
The Beat Generation

WORKSHEET A

Jack Kerouac was born Jean-Louis de Lebris Kerouac on March 12th, 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, USA. The grandson of French-Canadian immigrants, Jack spoke *joual*, a dialect of French.

Jack grew up during the Great Depression, which made life hard for him and his family. It was made even harder when his elder brother died of rheumatic fever at the age of nine.

At junior high school Jack loved reading. He particularly enjoyed the works of writer Thomas Wolfe, and was greatly influenced by his writing style. Jack was not only creative he was also athletic and was an excellent football player. His football skills earned him a scholarship to Columbia College, but after breaking his leg and falling out with the team captain, he quit both team and college.

Jack returned to Lowell and worked as a sports reporter for the Lowell Sun newspaper for a few months. He then left Lowell again and drifted to Washington D.C. and then Boston before enduring a brief stint in the Navy.

In 1944 he met and made friends with a group of creative but disillusioned young men: Allen Ginsberg, Lucien Carr, William S. Burroughs and handsome streetwise cowboy Neal Cassady. The following year Jack started work on *The Town and the City*, a novel about his difficulties balancing a wild city life with his old-fashioned family values. The book was published in 1950 and earned Jack critical respect, but it didn't sell well and Jack remained an unknown.

Between the mid 1940s and the mid 1950s, Jack spent a lot of time on the road, travelling from one side of the States to the other, mostly with his friend Neal Cassady. In the early 50s he wrote these experiences down in his most famous work *On The Road*. He wrote in a new style that was later called 'spontaneous prose', which is like a stream of thoughts written down as they occur. The result gives the reader the impression that they are witnessing events in real time.

Although *On The Road* wasn't published until 1957, it brought Jack the fame and recognition that he had wanted for his first book. He became the voice of a generation of people who were exhausted or 'beat down' by post-war life in the States. As the 'father' of this new Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac was as famous as 50s actor James Dean for rebelling against a society which he felt held no place for him.

Increasingly at odds with what he saw around him, and uncomfortable as the famous figurehead of a movement he could no longer relate to, Jack turned to alcohol. He died in 1969 from the effects of prolonged alcoholism, at the age of 47.

It is impossible to imagine 1950s America without Jack Kerouac's Beat Generation, with their 'live hard, die young' motto, their close associations with jazz music and their dark clothing, which was the trademark of the 'beatniks'. These were the forerunners of the hippies, even though they themselves were not always the best advocates of love and peace.

The Beat Generation

WORKSHEET B

Student A

1. Re-order these questions and then answer them. The first word is always in **bold**.

- a. original \ was \ **what** \ name \ Jack Kerouac's \ ?
- b. young Jack \ writer \ did \ **the** works \ enjoy reading \ which \ of \ ?
- c. **which** \ Jack \ newspaper \ work \ did \ for \ ?
- d. spend his time \ what \ **between** \ Jack \ did \ the mid 40s and 50s, \ doing \ ?
- e. *On The Road* \ was \ written \ **in** \ 'style' \ what \ ?
- f. death \ cause \ the \ Jack Kerouac's \ of \ **what** \ was \ ?

2. Now ask Student B the questions above. Each correct answer is worth 1 point.



The Beat Generation

WORKSHEET B

Student B

1. Re-order these questions and then answer them. The first word is always in **bold**.

- a. dialect \ is \ language \ of \ **joual** \ a \ which \ ?
- b. at \ sport \ Jack \ **which** \ good \ was \ ?
- c. was \ **what** \ called \ first \ novel \ Jack's \ ?
- d. name \ you \ Jack Kerouac's \ **can** \ famous \ work \ most \ ?
- e. which \ published \ **in** \ year \ it \ was \ ?
- f. people \ **dark** clothing \ group of \ trademark \ which \ of \ was \ the \ ?

2. Now ask Student A the questions above. Each correct answer is worth 1 point.