

  
NEW YORK  
TIMES  
BESTSELLER

**Top Education Book 2009**  
*American School Board Journal*

**Edgar Award**  
**Alex Award Finalist**

COLUMBINE  
**Instructor Guide**

COLUMBINE  
DAVE CULLEN

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"THE PACING OF AN ACTION MOVIE AND THE COMPLEXITY OF A SHAKESPEARIAN DRAMA." —NEWSWEEK

DAVE CULLEN



**COLLEGE / HIGH SCHOOL  
HUMANITIES COURSES**

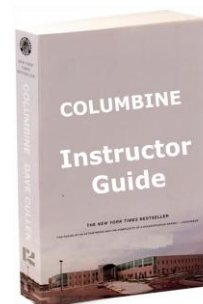
Edition 2.10 — February 3, 2011

# CONTENTS

<b>Core Topics, by Course</b>	3
<b>Introduction and Resources</b>	4
<b>Main Module — Cross-Curriculum</b>	5
<b>Quick Takes</b>	6
Using the Guide, Engaging Students, Before They Read, Discussions & Questions, Vocabulary Builder	
<b>Discussion Questions</b>	14
<b>Writing Assignments-- Analysis &amp; critical thinking</b>	22
See the breakout module for creative writing options	
<b>Special Units</b>	27
<b>Background Material</b>	34
Author bio, book summary, further reading & resources	
<b>Breakout Modules</b>	
<b>Literature</b>	37
<b>Creative Writing</b>	41
<b>Psychology</b>	45
<b>Mini-Modules (Coming Soon)</b>	55
○ Journalism / Media Studies	
○ Criminology	
○ Social Studies	
<b>Librarians' Corner (coming soon)</b>	
Resources/support	

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Designed to promote:  
**CRITICAL THINKING & ANALYSIS**

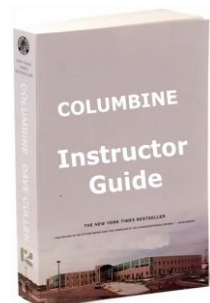


# TOPICS BY COURSE

	Literature	Writing	Psychology	Journalism	Media Studies	Criminology	Social Studies	Inservice*
<b>Schools</b>								
School safety		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Impact of Columbine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zero tolerance		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Teen Depression</b>								
Role in the attack	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prevalence/impact		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Detection/prevention		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
<b>The Killers</b>								
Motives/psychology	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The parents	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Warning signs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Survivors</b>								
Overcoming adversity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PTSD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Heroes and role models	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Grieving/healing process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Society</b>								
Impact on the culture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Impact on you	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Gun control		✓				✓	✓	
<b>Media</b>								
Myths/reading critically	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Empathetic reporting			✓	✓	✓		✓	
<b>The Future</b>								
Copcats	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Responding to an attack		✓				✓	✓	✓
<b>Columbine as Literature</b>								
Primary themes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Glorification of killers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Literary devices	✓	✓		✓	✓			

\* This column also applicable for PTA

Teen Depression is the greatest unlearned lesson of the tragedy.



# INTRODUCTION & RESOURCES

This guide is designed for humanities courses. It supports teaching the whole book, or shorter passages on key topics. The Main Module gears writing assignments to selected passages.

## Note on the writing assignments:

- Exercises in Module I are designed to develop **analytical skills and critical thinking**.
- To **engage students creatively in any course**, use the Creative Writing Module. (e.g., psychology students could use the exercise to rewrite the suicide scene from Dylan's perspective.)

**Additional resources.** See [davecullen.com/schools](http://davecullen.com/schools)



Classroom video series with Dave Cullen



Skype your class with Dave Cullen



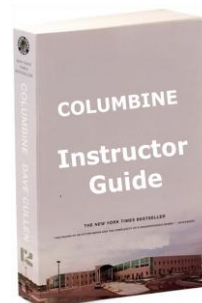
**3-minute *Columbine* intro video:** Very powerful with students.



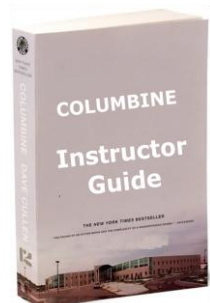
**Columbine Online:** The online companion and research tool. Students can share a decade of Dave Cullen's research.



**Invite Dave Cullen to speak at your school assembly**



# MAIN MODULE CROSS-CURRICULUM



# MAIN MODULE

## QUICK TAKES

### Using the Guide

#### *Cross-Curriculum Features*

Most sections were designed to apply across departments. The BY COURSE menu button is the exception.

### Questions

The questions are grouped into topics, so you can quickly spot what's relevant to you. The chart applies topics to suggested courses.

**Example:** *Teen depression* could spark a powerful class discussion in most courses. You can focus on its impact on Dylan Klebold as a case study, or broadly on teens today.

### Writing Exercises

The analytical assignments are grouped by type of analysis, with major topic in parentheses. The parenthetical topics makes it easy to skim quickly for assignments relevant to you.

**Example:** *Compare & Contrast (The Killers)*. This would make a great paper in literature, psychology, social studies, criminology, etc. The contrast between the actual killers vs their media portrayals also fits journalism, media studies, contemporary history, etc.

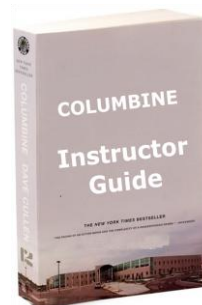
### Special Units

Each of these units was created because it's relevant to most courses and powerfully connected to young adults (ages 14 to 22).

**Example:** *Overcoming Adversity*: Half the book is dedicated to the aftermath story. A handful of core characters faced unimaginable horror: some responded heroically, others shamefully. Brian Rohrbough lost a son, Linda Sanders lost a husband, Patrick Ireland was told he'd lost use of his legs, speech and a good deal of his brain. Principal DeAngelis, Special Agent Fuselier and Sheriff Stone faced the career challenges of their lives. What can students learn from each? How might they behave when they face a daunting obstacle?

Any of those characters—or a contrast between two—could provoke a heated class discussion, term paper or group presentation.

*Teen Depression is the most important topic*—the great unlearned lesson of Columbine. If you conduct just one discussion, please consider this topic.



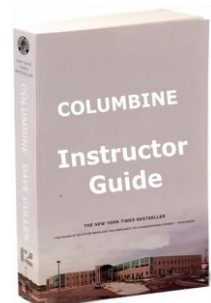
# MAIN MODULE

## QUICK TAKES

### Courses Supported

The chart identifies several applicable courses. A more complete list includes:

- English / Literature
- Writing / Creative Writing
- Psychology / Sociology
- Criminology
- Social Studies / Religious Studies
- Journalism / Media Studies
- Contemporary History / Political Science



## MAIN MODULE

# QUICK TAKES

### Engaging Students

*Columbine* provides an excellent tool to engage students critically with their world, because it provokes such personal reactions. Most can't remember the attack unfolding, but they all know the word Columbine.

They know the implications—it cast a pall over their generation—but they are fuzzy on what actually happened. And why. They are deeply curious.

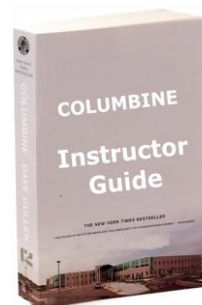
The subject matter tends to get students reading, but the characters keep them hooked. They say it feels like their lives. It draws them in like a young adult novel, but forces them to confront significant social issues.

The events invite critical analysis. You don't have to badger them to question the reliability of the media, or the impact of cruel behavior on the peers. They will be asking you.

#### Hot topics for this age group:

- School violence / their own safety.
- Outcasts, loners and marginalized students.
- Heroic survivors, especially Patrick Ireland (and Val Schnurr in the Afterword).
- Teen depression.
- Troubled peers: tolerance vs. self-preservation.
- The magnitude of the myths (shock at how unreliable major media can be).
- PTSD.
- Parents—of the killers, and the victims.

That last one may be surprising, but they read it very personally. Even and perhaps especially when they are rebelling, their parents play a central role in their life. It strikes a deep chord.





# MAIN MODULE

## QUICK TAKES

### Before They Read

*Establish their misconceptions*

#### Purpose

Establish a baseline. Document the magnitude of their own misconceptions, individually and collectively.

It's best not to spoil the surprise of the myths, though. Just tell them to get their thoughts down.

#### Activity

1. Ten-minute free-write:

##### **Prompt:**

Take ten minutes to write down everything you know about "Columbine." You can write journal-style or use bullet-points. You don't have to worry about organization or grammar, just get down as much information as you can remember. You must address three points: 1) What happened, 2) Why did the boys do it? 3) What were they trying to do?

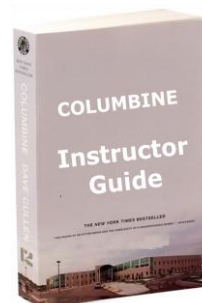
2. Ten-minute group discussion-write:

##### **Prompt:**

Break up into groups of five. Take ten minutes to share what you came up with, and collectively address those same questions. As a group, write down as many bullet points as you can on 1) What happened, 2) Why did the boys do it? 3) What were they trying to do?

