

# **Here Is New York Study Guide**

**Here Is New York by E. B. White**

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## Plot Summary

E. B. White's book, "Here is New York", gives a detailed description of parts of New York and the difference between the New York of 1948 and the New York that White first visited when he was a young man starting out writing. While White is quick to describe many parts of New York that he doesn't approve of, he has a clear place for New York in his heart and stands by the city to defend it.

E. B. White's book is given an introduction by his stepson, Roger Angell, describing the circumstances preceding the writing of "Here is New York" and what he believes would be White's reaction to the city at a more modern day. Angell states that he thinks that a lot of the reason that White decided to come to New York from his home in Maine and write the piece for the New York magazine, *Holiday*, had to do with the fact that Roger worked there and White wanted to help him out.

White starts out explaining to the reader that it is impossible for the book to be current when it's printed because New York is an ever changing place but at the same time a place that never changes. E. B. describes New York and the ability to be close to so much and so separated from it all at the same time. He also takes time to explain to the reader the amount of people in the city and the different ethnic, and religious aspects that all those people bring. E. B. states at one point "It is a miracle that New York works at all." referring to the fact that there is so much in such a small area.

He describes that nothing is like New York because it is the loftiest cities. E. B. has a lot to say about New York that is positive, but a lot to say about the city that makes it sound like there are a lot of problems. It becomes unclear what his stance is on the city in its current position until the reader gets to the last of the story. E. B. stands by New York and the belief that this city is capable of leaving its citizens with something more than any city in the world can give. E. B. states that New York has a way of giving its citizens the feeling of belonging to something great. A whole world contained inside one city. It becomes clear to the reader that the city of New York holds a special place in his heart although he does state that it is a place to visit but not a place to live.



# Page 1-29

## Page 1-29 Summary and Analysis

E. B. White's book, "Here is New York", gives a detailed description of parts of New York and the difference between the New York of 1948 and the New York that White first visited when he was a young man starting out writing. While White is quick to describe many parts of New York that he doesn't approve of, he has a clear place for New York in his heart and stands by the city to defend it.

The introduction to E. B. White's "Here is New York" was written by Roger Angell, who was White's stepson. Angell explains about time in which White wrote about New York and how things have changed. White himself had things in his story that had already changed when it was published but didn't want to change it for the reader. He wanted the reader to do that himself. Angell was working for the Holiday magazine that was going to show White's article, and he states that he believes this was a great deal of the reason that White agreed to do it.

At the time that White wrote "Here is New York", he had already moved away from the town. He describes it the way that he sees it now and the way that he saw it back then. He starts off by explaining that something one gets from New York is a gift of both loneliness and privacy whether one wants them or not. People who come to New York are looking for sanctuary or fulfillment, or some type of grail for their personal life. White goes on to describe the art, commerce, sport, religion, and entertainment that are all found in New York. Regardless of one's desire to be an evangelist, a promoter, actor, or merchant, New York holds the key to all these things. While White explains that New York gives a person privacy, he explains further that it also gives participation along with it. White describes the kind of people that live in New York; in the old days there were only a few inches that separated people. White recalls a time he was sitting in a dinner only a few inches away from Fred Stone, who White had seen in "The Wizard of Oz".

White explains that there are all kinds of things in New York that a person can attend or take part of. White says that the opportunities for a person to have variety and things to suddenly change are innumerable. He explains that in New York, one can change anything one wants simply by moving a few steps. He attributes this to the amount of diversity that is found in the city.

Having explained the things that there are to do in New York, White goes on to tell about the type of people that live in the city. He states that there are three kinds. The first kind are the ones who were born there, next are the people who move there but have lived most of their lives somewhere else, and the last are the people who commute. White attributes the passion in the city of New York to the people who move there to settle. He claims that they are the ones that come wanting something and have a fire in their hearts. He does give credit to the commuters for giving the city its restlessness and claims the native born give it its solidity.



Angell describes his stepfather, and it appears that he deeply cared for the man. It also appears that White was somewhat unsure about the way that things had changed in the city since he was small. Angell states that he is glad that White can't see it now for what it has turned into.

White spends some time explaining that he isn't going to bring his article "down to date"; meaning, things have changed since he wrote the work and it's up to the reader to differentiate and make the necessary mental changes. It seems an odd choice of words to choose, since the saying is bring it "up to date." It appears that White may have used those words to indicate he didn't feel like the changes that had been made in New York were all steps upward. White didn't live in New York at the time that he wrote this piece for the magazine paper, but the reader can see that White had still cared for the city in some respect, despite its changes. He even makes mention of sitting close to an actor from the Wizard of Oz. That movie has been a happy memory for thousands of people and it seems to have had a spot for White as well.

