turk at some point in his life. Later, after a 12-year absence, he was able to visit his mother again. She had given him up for dead. When Montaigne learns of this man, he is both a leader and a captive. He is knowledgeable in naval matters as well as being a strong soldier so the Genoese are able to keep and use him, although they have found the best way is to keep him bound and fettered.

There is a note from the editor in the beginning that Montaigne has been suffering from a kidney stone for two year. Not until this point in the Travel Journal does he begin to provide detailed accounts of his efforts to find a cure. He writes that when he urinates there is gravel in his urine. He describes with an almost clinical accuracy the reality of the case. He reports how much water he has consumed, how much time he has spent at the baths, how much he is urinating and what it is like when he does. This goes in tandem with brief discussions about how the water is not the same everywhere and the observation that some of the others visiting the baths seem to have the same problem he has. The journey extends outwards from Rome, and then, in this case proves to be a loop. This loop is closed by a return to the city of Rome. Only after this short journey, do they then carry on, leaving Rome proper. The next section runs the length of the Summer of 1581. It is called Italy: Florence - Pisa - Lucca. He explains that one can get cucumbers and almond nuts to eat in Florence, Italy but only during the Summer. During this time, while keeping readers abreast of whatever it is that has been giving him migraine headaches and causing him to pass broken down kidney stones through his urine the writer also shares with readers how he visited a part of town where there are women who are exhibitionists, remarking that he went to see the women who will let anyone interested see them naked.



# Book 5, Letters: Chapter 16

## Book 5, Letters: Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Montaigne describes further differentiations of the waters while en route back to Rome. Some waters are for drinking, others are only used as baths. One can readily see why it makes sense to not mix the two types of waters by considering hopefully that the tap water is somehow kept apart from the water in the toilets, at least in general and in spite of the extensive and profound powers of the sewage and other water treatment plants associated with modern cities, and well waters were those are also relevant. Cleanliness is a relevant concern both in Montaigne's era and in the present day. Montaigne writes briefly about how impressive Roman ceramics are, and how he is finding it preferable to drink from ceramics than to eat off of French pewter. Readers may be shocked when they consider - while pewter is currently used in the USA and Canada at least for small decorations, no adult would seriously consider eating off of such a substance except in the case of an absolute emergency.

Finally, there is the chapter of the Travel Journals called Italy: Return to Rome. This is dated September 12 - October 15, 1581 AD/CE [AD is for the Latin Anno Domini, which means the Year of Our Lord; this is abbreviated by the translation Christian Era signified by the English CE]. As previously alluded to there are certain baths that are reputed for having healing powers. Amongst these are ones where at least some people have been cured of kidney stones or have had them alleviated. He writes further of natural wonders that readers would probably take for granted and not even notice. Here, he explains that there is white crusty scum that naturally occurs on the surface of some public waters which is actually handy for collecting and using as a dental cleanser. Here is an early form of the tooth paste readers have grown to use industrially mass produced forms with fluoride. Montaigne then writes of another exceptionally flavored water. Readers have noticed that not all water has exactly the same flavor but little is mentioned of this unless it is about whether or not to purchase a water filter or buying water softening products or complaining because of hard water leaving residue on the ceramic bathroom fixtures. Montaigne writes about the actual flavors of water in the different locations as being well worthy of note and appreciation. Here, it is not that Montaigne is wrong, but he is evidently from a different era. The bottled water craze is the closest contemporary activity that shows support for Montaigne's observations.



# Book 5, Letters : Chapter 17

## Book 5, Letters : Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

There is an important note from the editor at the beginning of this final book of the collected writings. There is something very normal about at least one aspect of this situation. The majority of the author's letters have been lost through time. As he lived over 400 years ago, this is not particularly surprising. The letters have not all been translated by one individual. A man named WC Hazlitt is famous for having translated most of those known to remain in existence. The Letters book contains the 39 letters that have been successfully preserved. The very first letter is in fact quite a sad one. He writes about the legal murder by public execution of a man both Montaigne and the Provost of Paris knew. This is followed by a brief description of open warfare, and concludes with a sorrowful description of other deaths and injuries. Montaigne indicates that he has remained emotionally engaged throughout this process by signing off that he cannot write anymore about it at the time as it "gives me pain and sorrow" (p.1045).