#### Variations

1. The free-write can be done as a homework assignment. Just stress that they must not look up "the truth" on the web. They are not being graded on what they know. It's for their own use later, though you will check that they wrote something.
2. If they struggle with the open-ended questions, you can offer memory-jogger prompts midway through. Ask them to address:



## MAIN MODULE

# QUICK TAKES

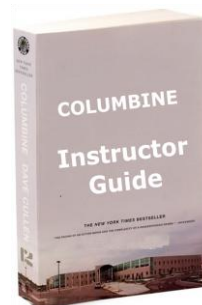
- Who did it?
- Were they acting alone or as part of some larger group? What was it called?
- How many were injured?
- Did anyone die? If so, how many?
- What weapons did they use? (Don't mention bombs, but you're establishing they didn't know about bombs.)
- Who did they hope to kill? How many?
- How long did the siege last?
- What happened to the perpetrator(s)? Are they still in prison?
- What was the Trench coat Mafia? How were they involved?
- Did the attack have any lasting impact? Did it change anything done at your school?

### Benefits

Most students have fuzzy ideas about what Columbine might have been about. After reading the book, they will be even murky on what they thought going it.

Getting it on paper will:

1. **Improve later discussions and papers.** It will be much easier to grasp the magnitude of the myths when they see their own words on paper. They can articulate it better when they can quote themselves and their peers.
  - Reading critically and reliability of the media will especially be impacted.
2. **Make them feel better about their reading experience.** It will demonstrate the power a book had on them, in their own words.
  - Option: Have them write about that impact.
  - Option: Have them choose another narrative nonfiction book that could make them rethink another topic. For ideas, see the RESOURCES menu.
3. **Help them develop *their own* path to critical thinking.** They won't feel led by the nose. This well-priming exercise will help them discover the process on their own.



# MAIN MODULE

## QUICK TAKES

### Discussion Topics & Student Papers

*Expanded topics list for class discussions, student papers, projects, etc.*

#### 1. Schools

- School violence
- Impact on daily life: drills, safety plans, awareness, etc.
- Zero Tolerance: pros and cons
- Threat assessment

#### 2. Teen Depression

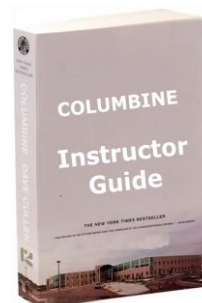
- Role in the Columbine attack (and in other attacks)
- Prevalence (6% of U.S. teens—2 million)
- Consequences
- Detection and prevention
- Treatment: options/ efficacy

#### 3. The Killers

- Eric's motives
- Dylan's motives
- Evolution of each boy's intentions
- Suicide vs. homicide in each
- Eric's gradual criminal development (vandalism, petty theft, felony theft, murder)
- Role/responsibility of the parents
- Life after Columbine for the Harrises and Klebolds
- Warning signs
- How Eric fooled everyone
- Dylan's attempt to warn Brooks

#### 4. Victims and Survivors

- Heroes and role models
- Overcoming adversity
- Grieving and the healing process
- PTSD—differentiated from normal trauma
- Positive and negative responses among survivors
- Infighting within the community
- Lessons from survivors
- Battle for control of the tragedy ("Who owns the tragedy?")
- The power of symbols: e.g., "Take Back The School"



# MAIN MODULE

## QUICK TAKES

### 5. Society

- Impact on the culture
- Copycats
- Fear among parents

### 6. School Culture / Teen Culture

- Tolerance: has anything changed?
- Attitudes toward bullying (whether or not they turned out to be a role in the tragedy)
- Efforts to help outcast kids and loners
- Compassion vs. recognizing real danger
- Impact of the book on you

### 7. Law Enforcement & Legal

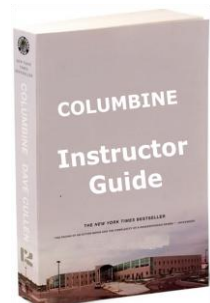
- What has changed?
- Active Shooter Protocol
- Gun Control
- The Gun Show Loophole
- The detective team: Investigating crimes of this magnitude

### 8. Media and Myths

- How did the press get it so wrong?
- Where did the myths come from?
- Implications for news consumers (reading critically)
- Tension between victims and journalists
- Compassionate reporting
- Infamy and glorification of killers

### 9. Columbine as Literature

- Themes
- Characters
- Plot and tension
- Setting
- Tone
- Novelistic techniques ("nonfiction novel"?)



# MAIN MODULE

## QUICK TAKES

### Vocabulary Builder

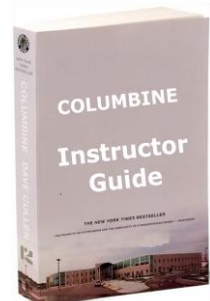
*Columbine* introduces many terms which may be unfamiliar or misunderstood/misused.

### Writing Activity

Have students write two sentences summarizing each term. Have them pick one to expand on for a full page.

### Vocabulary Terms

- Dyad
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Victim's advocate
- The Active Shooter Protocol
- Psychopath
- Angry depressive
- Psychosis (distinction from psychopathy)
- The gun show loophole
- Brady Bill
- NRA
- DSM-IV
- The Psychopathy Checklist
- fMRI
- Suicidal ideation
- Hostage vs. non-hostage situations (as defined by the FBI)
- Supervisory special agent
- Threat assessment
- Zero tolerance
- Diversion
- Altar calls
- Evangelical Christian
- Goths
- Napalm
- Molotov cocktail
- NATO
- Zeus

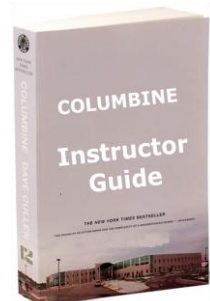


# MAIN MODULE

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

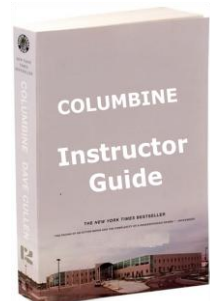
### General Questions

1. Do you remember the attack taking place in 1999? If not, when did you become aware of it? What did you think had happened?
2. Some readers have referred to *Columbine* as a "non-fiction novel." Do you think this description fits? What elements make it fit each category?
3. How does the author build and maintain suspense and mystery in the book? How does he deal with the fact that readers may know—or think they know—the outcomes or details of the book's events?
4. What do you make of the relationship between Eric and Dylan? Did this relationship remain consistent throughout the book? If there were shifts in their roles, can you pinpoint when and why this happened?
5. Why is it important that books like *Columbine* be written and read? Who should read this book?
6. Do you think this book glorifies Eric and Dylan and perpetuates the legend that they wanted to leave behind?
7. As you read the book, what surprises did you encounter? Why do you think you hadn't known about them before?
8. What if you were able to meet the killers' parents. What would you want them to know? What if you could meet another character in the book. Who would you want to meet and what would you say to them?
9. Which, if any, of the book's characters do you consider to be heroes? Which were scapegoats? Were there more than two people responsible for the killings?
10. Which characters had reason to feel guilty? Who do you think still feels guilty now?
11. Do any of the characters change or evolve through the course of the story? Do they change their view of the world and their relationship to it? If so, what events trigger such changes?
12. Compare *In Cold Blood's* Dick and Perry to *Columbine's* Eric and Dylan. What similarities and differences do you find? How did Capote and Cullen's approaches to researching and telling their stories differ?
13. Was there anything unique about the setting of the book? Did it enhance the story? How does the Columbine community compare to yours? How likely is it that a similar event could happen where you are?
14. Which passages were most difficult for you to read? Which scenes are most memorable for you?



**MAIN MODULE**  
**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

15. At what point in the book did you decide if you liked it or not? What helped you make this decision? What kind of impact did this book have on you?
16. Were you surprised by any of the revelations about the attack? Which ones? Were you surprised by the community reaction in the aftermath? How do you think your community would react after such an event?
17. At what point in the narrative could one decision or one action have changed the outcome? Which characters had a chance to make a difference but didn't?
18. With school shootings being featured regularly and predominately in the media for over a decade, does the public react differently to them now? Do students react differently? School personnel? Law enforcement? The press?
19. Has this book changed how you would relate to your peers?



# MAIN MODULE

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Detailed Questions

#### Personal Impact

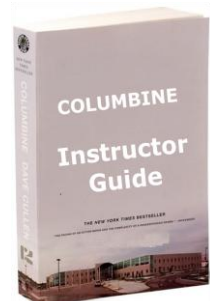
1. How did the book change your perceptions of Columbine? Summarize how you saw it before and after reading.
2. What impact did this book have on you personally? Have you changed your views on peers with depression? Or others? Are you behaving differently?
3. This is dark material: was it difficult to read? What choices by the author made that easier or harder? Which passages were most difficult and most memorable?
4. Were you surprised by the community reaction in the aftermath? How do you think your community would react to something similar?
5. What if you were able to meet the killers' parents: What would you want to ask or tell them?
6. What if you could meet another character in the book: Who would you want to meet and what would you say to them?

#### Social Impact

1. There have been many other school attacks, with more killed at Virginia Tech. Why are all shootings referred to as “Columbine-style” or “another Columbine”? What made Columbine the iconic attack?
2. How did Columbine impact life in your own school?
3. Do you think this book glorifies Eric and Dylan? Will it encourage copycats?
4. What is Zero Tolerance? How is it employed in different schools? Is it effective? Describe some situations where schools have employed it ineffectively and made things worse.
5. Is it important that books like Columbine be written? Who should read it?
6. How did law enforcement change because of Columbine? Address both prevention and response to attacks.

#### Understanding the Killers

1. Who changed more in the last two years: Eric, or Dylan? Summarize how each of them changed, if at all.
2. Did you ever feel sympathetic toward one or both of the killers? If so, where did this begin? How did you feel about having that response?