White talks about the people that one used to see in New York, and the fact that now when someone goes to New York, one sees about the same things there that one would anywhere else because of TV. He claims it's lost some of its charm in that respect. White died in 1985, and it's clear that the changes that were happening then haven't slowed down. The reader can see that the book appears to be much in date, with the exception of sites that are to be seen. White even makes a note of crime going on in the city.



## Page 29-58

### Page 29-58 Summary and Analysis

White compares the city to poetry that has been put to music. While White is looking at New York as a whole, a great deal of this description is for Manhattan. White describes Manhattan as a place that has the largest human concentration in the world. White says that the true meaning of Manhattan will always remain elusive. He states that it forces all different kinds of life in with each other. White admits that New York is not like any other place one could name. It is not like Paris, or Detroit, and he claims it to be the loftiest city there is. White talks about the Empire State Building and the fact that New York put up the highest peak at the worst point in the Great Depression. He says that the city had no choice but to begin building skyward because of the growth that they had sustained and the lack of room side to side. White explains that the city is congested at times and crowded, but that summer travelers will come from worlds away just to see the wonder that New York has to offer.

While he is describing New York, White admits that it is amazing that the city works or sustains itself. He describes things that are outlandish when one considers how many millions of people in New York are doing those things everyday. He talks about the pneumatic tubes that take messages from one place to another, and the subterranean lines and pipes that trail under the city that make electricity, water, and telephones possible. Thousands and thousands of people use the lines every day, and the lines continue to work flawlessly. He talks about the fact that New York should have destroyed itself many years ago if for no other reason than from the sheer number of people. White accuses the people in the city of New York as escaping hysteria by only a narrow margin.

White is able to name and list off reasons that the city is unstable and should have rotted away or destroyed itself, but then goes on to say that the city does give its citizens a feeling of belonging to something that is like no other place or society in the world. White explains that the feeling that the citizens get from the city is the same as a big dose of vitamins.

White explains what it is like to visit New York if a person is not from there and the things that will happen that person won't understand, like some world that has its own etiquette and customs. He says that in New York a person will have trouble understanding the waiter, will ride the wrong subway, and will get slapped by a bus driver for a seemingly innocent question. White quotes a piece that talks about how wonderful New York is but the person would hate to live there. He admits that while many people will love the city, there will be those that come expecting something from the city but won't get it. They will be the couple sitting in a cafe or a restaurant quietly eating their meal. White describes the neighborhoods in the city. He says that each one is almost like a community within itself and when you step off the bus, before you make



it to your apartment, you have gotten your paper, dry cleaning, shopping and anything else you needed in just a short walk.

Reminiscing about his past, White discusses the things that put him in awe living in New York as a young struggling writer, and all the things that are there for people that want to find them. While White is taking in the sites of the city he once lived in, he hears conversations going on between young couples, hears the music from the different point in the streets, and the familiar sounds of the boats and traffic. White takes a moment to talk about the different kinds of neighborhoods, from the rich and lofty to the ones that have drunkards sleeping on the summer streets. White names off all the different types of people found in New York and how they all live together.

White gives numbers of the citizens of New York to each race he is able to name and each nationality with the understanding that many of those nationalities may have illegal citizens that don't want to appear on a census. He talks about Jews, blacks, Russians, Puerto Ricans, Romanians, Austrians, Asians, and the list goes on. He gives New York credit for the fact that with all these different sections of New York, they are able to coexist in one city. White claims that if the city stopped its tolerance even for one day, the whole city would explode and there would be nothing short of a miracle that could mend it.

White talks about the things that have changed in the years since he was a boy, such as the elevated railways that were pulled down and the changes that have been made to Broadway. Greenwich Village is still there, but much of it's look and feel has changed to E. B. White in the years since he first saw it. Grand Central became a honky-tonk in White's opinion. He remembers living in Grand Central Terminal when he was younger as he no where else to live. The large mansions that covered the city when E. B. first arrived are beginning to be removed and are fewer than he remembers, and the number of newspapers are fewer than they were. Police patrol in cars instead of walking the streets like gumshoes swinging their sticks, and even the parades have changed. White says the most disturbing change that has occurred to the city is its vulnerability. White describes the city as being destructible in its current state. White states that a small group of planes could fly into the city and crumble bridges, burn the towers, or destroy any number of other targets and would successfully destroy millions of people.

