

## Chapter 1 : Life and Times of Michael K Summary & Study Guide

*Life & Times of Michael K* is a novel by South African-born writer J. M. Coetzee. The novel won the Booker Prize. The novel is a story of a man named Michael K, who makes an arduous journey from Cape Town to his mother's rural birthplace, amid a fictitious civil war during the apartheid era, in the 1950s.

Plot summary[ edit ] The novel is split into three parts. The novel begins with Michael K, a poor man with a cleft lip who has spent his childhood in institutions and works as a gardener in Cape Town. Michael tends to his mother who works as a domestic servant to a wealthy family. Michael decides to quit his job and escape the city to return his mother to her birthplace, which she says was Prince Albert. Michael finds himself unable to obtain the proper permits for travel out of the city so he builds a shoddy rickshaw to carry his mother, and they go on their way. Along the way, though, he is detained for not having the required travel papers, thus being assigned to work detail on a railway track. After his job on the railway track is finished, Michael makes his way to the farm his mother spoke of on Prince Albert. The farm is abandoned and desolate. Soon, Michael discovers how to live off the land. However, when one of the relatives of the real owners of the farm arrives, he treats Michael like a servant. Michael dislikes this treatment so he escapes up into the mountains. In the mountains, Michael goes through a period of starvation while he becomes aware of his surroundings. In his malnourished state he finds his way down to a town where he is picked up by the police and is sent to work on a work camp. Here, Michael meets a man named Robert. Robert explains that the workers in the camp are exploited for cheap labor by the townspeople. Eventually, there is an attack on Prince Albert and the workers of the camp are blamed. The local police captain takes over and Michael escapes. Michael finds his way back to the farm but soon feels claustrophobic within the house. Therefore, he builds a shelter in the open where he is able to watch his garden. Rebels come out of the mountains and use his garden. Although Michael is angered by this he stays in hiding. Michael becomes malnourished and delirious again because he has not come out of hiding. He is found by some soldiers and is taken to a rehabilitation camp in Cape Town. It is here that Michael is identified as "CM," an abbreviation most likely signifying "colored male. Michael becomes very sick and delirious because he refuses to eat. However, Michael escapes on his own. Upon his escape, Michael meets with a group of nomadic people who feed him and introduce him to a woman who has sex with him; later we see him attracted to women for the first time. He returns to the apartment where he and his mother lived in Cape Town, the same apartment and city he had tried to escape some time ago. Michael reflects on the garden he made in Prince Albert. Some commentators notice a connection between the character Michael K and the protagonist Josef K. The book also bears many references to Kafka, and it is believed, "K" is a tribute to Kafka. But K is also dedicated to being true to his beliefs. And when she dies along the way, K continues to show his dedication by carrying her ashes all the way to Prince Albert so she can finally be home. When K is institutionalized he becomes a gardener, where he learns to enjoy isolation and the freedom it grants him. But when his freedom is encroached on, K flees even further from society, maintaining his freewill. In the mountains he understands how he wants to live his life, which involves only eating food he has grown from the Earth. Anna put K into a government institution and ignored him until she had no one else to turn to because of her health. Though she seems to have been uncaring and absent during his childhood, K shows his unconditional love for her by taking care of her until her death. Anna lived her life in fear: The medical officer was the only one of the staff at the hospital to realize K is an innocent civilian, being unfairly treated for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The medical officer becomes fascinated by K and his childish nature and his reasons for not eating. The medical officer originally thinks K wants to kill himself "hence his reason for not eating" but he comes to understand that K does want to live, just on his own terms. This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. February Learn how and when to remove this template message The value of human life[ edit ] Michael K is often seen as a parasite, or unskilled worker throughout this book. At times he purposely acts dumb, like not speaking, because he knows he can get away with it. However, Michael knows that he still has a purpose in this world but it takes him the