## MAIN MODULE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

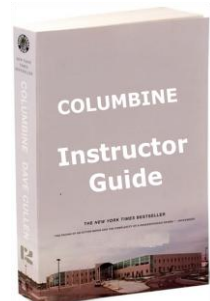
3. What do you make of the relationship between Eric and Dylan? Did it remain consistent throughout the book? If there were shifts in their roles, can you pinpoint when and why this happened?
4. Was the concept of psychopathy useful in understanding why Eric did it? What are the limitations of psychopathy in explaining it?
5. Was the concept of depression useful in understanding why Dylan did it? What are the limitations of depression in explaining it?
6. A year before the murders, Dylan told Brooks Brown about Eric's website. Brooks found death threats there and told his mother. Why do you think Dylan did this? Was this a cry for help? Was he trying to derail the plan? If so, why did he never do anything else?

### Responsibility

1. Who is responsible for what happened: just the killers, or others, too? Which characters had reason to feel guilty? Who do you think still feels guilty now?
2. Were Eric and Dylan equal partners in planning and instigating the attack, or was one more dominant? If so, how did one coax or manipulate the other?
3. Do the psychological designations of psychopathy or depression make either killer more or less culpable?
4. The Browns reported Eric's website to the sheriff's department. Why do you think it was not taken seriously?
5. Discuss the differing parenting styles of Wayne & Kathy Harris, and Tom & Sue Klebold. Would you describe each as strict or lax?
6. When Wayne Harris discovered Eric had made a pipe bomb, how did he react? What would you have done? What would you have done after Eric or Dylan was arrested?
7. Do you think Eric would have attacked Columbine if he never had met Dylan? How about Dylan, if he never had met Eric?

### Victims & Survivors

1. Who were the most memorable characters? As the chapters alternated between killers and survivors, which did you find more compelling?
2. Which, if any, of the book's characters do you consider heroes? Did any of them inspire you to act differently, or give you a new perspective?
3. Other than the killers, did you consider any characters villains? What made them behave that way?



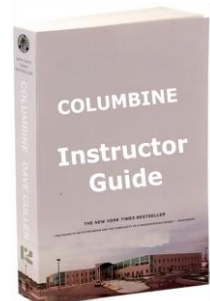
## MAIN MODULE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. Do any of the characters change or evolve through the course of the story? Do they change their view of the world and their relationship to it? If so, what events trigger such changes?
5. How would you respond if you turned on your TV today and your brother or son was named as a killer? What if it were a close friend? How did the lives of the killers' families and friends change?
6. The afterward profiles three survivors, who employed wildly different coping strategies the first ten years. Is any one of them "right"? Think about someone in your life who has experienced grief. Did they respond like any of these three? Do you understand their behavior better now?

### Teen Depression—The Great Unlearned Lesson of Columbine

1. Explain the difference between clinical depression and "sadness." What makes depression so dangerous?
2. Identify five common consequences of depression. Discuss how each one can devastate the life of a teenager.
3. Did you know 6% of U.S. teens suffer clinical depression? Discuss the impact to schools and individuals. Alternative: discuss the economic impact on adults.
4. Outline the two major strategies for treating depression. How successful are they?
5. Discuss the controversies surrounding pharmacological treatment. Is there legitimate cause for concern?
6. Discuss the suicide rate among teens. What are the key warning signs? How do you approach a classmate you fear is in danger? What can you do if you fear it in yourself?
7. React to the statement: "Parents and schools are drugging our kids out of our problem." Are anti-depressants over-prescribed? Under-prescribed? Take a position.
8. What causes depression? Are there genetic predispositions? How significant are external factors in bringing it on (e.g., breakup with a boyfriend/girlfriend)? Who is most at-risk?
9. Does a depression diagnosis still carry a social stigma? How might that change?
10. What have organizations like the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended as strategies for diagnosis and treatment?
11. What is in place in your school to diagnose and treat kids in trouble with depression? How effective is it? How could that change?
12. *(For more questions, topics, outside readings and selected Columbine passages, see the "Case Study in Teen Depression: Dylan Klebold" unit in the Psychology Module.)*



## MAIN MODULE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

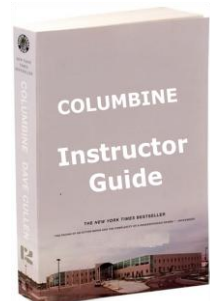
### Depression and Dylan Klebold

1. What role did depression play in the attack? Would Dylan have killed people if he'd been diagnosed and treated?
2. Describe the misery Dylan was going through. What was so painful for him? Did that change over time? How did his responses to it change?
3. How did Dylan see himself? How did his self-image compare to objective assessments (e.g., based on his social calendar, how his friends saw him and related to him, etc.)
4. Why was Dylan never diagnosed with depression? Should he have been? How do you think that would have affected the outcome?
5. How often do angry depressives commit murder? Outline the progression from suicide through single murder to mass murder. What causes a person to make that progression?
6. Read the essay published by his mother, Susan Klebold in 2009. (In *O Magazine*. Full citation in the depression section of the Psychology Module). List five warning signs she could identify in retrospect. How common are each? How does a parent, teacher or friend know when to take each one seriously?

*See the Teen Depression Unit for resources, warning signs, hotlines, further reading, detailed questions and much more.*

### Media Coverage & Columbine Myths

1. Describe the major Columbine myths. How did the media get it so wrong? Do you think they would make the same errors today?
2. How quickly did the major myths appear? How soon were they accepted as fact? What evidence did the media have for the conclusions about why Columbine happened in the first week? How about in the first year? Five years? When did the definitive evidence come to light?
3. Which two newspapers never bought in to the myths? Why did the rest of the pack follow the *Denver Post* and not those two outlets?
4. How did victims and survivors feel about coverage of their school? Was it fair? Were they bothered more by local coverage or national? Was it the quality of the reporting, bias, or sheer quantity? When did their attitudes about the media and their trust change? How did that affect the coverage? Did journalists have the access to report the story accurately?



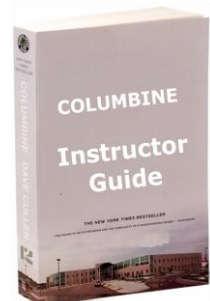
## MAIN MODULE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

5. Several of the news outlets that got the story so wrong ran corrections—big myths of Columbine stories—within the first year. Why were those so incredibly unsuccessful in correcting public perceptions?
6. Once an important incident is misportrayed, is it ever possible to correct it? Discuss some examples? Several of the “what” aspects of Columbine were initially misreported—e.g., nearly every newspaper in the country led with some version of *25 dead* April 21. It was reported on every major network. Yet those myths do not live on? Why do myths about “what” behave so differently than about “why?”
7. Does the book make you approach news coverage of other major events more skeptically? What sorts of questions do you ask?
8. When major tragedies occur—plane crashes, explosions, mine disasters, oil spills—how long does it usually take before journalists and the public can accurately answer why it happened? How soon does the media usually answer that question? When they are wrong, how do they go about correcting the myths?
9. How did the story of Cassie Bernall’s “martyrdom” take root so quickly? When was it first reported, and how did the story travel (mostly in the media, or by other means)? Who questioned it? How were stories of a strikingly similar exchange with Val Schnurr treated?
10. When did the *Rocky Mountain News* team realize Cassie never made the famous gunpoint profession of faith? Why did the editors choose to delay the story? At what point did that decision become a problem of ethics or journalistic responsibility? How did the lead reporter feel about the decision? How did the paper treat the subject when Misty Bernall’s book *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall* was published, and became an instant bestseller in September 1999? Why do you believe Misty published the book with that title? Do you believe she intended to mislead anyone?
11. Have things changed since Columbine regarding online threats? If a website like Eric’s were to appear today, what would the reaction be? Would anybody notice? If the media took hold of it as a story, what would be the reaction? How would the student writing it be treated?
12. How did “the cover-up” come to light? What role did news organizations play?

## Law Enforcement & Gun Laws

1. Define the Active Shooter Protocol. How has the standard police response to attacks like this changed? Have there been attacks where it saved lives?
2. Should law enforcement or school officials have discovered the plan in advance? What were the key actions they should have taken to discover the plan?
3. How easily were guns and explosives available to the killers? Should any laws be changed in that regard? Did reading the book change your attitude on gun laws?

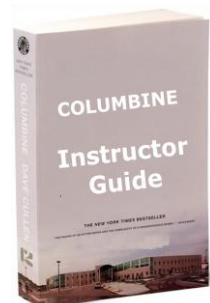


MAIN MODULE  
**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

4. What was “the cover-up” and who was involved? Why did they do it? What do you think would have happened if they had admitted the full truth immediately after the tragedy?
5. When did law enforcement start withholding information from the media? What long-term impact did it have on the public’s understanding. Aside from the cover-up, how did their silence during the first year affect trust within the community? What decisions or incidents during the first year eroded trust?

**Themes**

1. What are the primary themes of this book?
2. How was good vs. evil portrayed? Was the concept prominent in the thinking of Eric? Dylan? The victims and survivors?
3. How did religion impact the story?
4. How inevitable was the attack? Should anyone have stopped it? Who?
5. Were the survivors powerless? Which ones took control of their own destinies? What made the difference between them and those who remained victims?
6. Who chose to “forgive?” How did it work out for them? Why do some survivors embrace that word and others reject it?



## MAIN MODULE

# WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – ANALYTICAL

All assignments in this section are designed to provoke analysis and critical thinking. For exercises to engage the students creatively in the material, see the Creative Writing Module.

All suggested outside readings are online, linked at the book's online bibliography: <http://www.davecullen.com/columbine/bibliography.htm>

### Problem-Solution / Research

1. Do an initial *Columbine* reading, then investigate one controversial aspect of the event. Write a 5-page problem-solution essay proposing how one of the issues related to Columbine could be resolved. (Reading topics below can be referenced in the index of *Columbine*).