The next letter is merely an excerpt from that of one which he wrote to his father, upon the death of a mutual best friend Boetia. Montaigne writes in some detail for his father about the last times that the two men spent together. There are references to the man's wife, to whom he had given the pet name of "likeness." The dying man requested a priest. He was a Catholic Christian, which was predominant in the area. While on his death bed, he distributed final words of appreciation, advice and in some cases admonitions. Here, for the first time so far in the entire book, women and girls of the household are included in the events. The dying man is calling to him his daughter, stepdaughter and other girls and women who have been in his care. He assures them of his affection. The friend died at the age of 32. There were a great many who lived far longer than this during this era, which many people forget all too easily. At the same time, infant mortality was such a problem that everyone was painfully aware that youth did not make anyone impervious to death, but may have given more faith in the vigor of those who survived their first years. There are 39 letters, and these extend out to page 1093. Mashal de Matignon is the recipient of the most letters from Monsieur Montaigne. These have a different air to them. One of the longer letters is to Henry III. He wrote this letter in his official capacity as the Mayor of Bordeaux.



# Characters

## Montaigne

This Frenchman was born to parents of the nobility, but not the highest ranking of the French aristocracy. This sent his life in a given direction. He writes during the first 500 pages that his parents treated him gently. He explains that he feels this is the best methodology for those desiring to nurture honor and liberty in the offspring. He was granted a fine dwelling place, safe home and an education - all of which served him quite well during his youth.

For all there talk and writing of the leisure classes, there is an exception to this. The main exception is governance. Montaigne was commandeered for the purposes of serving as the Mayor of Bordeaux during his adult life. While this was only one of his jobs, it remains to have been one of his most important positions. He filled this position for two terms of office, which in this case, were two years each. His writing was essentially that of a hobbyist.

This man maintained a prevailing good reputation in both public and private matters. This was a natural source of pride. This reputation has been encapsulated for the public: during a feudal era, he was able to keep his estate open rather than tightly overtly defended. His estates were not attacked at a time when this level of peace stood out amongst the surrounding environs. This may strike readers as an echo of his observation that his parents were gentle with him.

## Donald Frame

This man is responsible for having translated this massive body of writings from their original 16th-century French into modern English. He has kindly contributed two introductory essays. He introduces readers to Montaigne and to the project in general terms. His self-presentation is mainly that of a conscientious scholar. He writes of how much he has endeavored to preserve not only the meaning of the original French but also the prose style of the author's. Naturally, this can be checked simply by anyone ready to meet the daunting task of acquiring all the necessary knowledge of 16th-century French and access to the museum's preserved copies of the original manuscripts used by the translator. Then, one could be certain of whether or not he has accomplished this successfully or not.

## Seneca

This figure is mentioned repeatedly by Montaigne throughout the book. Typically, he does this through brief quotations, here and there. Seneca is an example of men that Montaigne had learned of through the powers of education in history and the history of



ideas. He is treated by the author as though knowledge of him can be assumed or else is unnecessary with respect to making this decision.

Seneca was a Roman; he was a playwright and it is due to the tragedies that he wrote which were published that Montaigne had any chance of knowing who Seneca was. There is some possibility, thanks to the practitioners of the oral traditions, that Montaigne might have learned of the man otherwise. However, Seneca was most probably only knowable through the combined preservation and perpetuation of the Latin language and of the documents by the Christian Church - mainly in its distinctive post-Roman Catholic phase.

During the author's life, "everyone who was anyone" could read and write in Latin if he or she was literate. This fact is easily overlooked as it has ceased to be the case for generations, including those reading the book summary. While it is still true that Latin is known by some, and the Roman Catholic Church probably retains special prevalence of skills in this area today, the word has been made available to us anyways.

Seneca was Nero's teacher; hired by Nero's mother Agrippa. For those who are wondering: yes, that is the Nero who is still infamous for having danced and played a musical instrument during a massive fire that spread throughout the city of Rome. Readers can take this as a "tip" regarding the way that a strong reputation has surprising staying power.

## Lucretius

This man is known during the book because he is quoted. This ancient Roman is known to Montaigne by virtue of the written word and literacy. While self-evident, this is worth noting if only because this has not been the case for all humans, nor for all time. Lucretius is quoted, often only one sentence at a time, over the course of many essays found in the book. He is a sign of the author's education in the history of "Western Man." He is obviously referred to as a kind of "wise man." The references come along diverse topics.