whole book to discover what that purpose is. He spends his time living off the land one day at a time. The goal of his journey is not to find his purpose but to assist his mother and fulfill her wishes, what he believed to be his original purpose in life. Michael happens to stumble upon his gardening skills by doing what he had to for survival. He believes that, "A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living. He is held within the matrix of this relationship, and having never learned to engage with the world outside, expresses great distress whenever challenged to do so. The medical officer sums up this relationship, writing to Michael, "[ Time[ edit ] In the conclusion, Michael ponders whether the moral of his story is "that there is enough time for everything. The book ends with a metaphor: These tend, based on flimsy or non-existent evidence, to accuse K and other people of various crimes such as theft or sabotage, while themselves performing corresponding acts of aggression with impunity. K is also more than once drafted into forced labour and placed in camps that vaguely resemble concentration camps. The inmates are given food, but eventually K rejects it. This appears to be a passive resistance to internment and arbitrary authority, though K may be only vaguely aware of his motives. He grows weaker and weaker until he finally escapes. Later on he is taken to a hospital instead, because he is too weak to work. He is better treated here, but nevertheless again refuses to eat and escapes. He does not evince much interest in the war, except as the soldiers pose a threat to him, from which he must hide or risk repeated internment or violence. Race[ edit ] The story, which takes place during the apartheid regime and related racial conflicts, makes a reference to race, specifically, that there is a war "so that minorities can have a say in their own destinies". This line, spoken by a character in the hospital Michael stays in, implies Michael interacts with soldiers in the white side of a war between races in South Africa. It is also implied at various points that this side is losing the war. However, we are not told what race other characters belong to, nor are there any references to race politics or confrontations or any racial slurs in the dialogue.

**Chapter 2 : An analysis of Michael K in Coetzee's 'Life and time of Michael K' | Literary Articles**

*Life & Times of Michael K is a novel by South African-born writer J. M. Coetzee. The novel won the Booker Prize for The novel is a story of a man named Michael K, who makes an arduous journey from Cape Town to his mother's rural birthplace, amid a fictitious civil war during the apartheid era, in the s.*

Coercion to Speak in J. They want to hear about all the cages I have lived in, as if I were a budgie or a white mouse or a monkey. Set against the background of the South African police state as it attempted to maintain apartheid by any means, the plot unfolds as a relentless dissection of the logic of oppression. Michael K, a withdrawn and inarticulate gardener, sets out to take his dying mother back to their village in the country. He becomes ensnared in the incomprehensible and undeclared civil war, struggles to scratch out a refuge with his limited resources, and dares to want his share of ground. The precise, understated language underscores that Michael K is an Everyman for this bleak twentieth century. The effect of South Africa under apartheid was to turn what remained of the liberal dreams of virtue and of civic freedom into a nightmare. Not least among the perversions was the debasing of the value of one of the essential premises of English liberalism: The hope of British politics had been that as long as citizens could publish opinions and criticism, all would eventually be well with the Commonwealth. By the early eighteenth century, the rules for polite conversation were virtually indistinguishable from a political ideology advocating a community in which free citizens would participate as equals in an ongoing conversation. The art of conversation would simultaneously train its participants in democratic behavior and confirm that such behavior was legitimate. But in the movement from the center to the colonized margins, the freedom to speak underwent a transformation. Instead of the conversation of equals, dialogue in the imperial context becomes ensnared in the unequal distribution of power and wealth. The final part will address the implications of the coercion to speak for the writer Coetzee. Even the non-famous could thereby be ascribed a personality, a subjectivity. But Michael K declines to tell his story: Even in encounters with the few decent human beings in the novel, he remains silent or at best taciturn. The man who shares his food in the hospital yard talks spontaneously about his own problems, but Michael K says nothing: The normal condition whereby inner emotions well up and out into a personal narration is somehow unavailable to him. On the occasion when he wants to talk to the family of the kind stranger, words fail him. He has thoughts, memories, longings, but all remain blocked from utterance by a silence that embarrasses sympathetic listeners: Another mistaken conclusion would be that his harelip is a speech impediment. Barbara Eckstein has argued that the harelip both affects and represents language: Nor is Eckstein correct in arguing that it is the harelip that stigmatizes Michael K in the eyes of the oppressors: Michael K is not physically unable to utter sounds, but rather he has systematically been schooled into silence. This education began when his mother, because of her anxieties about having given birth to an imperfect child, isolated him from the community. Unable to succeed in the public school system, he was sent to an institution that aspired to do charitable work with handicapped children but in reality conformed to the procedures of discipline and punishment. Even though silenced, Michael K is able to think out for and to himself what the Huis Norenus has meant in his life. The discipline of silence forbade all personal or private conversation. The children were not permitted to speak to the institution except in response to specific questions, never articulating personal concerns. In the classroom, they were compelled to give correct answers to abstract problems largely irrelevant to their lives L Silence or the correct answer: But giving the answer to an arithmetic problem does not teach anyone to tell their own story. The answer leaves behind in unspoken silence the frantic struggle to solve the problem, the cold sweat of the palms, fearing the teacher-examiner, the bafflement of a human being confronting random exercises of power. Having never learned how to talk about himself, Michael K finds it virtually impossible to construct a narrative that would reveal the meaning of his life. The words were eaten up, the gap remained, his was always a story with a hole in it: The gap is present even in the privacy of inner thoughts, because all narration has been contaminated with the violence of the institution. However, that does not mean that the respondents are left in peace. The institution has the power to force them to make utterances, to repeat and to echo the one correct answer. This moment of coercion then remains as the unarticulated