- Perimeter, police response, SWAT team action & reaction time
- Eric Harris as psychopath and why no one “knew”
- Gun laws and minors

#### Suggested initial *Columbine* reading:

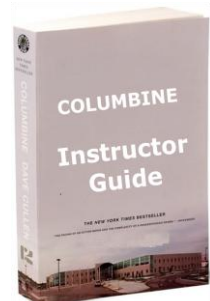
- Chapter 2 “Rebels” pp.6-12
- Chapter 4 “Rock ‘n’ Bowl” pp.16-18
- Chapter 5 “Two Columbines” pp.19-25
- Chapter 6 “His Future” pp.26-28
- Chapter 8 “Maximum Human Density” pp. 32-36
- Chapter 10 “Judgment” pp. 40-44

### Comparison and Contrast or Analysis (The Killers)

1. Look up 2-3 of the newspaper pieces on Columbine below, which the author cited as reliable. Write a 2-3 page essay on what we learned about the killers over time. How did our understanding of them change between 1999 and today? What new sources or material became available, and how did it shape our perceptions?

#### Suggested outside reading:

- “The Columbine Killers” – David Brooks, *New York Times*
- “Fatal Friendship: How Two Suburban Boys Traded Baseball and Bowling for Murder and Madness” – Lynn Bartells and Carla Crowder, *Rocky Mountain News*
- “The Gunmen: A Portrait of Two Killers at War with Themselves” – Dirk Johnson and Jodi Wilgoren, *The New York Times*.
- “I Will Never Know Why” – Sue Klebold, *O: the Oprah Magazine*.
- “The Last Columbine Mystery” – Dave Cullen, *The Daily Beast*.



MAIN MODULE  
**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – ANALYTICAL**

### **Cause & Effect (Myths & Media)**

1. Research one of the major Columbine myths (bullying, Goths, jocks, outcasts, gays, third shooter, Trench Coat Mafia, Christian martyr). Write a cause-and-effect essay analyzing how the myth began and what effect it had on the investigation, public perception and aftermath of the shootings.

**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

- Chapter 2 “Rebels” pp. 6-12
- Chapter 4 “Rock ‘n’ Bowl” pp. 16-18
- Chapter 6 “His Future” pp. 26-28
- Chapter 8 “Maximum Human Density” pp. 32-36
- Chapter 10 “Judgment” pp.40-44
- Columbine myths, pp. 149-52, 155-59
- Eric Harris as a psychopath, pp. 239-48

### **Compare and Contrast (Myths & Media)**

1. Watch one of the two Columbine-related films the author recommends: *April Showers* or *Zero Day*. (Or Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* can be substituted.) Write a paper comparing and contrasting the movie with Cullen’s book. What point of view does each work take? What is the focus of each story? How reliable do you find each narrator? What information did each rely on?

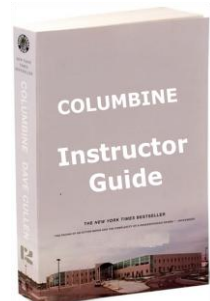
**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

- Chapter 2 “Rebels” pp.6-12
- Chapter 4 “Rock ‘n’ Bowl” pp. 16-18
- Chapter 6 “His Future” pp.26-28
- Chapter 8 “Maximum Human Density” pp.32-36
- Chapter 10 “Judgment” pp.40-44
- Columbine myths, pp. 149-52, 155-59
- Eric Harris as a psychopath, pp. 239-148

2. Write a 3-5 page essay comparing and contrasting the myths (bullying, Goths, jocks, outcasts, gays, third shooter, Trench Coat Mafia, Christian martyr) with the reality of Columbine, in order to draw conclusions about culture and society.

**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

- Chapter 2 “Rebels” pp.6-12
- Chapter 4 “Rock ‘n’ Bowl” pp. 16-18
- Chapter 6 “His Future” pp.26-28
- Chapter 8 “Maximum Human Density” pp.32-36
- Chapter 10 “Judgment” pp.40-44
- Columbine myths, pp. 149-52, 155-59





MAIN MODULE  
**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – ANALYTICAL**

- Eric Harris as a psychopath, pp. 239-148

### **Analysis (Media)**

1. Write a 3-5 page essay analyzing the media coverage of the event.

**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

- Chapter 8 “Maximum Human Density” pp.32-36
- Chapter 10 “Judgment” pp.40-44
- Columbine myths, pp. 149-52, 155-59
- Television coverage, pp. 52-3, 56-7, 64-7, 140-42, 149-53, 155-57

### **Taking a Position (Law Enforcement)**

1. Research the Active Shooter Protocol, which was developed and widely adopted because of Columbine. Should law enforcement have practiced something similar April 20? The team at Columbine followed the existing protocol they had trained under. Some SWAT members argued during the attack that the protocol should be disregarded, and they should rush in. Take a position and write a 2-3 page paper arguing for what leaders should have done, based on what they knew and believed at the time. (This paper could also be a compare/contrast).

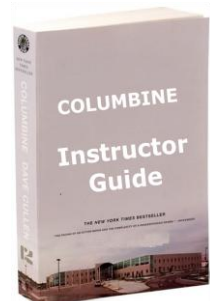
**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

- Chapter 12 “The perimeter” pp.52-57
  - More on the perimeter, pp.56-67, 58, 59, 64
  - Swat teams, pp. 61-63, 81-2, 83-84, 96-7, 142-45, 352-53
2. Imagine yourself in a government official’s job (e.g., Columbine dean or county sheriff’s investigator), at a certain moment in the year prior to the attack. Write a 1-page paper describing how you would respond to the information you received. Explain what you believe and how you would interpret the information—what is going on—and assess how you would prioritize it in relation to your other responsibilities.
  3. Research current gun laws in your area. Are they making an impact? Should they be changed? What bills have been proposed in the legislature in the last five years? What was the result? Discuss the arguments for and against stricter gun laws. Choose a position and defend it.

### **Argument**

1. Either read David Brooks’ op-ed or watch *Bowling for Columbine*. Write a rhetorical analysis which discusses argument techniques employed by Brooks or Moore.

**Suggested outside reading:**





## MAIN MODULE

# WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – ANALYTICAL

- “The Columbine Killers” – David Brooks, *New York Times*

### Point of View (Parents)

1. The killers’ parents have been among the most controversial people involved in the tragedy. They have kept very quiet, but Sue Klebold is the most heavily-documented of the four. In 2009, she published a powerful essay about life with Dylan before the tragedy, and her life with his legacy. She discusses her responsibility for the attack and reactions she has faced from the world around her. The Brooks and Cullen stories, and the book’s afterword offer several more points of view about her. Some of the victims’ parents responded to her essay on *Nightline* and *Good Morning America*.

Choose a point of view—e.g., parent of a victim, friend of the Klebolds, student injured in the tragedy, teacher at Columbine, SWAT team officer, paramedic on-scene, friend of Dylan’s, Tom Klebold, Sue Klebold, or Dylan’s brother Byron.)

- Write one-page assessing how you would feel about Sue Klebold’s actions and her statements.
- Now choose a second point of view and write a page assessing the situation for that person.
- Now try a third.
- Finally, write a page describing how you feel. Address how your opinion changed as you considered each point of view.

#### Suggested outside reading:

- “The Columbine Killers” – David Brooks, *New York Times*
- "I Will Never Know Why" – Sue Klebold, *O: the Oprah Magazine*.
- “The Last Columbine Mystery” – Dave Cullen, *The Daily Beast*.
- Transcripts of *Nightline* and *Good Morning America*, immediately after Sue Klebold’s essay was published

#### Suggested *Columbine* Reading:

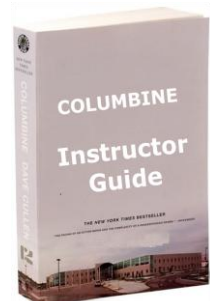
- Afterword: “Forgiveness”

### The Writing Process

1. Search online for one of the many interviews Cullen did about his process of writing the book. Choose one particular problem he faced and write a one-page summary and response.

### Research Practice

1. Locate 3-5 sources from *Columbine*’s bibliography. Write an annotated bibliography entry for each. Include government documents and television and print news as unusual sources.



MAIN MODULE  
**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – ANALYTICAL**

2. Research Dave Cullen’s online resource: Columbine Online at <http://www.columbine-online.com/> Provide an annotated bibliography for five different source materials posted there.

### **The Research Paper**

1. Teen Depression is the most important topic in the book. See the Teen Depression unit for suggested readings and a wealth of different ways to approach the topic. (See any of the special units for paper ideas and readings.)
2. Step back from Columbine and consider the broader environment. Investigate high school and college shootings. What are the problems? Is there a profile? What are possible solutions? Have they failed? Why? Which would have affected the outcome at Columbine? Is it representative?

**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

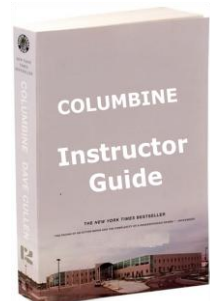
- Chapters 1-10

3. Investigate violence in schools from a historical perspective. Has violence changed significantly? Have the tactics or motivations changed? If so, why?

**Suggested *Columbine* Reading:**

- Chapters 1-10
- Investigate violence in schools from a historical perspective. Has violence changed significantly? Have the tactics or motivations changed? If so, why?

4. Choose from more than fifty topics organized into about a dozen categories on the page devoted to topics for papers and class discussions, in the QUICK TAKES section.



