Study Guide for The Sun Also Rises

Following are questions on literary elements (character, setting, plot, theme, point of view) and language elements (diction, syntax, metaphorical language, tone, structure). Note that, at times, there are several questions within a question. Explain responses in detail, using a balance of your analysis and specifics (explicit and/or implicit) from the text, on separate paper. Cite properly as you blend “bits” to prove. EXAMPLE: This is evident when Jake realizes, “It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing,” highlighting his insecurities (47). Note that for some questions, you have to read the whole novel in order to answer fully. I suggest that you jot thoughts and page numbers as you read.

1. One of Hemingway’s original titles for the book was The Lost Generation (see Context on opposite side). In what ways are the people in the novel lost? In the text, is being “lost” positive or negative, in your opinion? Explain your response.

2. What do we learn about Jake’s insecurities and conceptions of masculinity throughout the text?

3. Compare/contrast Jake’s relationship to Brett with Cohn’s relationship to Frances. For example, compare how each man treats and is treated by the women. Why do you think the women act as they do in these relationships?

4. Compare/contrast Jake and Cohn. In what ways are they like/unlike the rest of their friends? In what ways are they both outsiders?

5. In what ways is Count Mippipopolous like/unlike Jake and his friends? What do you think the Count means by “values”? Why does Brett say the Count is “dead”? What sort of “values” does Jake have? Do you think he sticks to them?

6. Discuss the role of religion in both Jake and Brett’s lives using specifics in the text.

7. Why do you think Cohn is verbally abused so often? Why does Mike attack Cohn but not Jake, whom Brett may actually “love”? Why does Cohn accept so much abuse? Why does he finally lash out?

8. Do you find Lady Brett Ashley to be a sympathetic character? Why/why not? In what ways is her treatment of her male friends justified or unjustified? What appeal does Brett have for men, beyond the obvious?

9. Read closely and analyze one of the longer passages in which Hemingway describes bulls or bullfighting. What sort of language does he use? Does the passage have symbolic possibilities? How is his writing in these passages different from the rest of the novel? If the bull fighting passages do not advance the plot, how do they function to develop meaning/theme(s)?

10. Analyze the novel in the context of World War I. How does the experience of war shape the characters and their behavior? Examine the differences between the veterans - Jake and Bill - and the non-veterans - Cohn and Romero.
11. Discuss the problem of communication in the text. Why is it so difficult for many of the characters to speak frankly and honestly? In what circumstances is it possible for them to speak openly? Which characters say what is on their mind, and how are these characters similar to each other? Choose particular characters to discuss clearly.

12. What does each of Jake’s friends suggest about Jake’s personality? Choose any three and detail each character’s interaction with or perspective on Jake.

13. Is Jake a reliable narrator? How does this point of view affect the reader’s perspective of other characters? Explain your response with at least two specifics from the text.

14. Does Hemingway have hope for any of the characters? Explain.

15. In your own words, describe Hemingway’s style. I am not necessarily looking for expert terminology here (although you could use the AP terms packet). Imagine you are describing how Hemingway writes to a friend of yours. Choose a particular passage (other than the previous bullfighting scene) from the text to use as a reference in your response.

The Lost Generation (Context)
During the 1920's a group of writers known as "The Lost Generation" gained popularity. The term "the lost generation" was coined by writer, Gertrude Stein, who was living in France at the time, and is rumored to have heard her auto-mechanic say that his young workers were, "une generation perdue." This literally referred to the young workers' poor auto-mechanic repair skills, but Gertrude Stein would take this phrase and use it to describe the disillusioned people of the 1920's who rejected American post World War I values.

The "Lost Generation" defines a sense of moral loss or aimlessness apparent in literary figures during the 1920s. World War I seemingly destroyed the idea that if you acted virtuously, good things would happen. Many good, young men went to war and died, or returned home either physically or mentally wounded (or both), and their faith in the moral guideposts that had earlier given them hope, were no longer valid...they were "lost." Many of the writers became “expatriates,” most moving to Paris, the apex of cultural civilization at the time.

The best known writers among The Lost Generation are F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, TS Eliot, Ezra Pound, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, HL Mencken, and Ford Maddox Ford. Ernest Hemingway, perhaps the leading American literary figure of the decade, would take Stein's phrase, and use it as an epigraph for his first novel, The Sun Also Rises. Because of this novel's popularity, the term, "The Lost Generation" has endured and is associated with writers, musicians, and artists of the period.

The novels produced by the writers of the Lost Generation give insight to the lifestyles that people led during the 1920's in America and often criticized American culture through themes of self-exile, indulgence, care-free existence, and spiritual alienation. For instance, in The Great Gatsby, the illusion of happiness hides a sad loneliness and a dangerous carelessness.

Hemingway's novels pioneered a new style of writing which many generations after tried to imitate. Hemingway did away with the florid prose of the 19th century Victorian era and replaced it with a lean, clear prose based on action and dialogue. He also employed a technique by which he left out essential information of the story in the belief that omission can sometimes strengthen the plot and the characters. His language is isolate and mirrors the plight of some of his characters.