Lucretius is most often quoted during the Apology to Raymond Sebond.

## Ovid

This is an ancient Grecian author of erotic poetry. In fact, the goddess Eros was nearly invented or discovered along with the poetry of Ovid. His poems were very popular. Here is a case where the tradition in which Ovid worked was actually the oral tradition, and it must be understood to be a conversion that it is possible to find written versions of his poetry. References to him are another clear sign that Montaigne was an educated man. For some reason "dropping the names of ancients" is taken as indication of initiation into literacy and into the great history of culture in the Europeans.



## Gauls

Although they are an entire tribe or nation, the Gauls are mentioned in a few places during the book. One of these choice locations is in the Essay: On the Affection of fathers. While writing about marriage, he explains that amongst the Gauls, males were expected to remain virgins until at least age 20, but still later was perfectly acceptable. While this is not the only reference to the people of Gaul, it is one of the most prominent.

## Plato

This man lived in Greece, mainly in the city of Athens way back circa 300 BC. Despite the time gap, he is renowned for the practice of philosophy and for having established an institution of higher education. As he lived 1800 years prior to Montaigne, it should come as little surprise that this highly educated Frenchman had heard of the already long famous Plato. Knowledge of this kind, passed on through the millenia enables readers of today, another few centuries into the future to have also heard of Plato, the Athenian philosopher. Plato was from the higher strata of Athenian society; this much is known. He is mentioned more than once during the book, during discussions of philosophy and ancient history.

## Aristotle

Aristotle comes up a little strangely when Montaigne is writing about marriage actually. He writes that he read or learned that Aristotle did not advise a man to marry until he had reached the maturity of his 30th year. By then, he would hopefully have enough money and the maturity needed for something like a marital relationship. Aristotle is the Macedonian philosopher who did most of his work at Athens. He is most renowned for things that Montaigne does not mention when he introduces Aristotle.

## King Henry II

King Henry II of England. This fellow is actually mentioned repeatedly during the first few hundred pages of the book. He is mainly presented in relation to political and military conditions during his reign. According to Montaigne he was an honorable leader. Little else is told of this English King.

## Marie

This is the name of the Blessed Virgin, Holy Mary Mother of God. She is brought up during essay #46 during a mysterious anecdote. Here, a young man had picked up a woman who turned out to be named Marie. Something about the situation apparently caused him to repent and to be turned religious, fervently throughout the entire rest of



his life. This is described as having been a direct consequence of meeting this particular Marie. No further explanation is given.



# Objects/Places

## Bordeaux, France

This is a city in France. It has been around for well over five centuries and has often done well as such. It has an important role in the book because it is the home town of Michel Montaigne. The family fortune was nestled there, and it is also the case that the author received his title and fortune there. He also served as the Mayor of Bordeaux. Bordeaux is the backdrop to many of the author's writings. The city is not prominent in the writings, but should be acknowledged as the scene of much of the activity.

## War Horse

These are horses especially bred, trained and used in warfare. They are described in at least one essay, mainly in terms of being "untamed" horses. They are the horses of the military cavalry. The military forces of several of the European countries have these. There are a set of limitations that involve them. How and where they can be kept in relation to any given battlefield being main ones.

## Spanish Order of Knights

This is a group of Knights belonging to the Spanish government. These are mentioned in reference to their cavalry and to the war horses that they used. Much of what has been written immediately above about the war horses was written of in reference to this particular organization.

## Fathers

These are men who have made a woman pregnant and she has lived to give birth, especially to living, growing offspring. Often enough they are married, and got their start at fatherhood during their twenties or thirties. Montaigne writes about them more than once in the first two books of Essays. He writes of fathers as of holding importance in more than one way. He writes of the role of father as being one of great love, and of its being filled with benevolent duties to one or more offspring. He writes of fatherhood from an enjoyable bias - that of the caring, and involved father. He writes of fatherhood as a role involving child rearing and protection, and probably education. He does not directly write of the mothers in the first of the cases, but asserts that fathers will assert their paternity - at least of sons irrespective of being married because of the strength of a most natural love of any and all sons. This comes across not so much as being a means of insulting women and girls, but rather as a case of a man who recalls having been a boy - a son, who may very well have at least one son. As previously mentioned, Montaigne has not presented himself as a hater of women - there are men who clearly have, so this is worth noticing.