MAIN MODULE  
**SPECIAL UNITS: TEEN DEPRESSION**

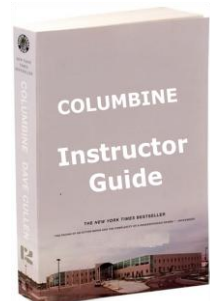
**Topics**—For discussion, papers or presentations

1. What is depression?
2. Distinguishing depression it from “sadness”
3. Prevalence: 6% of U.S. teens
4. Consequences:
  - Impact on kids: drug and alcohol, teen pregnancy, school dropout, misery, suicide
  - Impact on the school system—and the economy when it continues to adulthood
5. Detection and prevention
6. Treatment: options/efficacy
7. Depressives who kill:
  - The role of depression in Columbine
  - Prevalence of depression in other attacks
8. Your peers
  - Spotting it in your friends
  - Approaching friends in danger
  - Who could you turn to for help?
9. Yourself
  - Spotting it in yourself
  - options
  - Who could you turn to?
10. Your school, college or community:
  - What is in place now?
  - How could it be improved?
  - What can you do?

**Reading assignments: *Columbine* passages**

Pages:

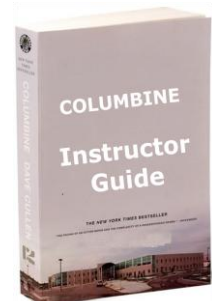
- 126-129 (Chapter 23, “Gifted Boy”)
- 173-176 (Chapter 31, “The Seeker”)
- 182-183, 185-186 (the Dylan passages from Chapter 33 “Good-bye”)



**MAIN MODULE**  
**SPECIAL UNITS: TEEN DEPRESSION**

**Discussion Questions**

1. Explain the difference between clinical depression and “sadness.” What makes depression so dangerous?
2. Identify five common consequences of depression. Discuss how each one can devastate the life of a teenager.
3. Did you know 6% of U.S. teens suffer clinical depression? Discuss the impact to schools and individuals. Alternative: discuss the economic impact with adults. (See Further Reading below for citations.)
4. Outline the two major strategies for treating depression. How successful are they?
5. Discuss the controversies surrounding pharmacological treatment. Is there legitimate cause for concern?
6. Discuss the suicide rate among teens. What are the key warning signs? How do you approach a classmate you fear is in danger? What can you do if you fear it in yourself?
7. React to the statement: “Parents and schools are drugging our kids out of our problem.” Are anti-depressants over-prescribed? Under-prescribed? Take a position.
8. What causes depression? Are there genetic predispositions? How significant are external factors in bringing it on (e.g., breakup with a boyfriend/girlfriend)? Who is most at-risk?
9. Does a depression diagnosis still carry a social stigma? How might that change?
10. What have organizations like the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended as strategies for diagnosis and treatment?
11. What is in place in your school to diagnose and treat kids in trouble with depression? How effective is it? How could that change?
12. Do most depressed teens hide it? Who are they most and least likely to tell? Why are their parents least likely to know?
13. How well do most depressed teens understand their own condition? Are they aware they are depressed?
14. Outline recent advances in the diagnosis or treatment of depression. What lies on the horizon?
15. In severe cases, do depressives usually cry out for help in some way before committing suicide or murder?



MAIN MODULE  
**SPECIAL UNITS: TEEN DEPRESSION**

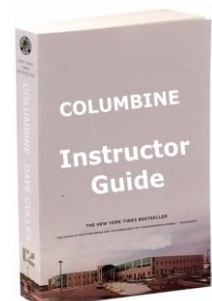
16. Anti-depressants carry a risk warning of potentially increasing the risk of suicide among some patients, primarily during the very early stages of treatment. Explain why this phenomenon occurs. How significant is the incidence of this problem? Is it greater or smaller than the number believed to be kept from suicide by the same treatment?

### **Depression and Dylan Klebold**

1. What role did depression play in the attack? Would Dylan have killed people if he'd been diagnosed and treated?
2. Describe the misery Dylan was going through. What was so painful for him? Did that change over time? How did his responses to it change?
3. How did Dylan see himself? How did his self-image compare to objective assessments (e.g., based on his social calendar, how his friends saw him and related to him, etc.)
4. Why was Dylan never diagnosed with depression? Should he have been? How do you think that would have affected the outcome?
5. How often do angry depressives commit murder? Outline the progression from suicide through single murder to mass murder. What causes a person to make that progression?
6. Read the essay published by his mother, Susan Klebold in 2009. (In *O Magazine*. Full citation in the depression section of the Psychology Module). List five warning signs she could identify in retrospect. How common are each? How does a parent, teacher or friend know when to take each one seriously?

### **Further reading on depression**

- Anderson, Scott, "The Urge to End It." *New York Times Magazine*. July 6, 2008. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/06/magazine/06suicide-t.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/06/magazine/06suicide-t.html?_r=1)
- Klebold, Sue. "I Will Never Know Why." *O, the Oprah Magazine*. October 13, 2009. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Susan-Klebolds-O-Magazine-Essay-I-Will-Never-Know-Why>
- U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, "Screening and Treatment for Major Depressive Disorder in Children and Adolescents: US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement" *Pediatrics*, April 2009.



MAIN MODULE  
**SPECIAL UNITS: TEEN DEPRESSION**

<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf09/depression/chdeprart.htm>

**Resources**

- Teen Suicide Hotline: 1-800-SUICIDE
- Depression Hotline: 630-482-9696
- Suicide prevention programs: 630-482-9696
- Links to those and more: <http://www.columbine-online.com/columbine-teen-depression-suicide.htm>
- For gay kids:
  - [The Trevor Project](#): 866-488-7386
  - [It Gets Better Project](#)
- Bullying:
  - [Teen Tools: bullying & harassment](#)
  - [Bullies to buddies](#)
  - [NEA: Don't Get Even. Get Help.](#)

**Warning Signs of Depression**

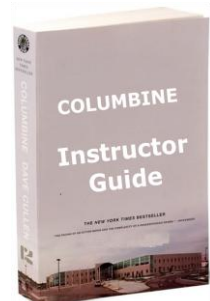
From [National Institute of Mental Health](#)

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Overeating, or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment

**Warning Signs of Suicide**

From [The Trevor Project](#)

- Increased isolation—from family and friends
- Alcohol or drug use increases
- Expression of negative attitude toward self
- Expression of hopelessness or helplessness



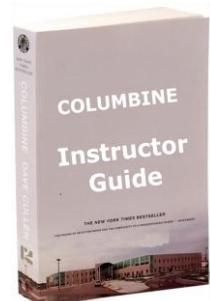
MAIN MODULE  
**SPECIAL UNITS: TEEN DEPRESSION**

- Change in regular behavior
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Giving away valued possessions
- Expression of a lack of future orientation (i.e. "It won't matter soon anyway")
- Expressing suicidal feelings
- Signs of depression
- Describes a specific plan for suicide
- History of suicide in the family
- A person who has been extremely depressed in the past may be at an increased risk for suicide if the depression begins to cease, as they may now have the psychological energy to follow through on a suicidal ideation.

**Facts About Teen Suicide**

*From [The Trevor Project](#)*

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 24-year-olds, accounting for over 12% of deaths in this age group; only accidents and homicide occur more frequently (National Adolescent Health Information 2006).
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death on college campuses (CDC 2008).
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Massachusetts Youth Risk Survey 2007).



MAIN MODULE  
**SPECIAL UNITS: OVERCOMING ADVERSITY**

### **Overcoming Adversity: Group Activity**

#### **Instructions:**

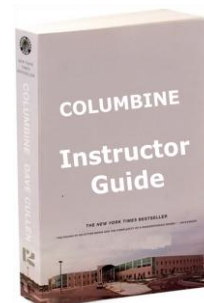
1. Organize students into small groups, and read them the prompt below.
2. Then give each group 3-5 of the questions, and have them discuss each question for five minutes.
3. At the end of the discussion period (15-25 minutes), have them choose one of the questions that provoked the most fruitful discussion. As a team, spend five minutes summarizing what they learned.
4. Have each group chose a spokesperson to make a two-minute presentation to the class on what they concluded.
5. Use the remaining time for an open class discussion, responding to what they heard from the other groups.

#### **The Prompt:**

"The survivors struggled with very different kinds of loss. Brian Rohrbough lost a son; Linda Sanders lost a husband; and Patrick Ireland was told he'd lost use of one leg, most of his speech and a good deal of his brain. They all lived through it, but in very different ways. Many survivors faced unimaginable horror: some responded heroically, others poorly. Discuss what you learned."

#### **Questions:**

1. Name five characters you feel acted heroically, or overcame a great obstacle. What did each person do that impressed you?
2. What did you learn from each person?
3. Which character did you admire most of all?
4. What character in the book faced the greatest challenge? Who overcame the most?
5. Did that person's attitude impact their success? What was their mental response to what they faced?
6. Were you surprised by what they achieved? How do you think their life might be now if they had approached their situation differently?
7. If you faced a similar loss or injury, how would you respond? What that change based on what you read?
8. Other than the killers, were there characters you think responded poorly to what they faced? Who? Why do you think that?
9. What do you think those people should have done?
10. For each person you had a negative reaction, find at least three things you did admire about their response.

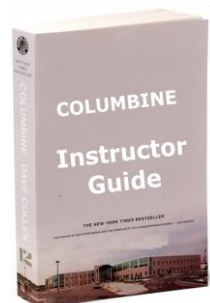




## MAIN MODULE

# SPECIAL UNITS: OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

11. Who did you feel responded poorly at first, but then learned from their mistakes?
12. Put yourself into the position of one person you did not admire. Why do you think they acted the way they did? Was it understandable, even if you don't agree with it? Or was it just plain wrong?