The reader will see that White describes the city in both good and bad terms. It appears that he is not mistaken about the fact that the city has many faults but that the city has a lot of good left to it. The reader also sees that White seems to feel more distant from New York since he no longer lives there. It is as if he is looking back at things and realizing they are much different than they were.

White describes New York as a city that both changes and is changeless. It would appear that the part that changes is the part that White seemed more eager to depict as the bad part of the city. He says that an old-timer would miss certain things that aren't there now but had been years ago. It would make the reader think that White is talking about himself as an old-timer and the things that he is noticing missing. He doesn't



appear to be writing about things that he himself had anything to do with, but things that were a part of his youth and memories.

White's description of the city has changed in some respects since he has written the story. He talks in the book about the couple that sends a message to each other through a pneumatic tube and how quickly it gets there. Current couples would use a cell phone or email. There are other things in White's descriptions that make the reader realize how much it has changed, but the overall description of New York is exactly the same as it was, such as the bustling city streets and the people that go there so that they can have a shot at the big time, whether it is writing or dancing, singing, or even becoming a stylist. The city still seems to hold the glittering star lights that called E. B. White to its streets so many years ago.





# Characters

## E. B. White

E. B. White was a writer. In the summer of 1948, he was asked to come to New York to write an essay. He agreed to come, and his stepson suspects it may have been to help him just as much as because White wanted to. E. B. White describes New York in both past and present terms in the book, and with it is able to give a description of himself as well.

White describes the places that he used to go to and the things that used to be along the way. The present description that he gives shows him yearning for something. He used to live in New York, and the reader sees that he spends much of the book watching and listening to those around him and doesn't participate much. He is an outsider looking in on the city.

E. B. White came to New York for the first time to live as a young struggling writer. He describes living in the same city with many of the people that he admired and wanted to be like. He also describes the other people that come to the feeling with the same feeling. The feelings that he had when he returned to the city to write this book were much different.

## Roger Angel

Roger Angel is a fiction writer in New York, and the stepson of E. B. White. Roger has a fondness for his stepfather that the reader sees displayed in the description that is given of E. B. White. Roger's boss, Ted Patrick, is the one who asked White to come and write the piece for the New York magazine. He told White it might be fun. Roger states that after he said that, his stepfather almost refused to come, stating that writing was never fun.

Roger Angel doesn't say when his mother married White, but it's clear that he respected the man and strove to be like him in many ways. He explains in the book that he believes much of the reason that E. B. came to write for the New York magazine was to help out his stepson, as Roger was working for the magazine at the time. Roger became a writer, much like E. B. White, and followed in his footsteps in many other ways. The words that Roger Angell wrote as the introduction to E. B. White's "Here is New York" take up almost half the book and convey what he would do with White if he were still alive today.



## **Waiter**

The waiter was a young man who waited on E. B. White and also waited on a film star at the same time. The two spend time discussing how New York is the only place that things like that happen casually.

## **Ted Patrick**

Editor that asked E. B. White to leave his home and come write "Here is New York."

## **Katharine White**

Wife of E. B. White and mother to Roger Angell.

## **Fred Stone**

Sat eighteen inches away from E. B. White in a cafe. Was in "The Wizard of Oz."

## **Young Intellectual Man**

The young intellectual man is trying to talk a girl into coming to live with him while E. B. White listens in on their conversation in a ex-speakeasy on East 53rd Street.

## **Giants**

The Giants are the authors and writers that E. B. White looked up to when he first came to New York. He explains that all the actors, singers, and other dreamers have their own giants that people look to when they come to New York.

## **Commuters**

They are people that live outside New York and travel there to work. They give the city its restlessness.

## **Natives**

The people that are born and bred in New York. These people give the city its solidity and continuity.

## Settlers

These people are from far away and have come to New York to make it big and have dreams and ambitions. They are the ones that give New York it's passion.



# Objects/Places

## New York

New York is the place that E. B. writes the book about. He went there, many years earlier, to start his writing career. White describes the state of New York from his youth as compared to the New York of the current date when he was writing.

## North Brooklin, Main

The place where E. B. White lived at the time that he wrote "Here is New York". White and his family had moved away from there years before, but White still remembers the place and what it had looked like and what had and hadn't changed.

## Holiday

A magazine in New York that asked E. B. White to come and write a piece for their publication. This was the magazine that published "Here is New York." This is also the magazine that his stepson works for.

## The Empire State Building

The building that was put up as the highest point during the Great Depression. White describes the building and the circumstances that surrounded the nation during the time it was built. These circumstances lead White to describe it as being that much more marvelous.