## Vice

This is an activity that is not in the best interests of an individual or that tends to detract from the individual's personal development or betterment of his or her character. Anything that is either ethically bad, immoral and especially if it is bad for the one who does it as well, is called a vice. Vice is set opposite to virtue. Where a virtue is an admirable quality in any given individual, a vice is a quality that detracts from the person's likability. Vices are mentioned repeatedly throughout the book, often briefly within the context of a greater discussion. Deceit, smoking, avarice, or violence can all be viewed as forms of vice.

## Friendship

This is also not a thing in the usual sense. There is an entire essay devoted to it. There are multiple types of these. Montaigne writes about the kind that exclusively exists amongst men. He writes of the kind of a bit of a different nature that can be found between men and women. He writes of the special type of friendship that exists between father and son. This is a very important concept for Montaigne. It comes up in various locations of the book.

## Manuscripts

There are a few notes regarding the actual manuscripts which were used to make the book. These are not mentioned during the normal text. Editors are responsible for the notes about these. There was more than one manuscript. The most prestigious of these is known as the Bordeaux Copy. This is what it is called. It is a copy of the copious manuscript which is kept in a museum in the town of Bordeaux. Now venerable at over 400 years, the document must be vigorously protected in order for it to be preserved. Under normal conditions 400 years is long enough to turn unguarded papers to dust or for them to be washed apart by rain water.

## Robes

These ceremonial and functional items are mentioned in especial cases during the book. During essay #8 in Book 2 of Essays, robes are referred to. Here he refers to them symbolically, remarking that when they have become a burden they should be removed. He does not describe them in detail, only that they indicate certain responsibilities.

## Nightshirt

This is an item that comes up in the same essay as the robes. He writes that a man should wear one of these. He recommends this type of pajama most especially for older



men. He uses it as a literal reference but also as an emblem for a man who has grown old enough that it is best for him to hand over control of many things to someone younger. Montaigne writes that 35 year old man is normally far too young for such an act to be reasonable. At the same time, he explains that hanging onto power until well past the peak of a man's power can ruin the honor of his memory and so a man should bow out gracefully to preserve his own glory and the height of power for his people.

## **Lake Maeotis**

This is a location mentioned in a note from the editor. It is noted on page 168 during essay #36 Of the custom of wearing clothes. This is the only occasion on which it is mentioned.

## **Roman Empire**

Typically, in the course of this book, this Empire is described as "Rome." The normal reference is to some period of history centuries prior to the current one. The Roman Empire comes up in a variety of places during the book, as there are so many topics which permit allusions to it.

## **The Edge of Emperor Otho's Sword**

This is the part of the blade the Emperor sharpened on many occasions, including the night that he planned to commit suicide. While awaiting for the final details of his plans to come through, he is said to have dozed off. He snored that night and apparently he lived and continued to wield this very sword many times after that night.

## **Macedonia**

This nation is mentioned in conjunction with the King. King Perseus is mentioned in essay #44. His death is described: he was actually killed by not being allowed to sleep. This is the place where this king is referred to during the book.

## **Carthage**

This place is mentioned more than once. It is almost always described along with the Carthaginians were a very famous opponent of the more Northern Europeans.



## The Eagle

This is the name of an Inn that Montaigne and his associates stayed at during their journey towards Rome. It is only referred to in the Travel Journal as one of the places where they stayed.

## The Bear

This is the name of another Inn actually, that houses them during their travels from France all the way to Italy over land. It is described as having provided high quality accommodations. This simple animal name for a such a place is now viewed as a classic name choice.

## Gold Vase

This is another inn. The author uses it as a point of contrast. He explains that they could have stayed at the Gold Vase for the same price and then goes into depth comparing leathers used in the one to fabrics and gold used at the other.

## Germany

This is a major European nation. It is located in a central Northern location wedging it between France, the Netherlands, Austria and - when it exists, Prussia. This nation figures frequently in the book, since Montaigne writes that they find signs of German occupation, often even after the Germans have not actually been there for quite some time. This country is also in the title of the first chapter of the Travel Journal.

## Austria

Austria has the fortune of being the Southern boundary of Germany. It is blessed with mountains, and they speak German there well enough for many to be able to understand. It is not mentioned as often as Germany as its reputation is less aggressive. It is named in the first chapter of the Travel Journal as the unavoidable route to Italy from France.