# MAIN MODULE

## BACKGROUND MATERIAL

### Author Biography

See latest updates at <http://davecullen.com/bio.htm>

Dave Cullen spent ten years writing and researching *Columbine*, a haunting portrait of two killers and eight victims. It became a break-out bestseller and won several major awards.

Cullen has been described as a cultural translator, writing about Evangelical Christians, gays in the military, Barbie doll collectors . . . anyone on the margins. He has contributed to *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Times of London*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *Daily Beast* and *Guardian*.



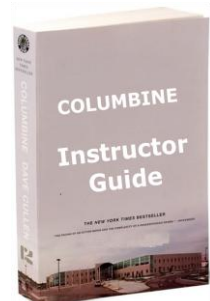
Dave began writing as a young boy in the Chicago suburbs. He dove passionately into journalism in high school and college, then wandered. He became an infantry soldier, management consultant, computer systems analyst and undergraduate instructor in scattered cities across the U.S., England, Kuwait and Bahrain. He traveled to 26 countries, with a penchant for north Africa and south Asia.

At 33, Dave devoted himself to writing full-time. He began with the University of Colorado-Boulder's writing program, where he won the Jovanovich Award for best master's thesis. He later won a GLAAD Media Award, an SPJ Award and is an Ochberg Fellow at the [Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma](#) at Columbia University's Journalism School.

*Columbine* spent thirteen weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller lists. It won the Edgar Award, Barnes & Noble's Discover Award, and the Goodreads Choice Award. It was a finalist for the LA Times Book Award, the ALA's Alex Award, and others. *Columbine* was named to two dozen Best of 2009 lists, including the *New York Times*, *LA Times* and *Publishers Weekly*.

**It was declared Top Education Book of 2009 by the American School Board Journal.**

Dave was planning a move to New York City when *Columbine* happened. He remained in Denver to research, write and promote the book, and moved to NYC in July, 2010. He is happy there. He travels extensively to high schools and colleges to teach writing and discuss the tragedy.



## MAIN MODULE

# BACKGROUND MATERIAL

### Book Summary

*From the book jacket*

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left an indelible stamp on the American psyche. Their goal was simple: to blow up their school, Oklahoma City-style, and to leave "a lasting impression on the world." Their bombs failed, but the ensuing shooting defined a new era of school violence—irrevocably branding every subsequent shooting "another Columbine."

When we think of Columbine, we think of the Trench Coat Mafia; we think of Cassie Bernall, the girl we thought professed her faith before she was shot; and we think of the boy pulling himself out of a school window—the whole world was watching him. Now, in a riveting piece of journalism nearly ten years in the making, comes the story none of us knew. In this revelatory book, Dave Cullen has delivered a profile of teenage killers that goes to the heart of psychopathology. He lays bare the callous brutality of mastermind Eric Harris and the quavering, suicidal Dylan Klebold, who went to the Columbine prom three days earlier and obsessed about love in his journal.

The result is an astonishing account of two good students with lots of friends, who were secretly stockpiling a basement cache of weapons, recording their raging hatred, and manipulating every adult who got in their way. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left signs everywhere, described by Cullen with a keen investigative eye and psychological acumen. Drawing on hundreds of interviews, thousands of pages of police files, FBI psychologists, and the boys' tapes and diaries, he gives the first complete account of the Columbine High School massacre.

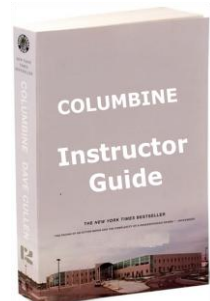
In the tradition of *Helter Skelter* and *In Cold Blood*, *Columbine* is destined to be a classic. A close-up portrait of violence, a community rendered helpless, and police blunders and cover-ups, it is a compelling and utterly human portrait of two killers—an unforgettable cautionary tale for our time.

### Reviews

Excerpts from most published reviews of *Columbine*, with links to the original sources can be found here: <http://davecullen.com/columbine/reviews.htm>

### Further Reading

These books are considered important works in their respective areas. With one exception, they were highly recommended by *Columbine* author Dave Cullen, who cited them as influential to him in writing the book. (He is not a fan of *The Executioner's Song*.)



## MAIN MODULE

# BACKGROUND MATERIAL

### A. Narrative Non-Fiction on Killers

- *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote
- *The Devil & The White City*, Erik Larson
- *Helter Skelter*, Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry
- *The Executioner's Song*, Norman Mailer

### B. Other Classic Narrative Non-Fiction

- *Longitude*, Dana Sobel
- *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe
- *The Professor & The Madman*, Simon Winchester
- *The Perfect Storm*, Sebastian Junger
- *All The President's Men*, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward
- *Blackhawk Down*, Mark Bowden
- *The Right Stuff*, Tom Wolfe
- *What It Takes*, Richard Ben Cramer

### C. Novels Excelling at Multiple Points of View

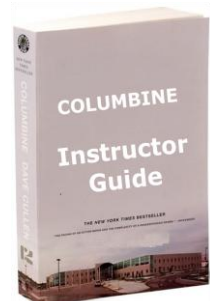
- *As I Lay Dying*, William Faulkner
- *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, Fay Weldon

### D. Classic Psychopaths in Literature

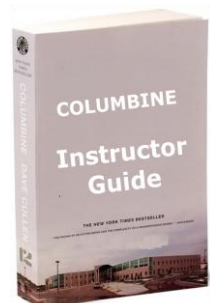
- Iago in *Othello*, William Shakespeare
- The narrator in *Notes From Underground*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky

### E. Reading By Subject-Matter (e.g., psychopathy, lawsuits, gun control, police tactics, etc.)

- *Without Conscience*, Robert Hare
- *The Mask of Sanity*, Hervey Cleckley
- For many more, see the bibliography, organized by topic, in the back of the book. Highlights—more than fifty entries—are included in the online version:  
<http://davecullen.com/columbine/bibliography.htm>



# LITERATURE MODULE



## LITERATURE MODULE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

See the Main Module for a wide variety of additional questions about the content, social impact, etc. (This section is strictly focused on literary elements.).

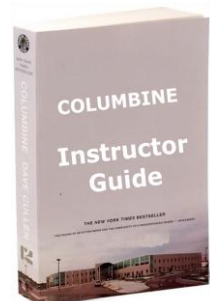
See the Creative Writing section for writing exercises addressing each of these literary elements.

### Character

1. Provide a brief character sketch of each killer. Were they more similar or different? What drew them together?
2. Compare *In Cold Blood*'s Dick and Perry to Columbine's Eric and Dylan. What similarities and differences do you find? How did Capote and Cullen's approaches to researching and telling their stories differ?
3. The book cites two literary characters as perfect psychopaths: Iago from *Othello*, and the narrator of *Notes from Underground*. Both were invented before the diagnosis even existed. How did Shakespeare and Dostoevsky understand the phenomenon long before modern science? What other writers and artists have a keen eye for the human condition. Discuss how novelists and playwrights can help humans understand ourselves better.
4. Can you identify other fictional psychopaths in literature? How about angry depressives? (Not just “sad” characters, but clinical depression.)
5. (See the cross-curricula module for several more discussion questions on character, under the sections on the killers and survivors.)

### Plot & Structure

1. How does the author build and maintain suspense and mystery in the book? How does he deal with the fact that readers may know—or think they know—the outcomes or details of the book's events?
2. Identify at least nine major storylines this book contained. How easy was it to recall each story/character with so many intervening? What devices allowed you to remember them and helped you stay interested?
3. At what point in the book did you decide if you liked it or not? What helped you make this decision?
4. As you read the book, what surprises did you encounter? Why do you think you hadn't known about them before?
5. This book has a highly complex structure. Was it effective? Outline the primary structure of the book, and the use of additional techniques such as flashbacks within that framework.



## LITERATURE MODULE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

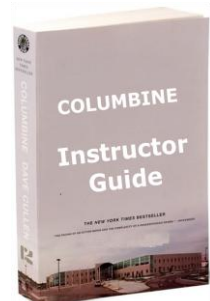
6. How many times does the reader encounter murder over the course of the book? How long does each episode last and how far apart are they spaced? What is unique about each episode? Why did the author make these choices? How effective were they?
7. At what point in the narrative could one decision or one action have changed the outcome? Which characters had a chance to make a difference but didn't?

### Tone & Voice

1. How does the author vary content and tone to affect the mood: eg, tragic passages intercut with hopeful scenes, or murder with redemption? Select a passage of 20 pages and identify each shift in mood. How does this affect the reading experience?
2. The narrator of this book has been described as speaking "quietly." Do you agree or disagree. Cite a passage and explain how the voice is understated or hyped.
3. Was the narrator generally objective or judgmental? What sort of attitude did he convey toward his characters? Did he respect them? How can you tell?

### Form/Technique

1. Some readers have referred to *Columbine* as a "non-fiction novel." Do you think this description fits? What other books fall into this category? How does *Columbine* use the form differently? How well does it fare?
2. Was irony employed in the book?
3. How did the author use language or imagery to enhance the story or create the mood? Did it feel like you were in the presence of teenagers even when dialogue was not present? How was that achieved?
4. Cullen has been both praised and criticized for his use of very short sentences. How did you respond to this rhythmic variation? Was it effective? Compare his sentence rhythms to one other author you strongly like or dislike.
5. Were metaphors or other tropes used? What other literary devices were employed?
6. How heavily is dialogue used? Is it effective?
7. Where did the author get this dialogue? Does he explain his process and his choices? Do you agree with them?
8. The endnotes of the book provide a sort of story behind the story. How interesting did you find the backstory? Was it wise to sequester it from the main narrative?