accompaniment of every attempt to speak. Because it represents the quotidian experience of an ordinary person from the margin, his story might captivate the readers in London or New York; it will hardly be worth telling in Johannesburg. In the closing pages of the novel, he addresses the problem directly: Overlapping with the criteria of correctness and interest are the demands for true stories. The irony here is that what is true is determined by the audience, not the speaker. Indeed, some truths would seem to be superfluous: And later, when Michael K attempts to tell the policewoman about his mother, she interrupts each time the dialogue is about to shift from rote responses to actual personal reporting. Suffering is therefore neither correct nor interesting nor true when uttered by those without power. The coercion that is implicit in every exchange between the South African authorities and Michael K becomes explicit once his interrogation at the hands of the soldiers begins. They need a story in order to be able to carry out their orders, and once again it has to be sufficiently interesting: Ask him when his friends are coming. Ask him when they were last here. The authorities cannot use his simple explanations. There is no meta-narrative to which they can refer his account of what he has been doing as a gardener in the wilderness, so consequently what he tells them must be dismissed as lies or nonsense. There has been some criticism of this shift as somehow rupturing the flow of the novel. With the figure of the doctor-narrator, the coercion puts on a genteel mask. The infirmary appears at first to be a space where conversation will at least be possible. The doctor seems genuinely attentive to Michael K as a person, but all too soon his motives are exposed to be inseparable from those of the police and the military. The doctor also wants to know something about Michael K, so he tries repeatedly to persuade Michael K to talk. But the story he is given is not the one he expects. It is not a discussion among equals by any means, and the threat of violence is hardly veiled. Since Michael K has nothing to say, the doctor becomes increasingly exasperated and finally desperate. The doctor has no difficulty in spinning out the yarn, because all that is required is that it satisfy the criteria set by the audience. His rationalization might be that he is simply helping to protect Michael K, but his actions belie his neutrality. The doctor does neither and therefore cannot alter the situation in which he and Michael K are caught. One such version would transform the boredom the doctor experiences and Michael K endures into a form of resistance. The problem that remains stubbornly in place is how to avoid coercing readers or interrogating texts. The brutality of totalitarianism has dissolved the possibility of a conversation of democratic equals. But what is that context? Coetzee has not written a naive political treatise in which the better world is only a revolution away. Something else emerges as a presence in the moment of coercive dialogue, something for which even politicians are ill-prepared. This is the introduction of technology into the system. In an ordinary conversation, questions are helpful, as they move us along to understanding each other. Thus, we might begin by asking questions about the novel: Who is Michael K? What does this story mean? We begin convinced that the questions will be answered or answerable and that the text was made to be questioned. The presumption and the danger of our own attitude are difficult to grasp. It is hard to question questioning. For today, if a question is to be put to questioning, the temptation is to fall into interrogation. Technology subsists by demanding energy and raw materials from the hapless earth and has taught us to expect, by analogy, answers from the world around us. Where they are not forthcoming, they can be extracted. A paradigm for an interrogative interaction between a subject and the system is the digital computer. The ambiguities and evasions of conversation are irrelevant. If I am right, hold up your right hand; if I am wrong, hold up your left! The doctor speaks from the vantage point of technological interrogation and, at the same time, echoes the questions of the schoolmaster. The latter is determined by accusations, rumours, and negotiations for meaning; the former by interrogations. Issues of innocence and guilt might remain to be decided by an accusation, so that Joseph K. But the truth is of no interest to the South African interrogators. But who determines what the needs of the questions are? The interrogation of Michael K takes its example and its might from the economy upon which South Africa has been constructed. From the beginning of the European presence, South Africa has had meaning only insofar as it yielded wealth from the land and the labor of the people. More blatantly than in Europe, the colonial situation could reveal the connection between the economy of extraction and the advent of technology. Mining for diamonds and gold may be taken as the quintessential South African activities. The work of the miners is governed by the regimen imposed by the requirements of the machines. Once the process is finished, gaping