## Italy

This nation serves as a destination for the travelers in this book. There are a number of baths they visit here, in addition to the thrill of being able to visit the vatican in Rome. With the healing of a millenia hardly anyone ever writes of the simple fact that at this point in history 1581 AD, Rome's Catholic Church and the city itself is all that remains in the truest sense of the Roman Empire - at least, the Western half of the Roman Empire.



# Themes

## Philosophy of Life

Montaigne writes about his life philosophy. He does not do this all at once, nor in a terribly orderly fashion. He has intentionally shared his thoughts throughout this entire book, through each of the essays, the letters and the entries into his travel logs. He believed in virtue. He was primarily a Christian. He had a Catholic father and a Jewish mother. He was raised gently and believed in kindness.

Competitiveness has its place in the philosophy of life of Montaigne. However, out of proportion, competitiveness can be unhealthy, even within teams. While Montaigne does not write about "teams per se" he does by virtue of writing about alliances. Feudalism showed the benefits and limitations of alliances. "Bottom up," and "top down" unity throughout levels of governance and dominance result in a unified system of operations. Feudalism is marked by rather severe dis-unities. This resulted in a special set of identifiable problems. The relationship between religions and politics manifested during Montaigne's life. The unity or dis-union between political leaders and their religious representatives would influence bodies of soldiers and levels of loyalty within the organization. Montaigne expressed his own beliefs and values by remaining loyal to the King of France throughout his life. He was known to be a Catholic and a political moderate. While he did have trouble in Paris, France once because of this in general this policy stood him in good stead.

Montaigne's philosophy of life was rooted in a few main factors. One of these was that he was a noble and a gentleman. He had a rather optimistic outlook on life. One reason for this was the tender nature of his upbringing. Another was that he was a thinking man - the impression he gives through his writings is that this was genuinely natural for him. Montaigne's philosophy was primarily Christian, but not absolute in every detail of this. Forgiveness, confession and devoted worship were the norm. Nurturing virtues and making progress from a lifestyle where love serves as a primary motivation for behavior was an integral part of his lifestyle.

## Kidney Stones & the Healing Powers of Water

This theme is major only during the travel journals. The author had a health problem, however much his life was pleasant otherwise. His trouble was kidney stones. Medicine during the 1500s is one of the ways in which the manner of life of the present time differs so much from what it is like today. Montaigne writes about the main therapeutic techniques known to be most effective for this type of trouble to the people of his place and time. These involved the use of water, in ways that are not customary to the mind set of people of the generations reading the book.



There were baths. These were often hot springs discovered and cherished in certain locations in France. Of these, many had been tested. While the scientific rigor of the time and place differed from how it might be applied today, people paid enough attention to notice whether or not the waters of any given spring had specific effects or not. Those that did became known for it, and it was to some of the ones said to have helped create a cure for kidney stones in the past, that Montaigne naturally tried. Evidently, he wanted to try what would work.

Another part of the treatments was to put himself under warm water. Readers may scoff because North Americans wash under warm water so frequently, that the idea of a man doing this only as a rarity for the purposes of curing a disease seems bizarre. Nevertheless, the author writes in detail about his urination and what comes out. He is passing some kind of mineral deposit on a rather frequent basis. He has a few other symptoms that he mentions, mainly feverishness which recurs.

Over time, Montaigne writes of actual or perceived success by describing how he passes a few of these 'stones.' In the event that any readers do not know, kidney stones are in fact mineral deposits that build up in the body, but they feel enormous given the perspective of what they are in and what they pass through to exit the body. Some of the waters, a great of bathing and warm showers and soaking himself seem to have helped him immensely.

## 16th Century Europe

Monsieur Montaigne's writings give a wonderful account of life in the 1500s in Europe. He was French and had a decided European outlook and bias. Bordeaux was in one of the Catholic areas of France. Naturally, those from Catholic regions will find this utterly normal, but for home grown Protestants, this can be a bit strange and possibly disconcerting. There may be strong and easily excited feelings about this. One reason, as most readers know, is the extent with which men fought about religion in Europe for a few centuries. The fighting isn't so much over as the situation has been in part worked out. The violence has been reduced in its severity for a three centuries now, and religious tolerance is flourishing and being cultivated as a survival skill in many nations of the world. This is true in the 21st century. For Montaigne, the actual full bore warfare over religious choice was at a high point. This is pointed out early on by an editor who succinctly tells readers that France was rent by civil wars over religion from the 1550s to the 1580s. Thirty years is longer when people are living it, than it is when glossed over in a book, reduced for easy referencing.