## Loneliness and Privacy

The gifts that New York bestows upon every person. White says that every person will have loneliness and privacy even if they don't want it. He describes the good and the bad that come with this gift.

## Manhattan

A place in New York that White spends a great deal of time describing. It had changed a lot since White's younger days, but much of it had remained the same. White seems to long to be there, but sad at the same time over the differences in the place that holds his memories.



## **Metropolitan Opera**

Place where E. B. White used to usher. He describes the patrons of the opera and the differences between the two different times of the Metropolitan Opera.

## **Brooklyn Bridge**

Bridge that E. B. White visits and describes in his book. He views this bridge in connection with the people that are traveling on it as well as sightseeing.

## **Mall in Central Park**

Place where White goes to hear a band. Here White spends time reflecting on sounds and sights that have changed. A lot of what changes in the park can't be seen by White, but he notices the sounds are different.

## **Grand Central Terminal**

A place, where at one point White lived because he had no where else to reside. He refers to it as a type of place that people would have gone at one point in time to party.



# Themes

## The Desire for the Past

E. B. White wrote the book in the year 1948, and the reader can see that there are many things about the city that White seems to miss. Things that were once there and now gone. His stepson, Roger Angell, notes in the book that if White were still alive today, he believes White would not like what has become of New York.

There is something to be said for the change that has to happen in society. But no matter what it is that changes, there will be memories of the past that for some reason one will miss. Even if it has nothing to do with our lives. White makes a note in the story referring to an "old-timer". It is possible that he was simply using a metaphor, but it seems that White may have been alluding to the fact that there are things that have changed so much in the city that he himself misses them. The "old-timer" in the story walks past a railroad and misses the sounds that came from the train. No where does it say that the railroad had employed the man or he had been on trains, but simply that he knew that the familiar sound was missing. It is often true of people that smells, sounds, sights, and objects create happy memories of things from one's past. White seem to be looking around at all the things he remembered from his first days in New York as a young man, and sees them missing, as if a part of his life were perhaps gone as well.

## Civic Pride

It becomes obvious to the reader that E. B. White saw both good and bad in New York. He compares the city's attributes to its flaws. No matter what he has bad to say about the city, and there is plenty, he notes that the city is a sound beacon that should always stand where it is.

White describes the crime that is in the papers, the sheer number of people that live crammed in such a small area, and he tells about the frustrations that come with living in New York. White doesn't take much time to sugar coat things and leaves the reader feeling that there may be some real problems in the city. He follows up with the fact that New York gives innumerable things to its citizens that makes it a treasure all its own. White states that in New York, its citizens are able to have a sense of belonging to something unique. The fact that the people there are so integrated and feel as if they are a part of an intricate design causes pride that at times is hard to be found. It doesn't mean that everyone lives in harmony, as White points out, but that everyone pulls together for the good of the city, a bond that can't easily be broken.

## The Importance of Memories

Memories can be associated with smell, sight, touch and at times something that can't even be named. "Here is New York" is one of those books that describes moments



where everything in the city reminds E. B. White of something from when he was starting out his writing career in New York. He describes familiar sights that he visits the city looking for.

White also describes what happens when he, and other people, get to a place in the city and suddenly realize something is missing. Sights and sounds change and things that were once steady and always there are suddenly missing. The memories can cause sadness, but White never reveals whether they do or not. Memories are what connects people to a place and a time and gives people a sense of belonging. The reader sees that White doesn't seem to fit into the New York he is now visiting. He has been away so long that the place and time he was a part of has moved on and taken up the spot that he occupied. All he has left are the memories of the world that he held so dear.

# Style

## Perspective

The perspective is written in first person with an omniscient point of view. The story is written from the point of view of E. B. White while he tours New York. There are times when someone says something in the book, but with little dialog and no other characters, the only person one needs to understand is E. B. White. The perspective is also present tense with comparisons to the past. The author also incorporates brief instances of "what if" into the story describing things that could happen to the city in the future. White seems to be almost depressed in his descriptions at several points in the book, but at other moments it is clear to the reader that White is reliving his glory days on the streets of New York describing his old home.

The author distances himself from the other people that he comes into contact with, but the reader is given a lot of detail about thought and feelings that come from the author. The reader gets a feel for what the author is experiencing, and the piece is overall very easy to follow. There is an introduction at the front written by E. B. White's stepson, Roger Angell. His perspective is also omniscient to himself and first person, with speculation as to what E. B. White would think and say if he were still alive today.

