EPISODE ONE:

THE MURDER OF JOHN LENNON

SYLLABUS
OVERVIEW:

Singer, songwriter and political activist John Winston Lennon was born on October 9, 1940, in Liverpool, England, in the midst of a Nazi air raid. Lennon met fellow Liverpudlian and rock-and-roll enthusiast Paul McCartney in 1957, and together the two would form one of the most successful songwriting partnerships in history. Then, along with George Harrison and Ringo Starr, they would create perhaps rock’s biggest band: the Beatles. Beginning in 1964, Beatlemania swept the United States and the globe, and the young Lennon became one of the most famous people in the world. After the Beatles broke up in 1970, Lennon launched a successful solo career before taking a five-year hiatus to raise his son Sean with his wife, the avant-garde artist Yoko Ono. On December 8, 1980, just months after his return to the recording studio, Lennon was killed by a crazed fan named Mark David Chapman.

EPISODE SUMMARY:

After shooting rock star John Lennon in front of the Dakota Building in Manhattan on December 8, 1980, Mark David Chapman remained at the crime scene, reading his favorite book, The Catcher in the Rye, until police arrived. Chapman identified powerfully with Holden Caulfield, the novel’s alienated protagonist, and in this episode we explore Chapman’s motivations and their grounding in Catcher, asking the question: What makes someone kill their own hero in cold blood?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions based solely on material discussed in the podcast.

1. At the time of his death, why was John Lennon finally starting to feel like he was happy in his life and had figured things out?

2. Would Mark David Chapman have murdered John Lennon if he hadn’t been obsessed with The Catcher in the Rye?

3. What is a phony, and why did Mark David Chapman consider John Lennon to be one?

BONUS QUESTIONS (for college listeners)

1. Is there a danger in creating too large a sense that there was a causal link between The Catcher in the Rye and John Lennon’s death? Why or why not?

2. Do Mark David Chapman’s actions change your opinion of The Catcher in the Rye? Why or why not?
EPISODE QUIZ (with answers)

Questions based solely on material discussed in the podcast. Correct answers in bold.

1. Which classic American novel was Mark David Chapman reading after he murdered John Lennon?
   a. Catch-22  
   b. The Great Gatsby  
   c. The Catcher in the Rye

2. What was the name of the famous Manhattan apartment building where John Lennon and Yoko Ono lived?
   a. The Waldorf Astoria  
   b. The Dakota  
   c. The Chrysler Building

3. Which famous historical event did not happen in 1980?
   a. The attempted assassination of U.S. president Ronald Reagan  
   b. The Iran hostage crisis  
   c. The U.S. boycott of the Olympic Games

4. What was the name of John Lennon’s final album, the one he signed for his assassin?
   a. Imagine  
   b. Double Fantasy  
   c. Just Like Starting Over

5. Where did Mark David Chapman go prior to the murder for his “last fling in paradise”?
   a. Hawaii  
   b. Georgia  
   c. The Empire State Building
PRIMARY SOURCES:

- *The Thread*, Episode One. Available at ozy.com/thethread

- *The Thread* immersive story page and timeline. ozy.com/thethread

- Howard Cosell informs the nation on *Monday Night Football* that John Lennon has been killed, December 8, 1980. Watch on YouTube.


SECONDARY SOURCES:


- *Lennon: The Man, the Myth, the Music — The Definitive Life* (2011), by Tim Riley