Monarchy was the dominant political system of Europe during this era. Now and then a bit of democracy would turn up - as it already had in Greece and in the Hanseatic cities of Germany. This was the exception, rather than the rule. In truth, this poses the greatest challenge to the North American psyches of today who have grown very attached to democratic representation as their form of government and governance. Some of the duties presently performed in democracies by representatives have been like that for centuries but in formations that were part of a monarchic style of

government. Montaigne just assumes monarchy and all the practices associated with a well established, flourishing aristocracy.

Feudalism is an expression of what about monarchy wasn't working well at all in Europe. This included Montaigne's era. For present day readers the most accurate perception might be to view them as different levels of government. Mysterious conditions arose when there was evident discord between levels. If a King did not support an attack by one lord upon foreign lands, and if a duke [for example] was attacked but could not get the needed support from other levels of government - then, you might end up with German occupied areas in France or Britain whilst at the very same time, having English occupation in a different region of France and the Netherlands, let alone the nearest and dearest, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. This is heavily influenced by the prevailing clerics and the religions of the leadership. Changes of reign have great significance.





# Style

## Perspective

The author is a Frenchman of the 16th century/ 1500s. He is viewed as being a French citizen although his mother is a Spaniard and a Jewess. He was a high class fellow. He explains to readers early on in the book that he was raised with gentle care. He was granted a marvelous education. During his lifetime, the European Continent was rife with feudalism. Essentially, this meant that the hierarchy of power was not fully and properly aligned. The checks and balances normally associated with different levels of government were not in place in the manner to which we are accustomed. A location might be attacked by a foreign power that it could repel without further support. If that other support never appeared, then the place might simply be subjected to foreign rule indefinitely. Likewise, lower class nobles might not refrain or desist from invading the territories of another sovereign even if their own monarch requested this. Due to this, there were some bizarre conditions - a French town might be under a German prince for example. A French or English location might have been subjected to troops from the other nation - again, often enough because a knight or a duke invaded and not a King or a Prince stopped it. During Montaigne's adult life, this manifested in the form of civil wars based upon religious differences.

Montaigne was a Catholic. These were the Roman Catholics. While this may seem to be a pointless comment, the truth is that the Christian Church only became called Roman Catholic 200 years prior to Montaigne's life; that was not always what it was called. His father was the one of his parents to have been raised RC.

Montaigne was famous for being a moderate. This may have also been the case sexually as well as politically. The reason this is suggested is that it is a well known fact that he fornicated - was sexually active without being married, and that he also spent much of his life as a married man. He is not reported to have been sexually active outside of his marriage and during it.

Montaigne does not exhibit any particular dislike of women or girls in the writings. He seems to like and respect females well enough. This is worth noting mainly because the men of his era and culture have a horrible reputation as sexist - generally lacking respect and proper knowledge or understanding of females in general and on the whole.

## Tone

The tone of the book is rather personal. This is definitely intentional. He has explained from the beginning that his purpose of the book is to make a sort of memorial so that friends and relatives of his will have something that they can access after his death. As such, he wants the writings to be accurate expressions of his very identity and personality. Given that, the way that the writings are personal may not be quite what



readers would have presumed. He does not simply recount the story of his own life, nor deliver descriptions of his own exploits. Here, what he is sharing more than anything else are his personal values.

Montaigne does an excellent job of showing how the personal and the abstract are connected. Perhaps this is because he was a high status man, or particularly well educated, or a thinking man. Whatever the reasons, all of the previous seeming highly likely, he writes on topics. He consistently shows the connections between his abstract thinking, his beliefs and events. He uses historical figures and normally offers at least one case example to help readers understand what principle he means to convey and where he has derived it.

Thanks to this, the tone is expressive and personal while at the same time retaining a level of objectivity. To some, this set of compositions will come across as rather "dry" and impersonal whereas others will find that Montaigne has found a fabulous and engrossing technique for uniting personal expression with this greater level of thought and idea. Those who love the grand scheme of things and want to view life through the filter of "the big picture" will love the tone of Montaigne's writings.