## Tone

The book is written in a fluid manner with modern writing for the 1940s when the piece was written. There have been little changes to the English language since this time, so there will not be many places in the book where the reader has difficulty. The author is someone that seems to be objective at the beginning in his thinking, pointing out both the good and the bad about New York, but ultimately is partial to New York and stands firm in the end that New York must always stand as a symbol to the rest of the world. Since the author also has moments where he is talking about things that he dislikes about the way the city has turned out, he can become combative in his wording at times.

The story is a true one and written from the author's point of view, so the writing is that of a professional writer who has expanded his vocabulary; however, most readers should be able to pick up on the meanings as the words are not difficult. Also, the context of the sentence should clear up any uncertainty that the reader may have. The author uses many facts in the descriptions that he gives, but much of it is also his personal opinion. The city is compared to a poem, and the things New York gives a person are said to be loneliness and privacy. There are numbers, dates, facts, and subjects in the story that will be irrefutable, but much of it was left up to create writing.



## Structure

The structure of the book is very basic. The book is fifty-eight pages long with an introduction at the front of the book done by White's stepson, Roger Angell. The introduction lasts until page fifteen, at which point there is a one page foreword and a picture of E. B. White. Here is New York doesn't start until page nineteen. The book doesn't have any chapters or sections that are signified by any marks. There are paragraphs that separate different thoughts, and occasionally when White is beginning a different piece in his depiction of New York, he will leave a large space as a break in the story.

The structure of the story is easy to follow and has a steady flow to the reader once one becomes familiar with the standard. It is a book that will be an enjoyable read and it will go quite quickly once started. There are also small inserts at the back and front of the book to tell more about E. B. White, his life and death, and his stepson's career and brief critiques of the work by other authors.



## Quotes

"He told me that Patrick's letter, offering the assignment, had begun with the thought that he might 'have fun' writing about New York, and he wanted me to tell him that the project had almost foundered right there. 'Writing is never 'fun,' he said ominously." p. 9

"To bring New York down to date, a man would have to be published with the speed of light—and not even Harper is that quick." p. 17

"No one should come to New York to live unless he is willing to be lucky." p. 19

"New York is nothing like Paris; it is nothing like London; and it is not Spokane multiplied by sixty, or Detroit multiplied by four. It is by all odds the loftiest of cities." p. 30

"Mass hysteria is a terrible force, yet New Yorkers seem always to escape it by some tiny margin: they sit in stalled subways without claustrophobia, they extricate themselves from panic situations by some lucky wisecrack, they meet confusion and congestion with patience, and grit—a sort of perpetual muddling through." pp. 32-33

"The city is always full of young worshipful beginners—young actors, young aspiring poets, ballerinas, painters, reporters, singers—each depending on his own brand of tonic to stay alive, each with his own stable of giants." p. 38

"This is not so much personal menace as universal—the cold menace of unresolved human suffering poverty and the advanced stages of the disease alcoholism." p. 44

"Women push baby carriages in and out among the dancers, as though to exhibit what dancing leads to at last." p. 45

"The collision and the intermingling of these millions of foreign-born people representing so many races and creeds make New York a permanent exhibit of the phenomenon of one world." p. 47

"The normal frustrations of modern life are here multiplied and amplified—a single run of a cross-town bus contains, for the driver, enough frustration and annoyance to carry him over the edge of sanity: the light that changes always an instant too soon, the passenger that bangs on the shut door, the truck that blocks the only opening, the coin that slips to the floor, the question asked at the wrong moment." p. 52

"The subtlest change in New York is something people don't speak much about but that is in everyone's mind. The city, for the first time in its long history, is destructible." p. 54

"If it were to go, all would go—this city, this mischievous and marvelous monument which not to look upon would be like death." p. 56



## Topics for Discussion

From what you have read do you think that E. B. misses the way that New York was? Why?

Do you think that the "old-timer" who misses the sound of the train could have been a description of White himself, or just a generalization? What makes you think so?

What similarities do you see between the New York that White describes in the book and the one that we know of today?

What are the main differences that are seen between the New York of the '40s and the modern one?

Describe what you think that White meant when he said "It's a miracle that New York works at all. The whole thing is implausible." Do you think he was right?

E. B. White states that "The city has to be tolerant, otherwise it would explode in a radioactive cloud of hate and rancor and bigotry." Do you think that New York was more tolerant than other places in the world at that time? Does White tell anything in his book that makes you believe one way or the other?

E. B. White has a lot of descriptions and perspectives on what New York is like at this point in time. Pick one word to describe his overall feeling during the book. List at least two places in the book that support your decision.