ruins are left behind. The doctor sums up the destination of South African history: In the age of technology, the only legitimate purpose is endless extraction. On the hermeneutic plane, this suggests that the meaning of history will not become apparent at the end of time as a supplement, from which the entire narrative will gain meaning and value. Instead, there will only be a void.

**Chapter 3 : Life & Times of Michael K - Wikipedia**

*Life and Times of Michael K: A Novel and millions of other books are available for Amazon Kindle. Learn more Enter your mobile number or email address below and we'll send you a link to download the free Kindle App.*

Herny Kratz From the Reviews: In the final quarter we are removed, temporarily, from the plain seeing of Michael K to the self-indulgent diary of the prison doctor who struggles with the entanglements of an increasingly abusive regime. Similarly the illustrative quotes chosen here are merely those the complete review subjectively believes represent the tenor and judgment of the review as a whole. We acknowledge and remind and warn you that they may, in fact, be entirely unrepresentative of the actual reviews by any other measure. Michael K has a hare lip which, though it could be easily medically corrected, never is. As a doctor who later treats him explains: He is a simpleton, and not even an interesting simpleton. If it is a child, then generally guilt or death must eventually attach; a simpleton, however, remains simple -- remains in a state of purity, innocence, and grace. Michael K is thirty-one when the story begins. His mother, Anna, who works as a domestic servant is ill, and things are looking bleak in the coastal city where Michael also lives, so she persuades him to take her back to the town where she was born. The state of affairs necessitates travelling permits and the like, but eventually Michael just packs his mother in a homemade cart and rolls her off to the country. She dies along the way, but eventually Michael makes it there on his own. The book is told in three parts. The second part is narrated by a doctor at one of the camps he is sent to. Grossly malnourished, Michael is kept under medical supervision and promptly returned to it after he is briefly released into the general population, and the doctor, intrigued by him, writes about him. Michael eventually escapes from the camp, and in the last section returns to the city he started out in. It is a story of survival and isolation, the individual struggling against a society gone awry -- and struggling to survive in nature. There is only a vague, ominous sense of how bad things really are in the greater society, as when the doctor speaks with a camp-administrator regarding their apparently relatively lenient treatment of the camp-inmates: Perhaps we think that if one day they come and put everyone on trial, someone will step forward and say, "Let those two off, they were soft. Someone suggests to him: Why do you think they give you charity, you and the children? Nevertheless, he is certainly not socially or politically engaged or, apparently, engagable. On some level this works: Coetzee has Michael K think: How fortunate that I have no children, he thought: I would not know what to do with a child out here in the heart of the country, who would need milk and clothes and friends and schooling. I would fail in my duties, I would be the worst of fathers. Whereas it is not hard to live a life that consists merely of passing time. I am one of the fortunate ones who escape being called. But what use is such a character, especially in a novel where it is society itself that is frayed to near beyond repair? To show that man can, indeed, be an island, that he can retreat and let the world collapse around him while he tries to tend his own garden and, possibly, maintain some dignity in a truly undignified world is surely not of much interest -- and if that is the message to be portrayed, then would it not be more interesting to make the character a thinking man? Michael is not entirely thoughtless -- he is slow, not stupid -- but even in a society at peace he would be a marginal figure, and he would still not want to have children. Readers perhaps need not identify with the central character, but Coetzee appears to mean there to be a lesson to be learnt here, an example to be set -- yet chooses a character none of his readers could hope to or, probably, want to emulate. Even Coetzee appears to tire of his limited character, switching to a first-person narrative when the doctor takes over the telling of the tale. A basically decent man, the doctor comes up against the brick wall that is Michael or Michaels, as he knows him as. The doctor never really gets it, writing a letter to Michael s which he closes with what is a plea for the impossible: Coetzee tells his simple story well. The book is full of ugly and sad scenes, and few glimmers of hope or beauty, but Coetzee presents his material fairly well. Disturbing, and not in any good way.