Whether planned for or not, these writings could be used as an educational work to implement a general humanities course, or for use by a private family for education. Here is a bit of politics, there a smattering of history, there is a piece of work on ethics and there again, morality and finally personal history.

## Structure

The book has an unusual structure. There is a vast set of short essays. There are also a number of entries into a travel log and there is a large set of letters. The essays are subdivided into three Books. During these, the author describes a number of things. He shares a great deal about his views on life. He makes it very enjoyable. He also shows off his education throughout these essays. By the end of it, readers will have grown to find it comfortably normal. Then, something changes.

The travel writings consist of another book. The style of the writing is not entirely different yet it is. Travel writing has its own flow. There is a set of topics for readers throughout this book. One is a sequence of descriptions of activities and events, rather like a log. Another, is of course, the author's health and his efforts to find relief and a cure for the kidney stones. He does make some headway on this, but it isn't all that easy.

After that, there are letters. These are diverse in their subject matter as well. The majority of these have one recipient, but there are several people who have received letters from Montaigne. Those preserved are viewed as precious, the majority having been long lost. These include small amounts of material like what is found in the other parts, but naturally it has the normal arrangement for a letter. As such, it is always

directed towards one specific individual. This influences what the author has written to his friend about.



## Quotes

"Finding to his delight that life was still bearable he now...had nothing to fear" (p. x).

"'That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die'...'it is philosophy that teaches us to live'" (p. xiii)  
[There were years of personal development between these two statements.]

"That's a shoemaker who can make big shoes for a small foot. They would have had him whipped in Sparta for professing a deceitful and lying art" (p. 221)

"But although they are equally vices, they are not equal vices" (p. 244).

"In my opinion he is wrong who thinks/ That an authority by power attained / Is more secure than that by friendship gained" (Terence, p. 281).

"A father is very miserable who holds his children's affection by the need they have of his help - if that is to be called affection" (p. 281).

"For each one feels his power and his needs" (p. 334).

"Lying is worse than it may seem...[it is] an accursed vice" (p.23).

"But although they are equally vices, they are not equal vices" (p.244).

"gives me pain and sorrow" (p.1045).

"Urbino, sixteen miles, a town of little distinction, on the top of a mountain of medium height, but lying in all directions according to the slopes of the place, so that there is nothing level about it, and everywhere you have to go up and down. The market was being held, for it was Saturday" (p. 977).

"He had a mind so equally versatile for all things that whatever he was doing, you would say that he was born for that one thing alone" (p. 621).

"It seems to me that the function of a servant is to represent things faithfully in their entirety just as they happened, leaving to his master the liberty to arrange, judge and choose" (p. 51).

This mishap is to be feared only in enterprises where our soul is immoderately tense with desire and respect....there is no way of recovering from this trouble...A count, a member of a distinguished family...upon getting married to a beautiful lady who had been courted by a man present at the wedding feast, had his friends very worried...[an old lady] She was fearful of these sorceries" (p.70).



"The daughter-in-law of Pythagoras used to say that the woman who goes to bed with a man should put off her modesty with her skirt and put it on again with her petticoat" (p.71).

"To compare this brotherly affection with affection for women, even though it is the result of our choice - it cannot be done" (p. 137).

"To return to my subject, it seems to me, I know not why, that no kind of mastery is due to women over men except the maternal and natural, unless it is for the punishment of those who, by some feverish humour, have voluntarily submitted to them" (p.291).

"The art, the reason, the force of the conclusion of this one are the same as in the other; yet there we are, stuck in the mud" (p.392).

"He kept a tighter rein on his soldiers, and drew them up shorter, when they were near the enemy" (p.561).

"The outcome often justifies very inept management. Our intervention is little more than a routine, and more commonly a calculation of usage and example than of reason" (p.713)



# Topics for Discussion

What is feudalism given the perspective of this book?

What year was Michel Montaigne born?

What tainted Michel Montaigne's time as the Mayor of Bordeaux?

Which is your favorite part of the book and why?

What is a kidney stone? Why was it a serious issue in Montaigne's time?

Describe the first toothpaste.

What do you think about Montaigne's traveling secretary?

Do you like how much Montaigne wrote in a way that showed his knowledge of history?  
Defend your answer.

Who is this Seneca and why is he so important? [Differentiate this one from the Native North American Haudensaunee man Seneca.]

Do you think it was a good idea of Montaigne's - to write the remembrance book?  
Support your answer.