# LITERATURE MODULE

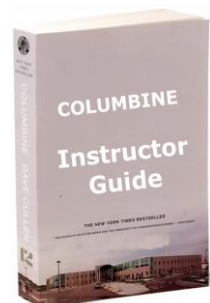
## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Setting

1. What was unusual about the setting of the book? Did it enhance the story?
2. Reporters routinely described the Columbine area (Jeffco) as a typical American suburb, like any other. Did it come across that way in the book? What distinguished it? How did the author make it feel like a very specific place? Did the particularity influence your feelings toward the story?
3. Discuss how novelists use setting to establish authenticity, versus common journalistic technique.
4. How do Columbine High School and the community of Littleton compare with your own school and community? How likely is it that a similar event could happen where you are?

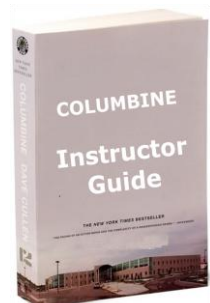
### Theme

1. (See the cross-curricula module for several discussion questions on theme.)





# CREATIVE WRITING MODULE



# CREATIVE WRITING MODULE

*For writing classes, or engaging students creatively in any class*

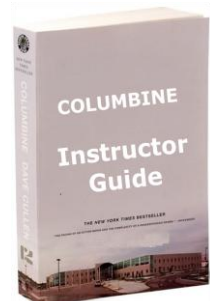
*See the Literature Module for discussion questions on each of these topics. And see the Main Module for a wide variety of discussion questions and writing assignments. That material is not repeated here.*

## Character

1. Create a character sketch of one of the principal characters: Eric, Dylan, Mr. D, Patrick Ireland, Dave Sanders, Brian Rohrbough, Misty Bernall or Agent Fuselier. Write “He/she was the kind of guy who...” Think of actions and images not in the book. Put these characters in a different setting and write how they react.
2. Based on what you learned from the book, choose a principal character and invent a story about them unrelated to the Columbine events. Make it hold true to their character. (You may write in first or third person). Principal characters include: Eric, Dylan, Mr. D, Patrick Ireland, Dave Sanders, Brian Rohrbough, Misty Bernall or Agent Fuselier.
3. Select a scene from the book that you found emotional (e.g., Patrick Ireland attempting to walk and talk again; two Eagle Scouts trying to save Dave Sanders from bleeding to death; one of the parents trying to find their missing child April 20, etc.) Replace a primary character from that scene with another character from the book, and rewrite the scene as you imagine it unfolding with the new character (e.g., replace Patrick Ireland with Dylan Klebold, or Misty Bernall with Rev. Marxhausen).
4. Choose a major event from the book, and imagine what would have happened if it had turned out different (e.g., Eric’s parents found his arsenal, the Jeffco cops had exercised the search warrant on Eric’s house, the big bombs exploded, Eric was wounded or killed in the early shootout with Deputy Gardner, a victim had been in another location in the school, the SWAT team had gone directly to Dave Sanders in Science Room 3 . . .) Write a scene based on the new/imaginary scenario as it affected one primary character. Stay true to the character.

## Point of View

1. Rewrite the killers’ suicide scene in chapter 52 in the first person, as narrated by either Eric or Dylan. You may invent additional details, imagining what they saw, heard, smelled, thought and felt, and how they acted. Choose where to begin and end the scene, and what tone to strike. Is he elated, disgusted, anxious, remorseful . . . ?
2. Reread chapter 24, “Hour of Need.” Rewrite the scene of Dylan’s funeral four times in the first person, as told by each of his parents, his brother and Rev. Marxhausen.
3. Rewrite the first paragraph of chapter 20 in the voice of the girl described in the photograph. Invent any necessary details to describe what she went through. Think about what she would choose to tell, and how she would deliver it.



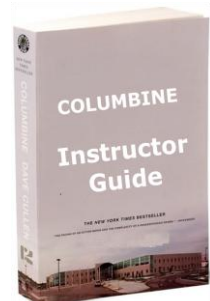
# CREATIVE WRITING MODULE

*For writing classes, or engaging students creatively in any class*

4. Rewrite chapter 1 in the first person of either Eric or Dylan, in the bleachers, describing Mr. D's speech and the narrator's reaction.
5. Reread the brief chapter 21, which portrays the early childhood of Eric. Rewrite it in the first person, from Eric's point of view. You may completely change the information presented in the chapter, inventing as necessary, or leaving it largely unchanged. Think about what Eric would choose to tell the reader about his early life, and how he would present it. Now rewrite it again, as Dylan, thinking about how he would present Eric, and what he would know about Eric's youth before they met. For an additional exercise, write it again as one of Eric's parents.
6. Repeat the previous exercise with chapter 23, which portrays the early childhood of Dylan. Write it first as Dylan, then as Eric.
7. Choose any emotional scene in the book, and rewrite it two times, both in the first person: once from the point of view of the primary character, and once from the point of view of a bystander or secondary character. (Example 1: Patrick Ireland going out the library window: write it once by him, and once by a member of the SWAT team racing to catch him. Example 2: Any parent searching for their child April 20: write it once as the parent, and once as a student or teacher observing them and briefly speaking with them. Example 3: Brian Rohrbough chopping down the crosses or trees: once as Brian, once as someone who planted the trees or wants the crosses to stay.) You may fictionalize additional details to flesh out the scene.

## Voice

1. Rewrite the killers' suicide scene in chapter 52 in a completely different style/voice—e.g., eliminating the graphic detail, or in a hyped, melodramatic style.
2. Investigate a piece of news—a real event—unrelated to Columbine. Write about it in the tone of a particular scene from Columbine. Develop characters and setting. Give them thoughts and dialogue based on your research.
3. Reread the first four paragraphs of chapter 43, where Linda Sanders considers the house in Laramie that she will never own with Dave. Now take a real or imaginary victim, and write a short lamentation about something dear to them which they will lose or never attain. Write in the third person, using the same quiet, detached tone of this scene.
4. Rewrite the final scene of the book (the last three paragraphs of chapter 53) in a radically different style and tone. Use the same event—the dedication of the memorial—but change the details presented or words spoken (inventing as necessary), to achieve a completely different effect: e.g., exciting, glum, hopeful, tragic, ominous, foreboding, etc.



# CREATIVE WRITING MODULE

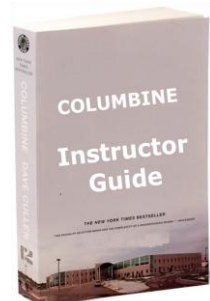
*For writing classes, or engaging students creatively in any class*

## Genre

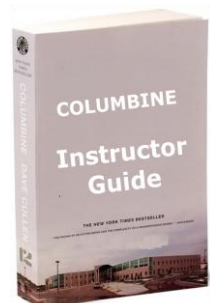
1. Write a poem or memoir about where you were when Columbine happened and how it affected you. Or choose a more recent tragedy such as the Virginia Tech. shooting or the BP oil spill.
2. Choose a scene from the book and rewrite it in another form: e.g., poem, song lyric, play, screenplay, etc.

## Structure

1. Read “Part II: After & Before” from Columbine. Take a story you have previously written and split one of your narratives into alternating sections of “before” and “after” a pivotal event in order to learn how to sustain tension in a narrative.
2. Take a story you have previously written and recast it employing flashbacks. You may accomplish this by adding a new backstory, or taking events already written and changing the chronology of when they occurred.



# PSYCHOLOGY MODULE



# PSYCHOLOGY MODULE INTRODUCTION

*See the Main Module for a wide variety of discussion questions and writing assignments. That material is not repeated here.*

**The Psychology Module is organized into four units:**

1. Case Study in Teen Depression: Dylan Klebold (now in the Special Units section of the Main Module)
2. Case Study in Psychopathy\*: Eric Harris
3. Case Study in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Survivors
4. Case Study in Criminal psychology: Transitioning from fantasy to action

Suggested supplementary units:

- Dyads
- Myth-making and martyr mythology

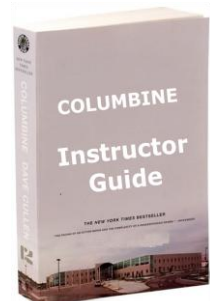
**Each unit includes:**

- A. Core topics
- B. Reading assignments: relevant *Columbine* passages
- C. Discussion questions
- D. Further reading from outside sources (for most units)

**Still more reading:**

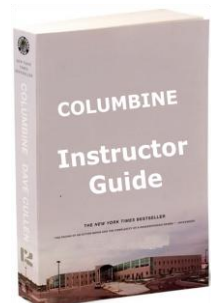
In addition to the sources listed in each unit, see the extensive bibliography in the book, and the abridged version online at <http://davecullen.com/columbine/bibliography.htm> Some areas are broken out into subcategories, such as Juvenile Psychopathy and Psychopathy Treatment.