Chapter 4 : Life and Times of Michael K Characters - calendrierdelascience.com

*Narrated mostly from the third-person point of view of Michael K, the novel begins with a summary of his bleak, uneventful life and family history. Michael is the third surviving child (all by).*

The reaction to that Disgrace blog made me nervous about this one. But even without that, criticising Coetzee is a dangerous game. He is a Nobel-winning sacred cow of contemporary literature, and any attempts to slaughter him must be made in the face of received and popular opinion. At first, I thought I was going to escape such conflict. This animal, according to Coetzee, ate only young bamboo shoots when free and so refused all other food when captured. It died as a result. The titular Michael K, a borderline simpleton, "not right in the head" and burdened with a cleft lip, enacts a similar biological revolt. We first meet him in Cape Town, where things seem relatively normal – until in discomfitingly casual tones, Coetzee describes a jeep knocking a youth off a road, a crowd gathering, curfew sirens ignored, a man firing a revolver from a nearby building and the arrival of the military. Things are very wrong in this alternate South Africa. Soon, Michael K decides he cannot stay where he is, especially since his sick mother is hankering for her rural birthplace. So he straps her to a makeshift trolley and heads for the hills. She dies on the way, but he continues with her ashes, to an abandoned farm where he begins to cut his remaining ties with the world; hiding himself away, in a self-made dugout, living off little more than water, light, a few gathered bugs and a crop of pumpkins. He finds himself in and out of prison camps, forced to work, and to answer questions he does not understand. So he defies his captors by rejecting the food they give him. All of this is told in fewer than pages. At its best his writing moves like a cracking whip. But in spite of such pleasures, I have serious doubts. My main concern is Michael K himself. Yet he is able frequently to outwit those who would capture him, to work irrigation systems and grow crops, build shelters and – most jarringly – speak eloquently and ask endless searching questions. The way in which this "simple" man so often voices the central concerns of the book soon stops feeling uncanny and starts to feel clumsy. Michael K, for instance, is prone to reader-prodding reflections such as: Who needs York Notes? He also has an irritating fondness for gnomonic utterances almost as annoying as the garden decorations themselves: That is the nature of trains. Less than nothing if you consider the uses the Nazis had for their trains. These are serious annoyances. Especially when so much of the book is so elegantly crafted. I was left with the feeling that this was a deeply flawed book. Much better than Disgrace, but not one I would be inclined to give a prize.

*Life and Times of Michael K* is a novel by the South African writer J. M. Coetzee, first published in 1983. Telling the story of the eponymous Michael K, it details his difficult childhood and his dangerous journey from Cape Town to the rural village where his mother was born during a fictional civil war that broke out during the apartheid era.

Michael K, the simple-minded son of Anna K, is raised in a state institution and finds work as a gardener in the city of Cape Town. When his mother becomes ill, he quits his job and tries to move her back to her birthplace in the country, Prince Albert. After being turned back once at a checkpoint on the edge of the city, K succeeds in getting out of town, but his mother dies soon afterwards. K is given her ashes and he proceeds towards Prince Albert. En route, he is detained for not having travel papers and he is assigned to a work detail on a train. When the job is finished, K leaves and continues on to Prince Albert. K finds what he believes is the farm his mother spoke about. It is abandoned and K soon learns to live off the land. When one of the relatives of the real owners of the farm arrives, he treats K like a servant and K retreats up into the mountains. There, K becomes very aware of his surroundings, but seldom eats and grows malnourished. He meets a friend named Robert who explains why they are tolerated by the locals of the town for the cheap labor. When saboteurs attack Prince Albert, the camp residents are blamed. When the police captain takes over the camp and clamps down on its residents, K escapes back to the farm. K finds that he feels "trapped" in the house and builds a shelter out in the open, where he can watch his new garden. K sees a group of rebels come out of the hills and use his garden, but he stays in hiding. K then grows sick again and he stops eating. K becomes delirious and he is picked up by a group of soldiers who eventually take him to the Kenilworth rehabilitation camp in Cape Town. He is accused of aiding the rebels. The doctor at Kenilworth takes a liking to K and realizes that he is a simpleton who is being unfairly accused. K refuses to eat the camp food and grows more and more emaciated. The doctor tries to get a release for K, but in the meantime K escapes. In Sea Point the Cape Town suburb where he lived with his mother for a time, K meets up with some nomadic townspeople who feed him. Eventually, K returns to the old apartment and wonders about his garden in Prince Albert. This section contains words approx.



### Chapter 6 : Life & Times of Michael K | work by Coetzee | calendrierdelascience.com

*Life and Times of Michael K Quotes (showing of 25) "He thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind it, but if anything, as a speck upon the surface of an earth too deeply asleep to notice the scratch of ant feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust".*

This is the story of a heroic anonymity. Therefore, the readers of this book are allowed to have an access to the inner self of Michael K, at the same time they can have a glimpse of the social and political condition of the then South Africa. Even nature is not merciful to him: So, from the start, he was doomed to bear an ill fate. He is a simpleton and the obscurest of the obscure. He seems to be a mote in the dust heap of suwety, but he is no derelict. He starts his career as an honest and devoted public gardener in Dewaal Park in Cape Town. Both of them lead a simple but honorable life just before the Civil War breaks. From the first to the last, Michael K remains an extreme individualist. He does not approve the war nor does he denounce the war. He is identified with neither rulers nor rebels. He remains a complete outsider in times of the civil unrest. His heart only knows what is obvious and elemental. He is not a protester against social injustice and oppression. He is an unheroic hero. At the end of the novel, in his realization, mother and earth will be the same entity. His deep responsibility and care for his ailing mother is beyond description. After the war starts, his mother makes a wish that she wants to return to her birth place, a farmhouse in Prince Albert. Then K sets out on a long and laborious journey along mother. The greater part of the book covers the minute description of the journey. On the way, they confront danger, rain and severe cold. In the hospital, she dies without consultation with him. She is cremated and K is given a small bundle of ashes in a plastic bag. As the soil provides him with his foods, he becomes grateful to it. K is a genuine human being who is capable of human love and tenderness. He sees the grown up vegetables as his siblings. This humanity is in sharp contrast o the cruelty of the artificial civilization. The violence and atrocity of the war can not taint his inner integrity and genuine love. Really, for the first time in his life, he gets a temporal bliss. His previous idyllic life shatters with the advent of this stage. His later life is a parable of starvation. He can neither eat nor can Later, K flees the farmhouse and he is picked up as a parasite and confined to a work camp. He can neither eat nor can he swallow. Injustice is vomited out.

### Chapter 7 : Life And Times Of Michael K | Read Book Summary

*Michael K is a puzzling combination of total passivity and active, ingenious coping with his very difficult situation. A sort of fantasy on the chaos of South African culture toward the end of the apartheid era, the tale is an allegory of a seriously troubled society.*

### Chapter 8 : Life and Times of Michael K Summary - calendrierdelascience.com

*Life and Times of Michael K Questions and Answers. The Question and Answer section for Life and Times of Michael K is a great resource to ask questions, find answers, and discuss the novel.*

### Chapter 9 : Life & Times of Michael K - calendrierdelascience.com

*Life & Times of Michael K is set in a dystopian South Africa of around the s in which there is a civil war going on. The setting matters some, but what might be thought to be the obvious -- issues of race, especially -- aren't at the forefront.*