*\* See terminology debate on psychopath vs sociopath, in the section.*



PSYCHOLOGY MODULE  
**TEEN DEPRESSION**

**Teen Depression is now in the Special Units section of the Main Module.**



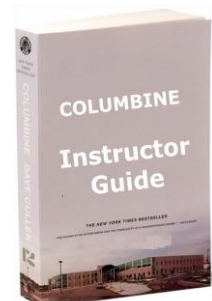
**PSYCHOLOGY MODULE**  
**PSYCHOPATHY CASE STUDY**  
**ERIC HARRIS**

**Core Topics**

1. Popular understanding and misconceptions
2. Characteristics
  - a. Identify all 20
  - b. Tell-tale signs
  - c. Scoring Eric
3. How much does psychopathy explain Eric? Limitations?
4. Causes
5. Treatment
  - a. The treatment conundrum
  - b. Did treatment make Eric worse?
  - c. Future hope for treatment
6. Juveniles: early warning signs
7. Eric Harris: the rare sadistic/killer psychopath
8. Eric's progression:
  - a. Petty thief to felony theft to murder
  - b. Human extinction fantasies to blowing up a high school
  - c. Fantasy to reality
9. Identifying the charming psychopath

**Advanced Topics:**

1. Recent advances with fMRIs
2. Ten subtypes (See reading by Theodore Millon)
3. Onset age—controversy over diagnosing juveniles
4. In-depth on The Psychopathy Checklist
  - a. Characteristics
  - b. Scoring
5. Historical developments
6. Terminology debates: sociopath and APD
7. Exclusion from DSM





**PSYCHOLOGY MODULE**  
**PSYCHOPATHY CASE STUDY**  
**ERIC HARRIS**

**Terminology Debate: Psychopath vs. Sociopath vs. Anti-Social Personality Disorder**

Some disciplines use the term Sociopath in place of Psychopath. Contrary to popular belief, the terms are generally used interchangeably, and can easily be substituted here.

Other disciplines prefer the term Anti-Social Personality Disorder, which is far broader, but includes psychopaths/sociopaths as a subset. (The most dangerous subset.) That term fully applies to Eric Harris, and can also be substituted.

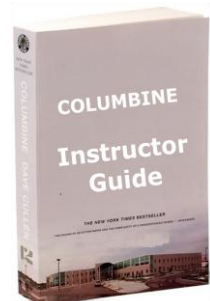
**Reading assignments: Columbine passages**

Pages:

- 134-136
- 168-170
- 239-246 (Chapter 40, “Psychopath”)
- 378-379 (in the Notes)

**Discussion Questions**

1. Identify the key characteristics of a psychopath. Explain how psychopathy differs from psychosis, and why it’s so dangerous. Illustrate how Eric Harris fit the profile. Were there any contradictions between his behavior and the profile?
2. Where do psychopaths come from? Describe the current theories. Pick one and defend it?
3. How often are psychopaths violent? Explain which subset of psychopathy Eric Harris falls into.
4. Can psychopathy be cured? What have we learned about treatment?
5. Identify the early warning signs of psychopathy.
6. How does Eric match up with the psychopathy checklist in the book’s endnotes for chapter 40? Take your own shot at rating him on each item. What score do you get for him?
7. Therapy often provides psychopaths with the means of better manipulating people. Do you believe this was true for Eric? If so, in what ways? What is your opinion of the treatment programs such as the one proposed by Dr. Hare or put in place by Dr. Caldwell at the juvenile treatment center in Wisconsin? Do you think they show promise?
8. The author notes a resistance to diagnosing minors as psychopaths. Why do you think there is this resistance? Do you think there would



**PSYCHOLOGY MODULE**  
**PSYCHOPATHY CASE STUDY**  
**ERIC HARRIS**

- have been a different outcome if Eric had been diagnosed a psychopath?
9. The book cites two literary characters as perfect psychopaths: Iago from Othello, and the narrator of Notes from Underground. (Both invented before the diagnosis even existed.) Read one of the works—or the first twenty pages—and rate each character on Dr. Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist. (The checklist and instructions are in the book’s endnotes for chapter 40 on page 398.) What score do you calculate for each? Where does that put them on the psychopathy spectrum?
  10. Explain the terminology confusion between the terms psychopath, sociopath and anti-social personality disorder (APD). How is APD different? Why do Dr. Hare and many of his peers find it unuseful? Why is psychopathy (or sociopathy) not in the DSM-IV.

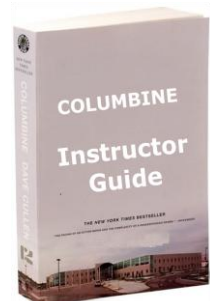
## Further Reading

### Primary outside readings on psychopathy:

- Caldwell, Michael F., David J. McCormick, Deborah Umstead and Gregory J. Van Rybroek. “Evidence of Treatment Progress and Therapeutic Outcomes Among Adolescents with Psychopathic Features.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 34 (2007): 573-587. <http://cjb.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/34/5/573>
- Cleckley, Hervey. [\*The Mask of Sanity: An Attempt to Clarify Some Issues About the So-Called Psychopathic Personality\*](#). 5th ed., 1988.
- Hare, Robert D. [\*Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised \(PCL-R\)\*](#), 2nd ed. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems, 2003.
- ———. [\*Without Conscience\*](#). Guilford Press, 1999.
- ———. Robert Hare’s [\*Web Page Devoted to the Study of Psychopathy\*](#).
- Kiehl, Kent A., Alan T. Bates, Kristin R. Laurens, Robert D. Hare, and Peter F. Liddle. “Brain Potentials Implicate Temporal Lobe Abnormalities in Criminal Psychopaths.” [\*Journal of Abnormal Psychology\*](#) 115, no. 3 (2006): 443– 453.
- Millon , Theodore, and Roger D. Davis. [\*Psychopathy: Antisocial, Criminal, and Violent Behavior\*](#). New York: Guilford Press, 1998.
- Millon , Theodore, Erik Simonsen, Roger D. Davis and Morten Birket-Smith. “Ten Subtypes of Psychopathy.” In Millon and Davis, [\*Psychopathy: Antisocial, Criminal, and Violent Behavior\*](#), pp. 161-70.

### Supplemental outside readings on psychopathy:

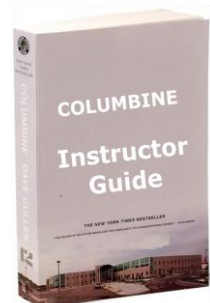
- Seabrook, John. “Suffering Souls: The search for the roots of psychopathy.” *The New Yorker*. November 10, 2008.



**PSYCHOLOGY MODULE**  
**PSYCHOPATHY CASE STUDY**  
**ERIC HARRIS**

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/11/10/081110fa\\_fact\\_seabrook](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/11/10/081110fa_fact_seabrook)

- Glenn, Andrea L., Adrian Raine, Peter H. Venables, and Sarnoff A. Mednick. “Early Temperamental and Psychophysiological Precursors of Adult Psychopathic Personality.” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 116, no. 3 (2007): 508-518. [http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~aglenn/Glenn\\_JAbnormal\\_2007.pdf](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~aglenn/Glenn_JAbnormal_2007.pdf)
- Wong, Stephen C. P., PhD and Robert D. Hare, PhD. *Guidelines for a Psychopathy Treatment Program*. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems, 2006. <http://www.mhs.com/product.aspx?gr=saf&prod=gtp&id=resources>



# PSYCHOLOGY MODULE

## PTSD CASE STUDY

### SURVIVORS

#### Core Topics

1. Definition
2. Impact / Consequences
3. Causes
4. Treatment
5. How it works, medically
6. Prevalence
7. Stigma
8. The public understanding

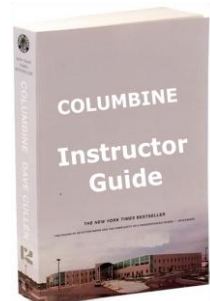
#### Reading assignments: *Columbine* passages

Pages:

- 96-98 (Chapter 19, “Vacuuming”)
- 101-102, 106-107
- 116-122
- 281-292
- 312-314
- 354-358 (Chapter 53, “At the Broken Places”)

#### Discussion Questions

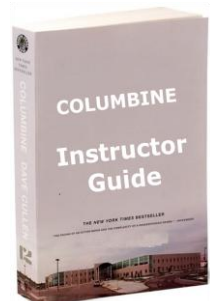
1. **What is PTSD?** How does it differ from ordinary trauma? How is the term misapplied?
2. List and describe the major criteria for a PTSD case.
3. How common is PTSD? Discuss some of the major situations that can bring it about.
4. What causes PTSD? Describe the medical process of how it occurs in the brain.
5. Are there effective treatments? Describe them. What should victims or people close to them not do in the immediate aftermath?
6. How quickly do symptoms of PTSD show up? How long does it usually last?



PSYCHOLOGY MODULE  
**PTSD CASE STUDY**  
SURVIVORS

**Further reading on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

- Ochberg, Frank. [“PTSD 101.”](#) DART Center for Journalism and Trauma.



**PSYCHOLOGY MODULE**  
**CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY CASE STUDY**  
**FANTASY TO ACTION**

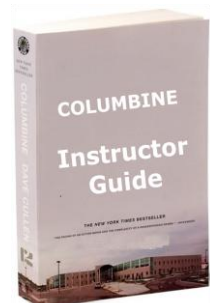
**Core Topics**

1. Eric's progression:
  - a. Petty thief to felony theft to murder
  - b. Human extinction fantasies to blowing up a high school
  - c. Fantasy to reality
2. Dylan's progression:
  - a. Suicide to murder
  - b. Actions that made it real
  - c. The "preps" story
  - d. The April 20<sup>th</sup> attack plan: how it eased Dylan in gradually: set diversion bomb, set cafeteria bombs, open fire. Was this by design?
3. Final progression:
  - a. Making bombs
  - b. Buying guns
  - c. Finalizing plans
  - d. Shooting practice
  - e. Gear-up practice
  - f. Filming The Basement Tapes
  - g. Expanding the plan / attempts to recruit others
  - h. Scaling back the plan to make it work
  - i. Final preparations

**Reading assignments: *Columbine* passages**

Pages:

- 322-324
- 384-385
- And chapters 44, 46, 48, 50, 52.



# MINI MODULES

(Coming Soon)

