STUDY GUIDE
“Contents of a Dead Man’s Pocket”
BY: Jack Finney

Pages 16-17

1. What does Tom Beneck’s use of a typewriter suggest about the time in which the story is set?

The story was set before computers were popular. It takes place in the 1950s.

2. What type of conflict is Tom facing? (hint: internal or external) Justify your answer.

Internal conflict. He wants to go to the movies with his wife but he feels he needs to do his work.

3. What caused the sheet of paper to fly out the window?

The warm air from the hallway outside of the apartment caused the sheet of paper to fly out.

4. Why do you think the author provides such a detailed, step-by-step description of the paper’s movement?

The sheet of paper was of great importance to Tom. It builds suspense of the story.

5. Why is Tom upset about the loss of the paper?
The sheet contains the result of weeks of work on a personal project. He hoped this project would help him advance himself in the workplace. (Make Tom more successful.)

Pages 18-19

1. What internal conflict is Tom experiencing here?
Should Tom get the paper or start the project over? He is trying to convince himself that the project is not that important and he will not receive a raise soon anyway.

2. Anxiety and uncertainty create suspense. What questions have been posed in the reader’s mind? What do you want to find out?

Will Tom get the paper by the end of the story?
Will Tom go to the movies with his wife?
What will happen to Tom's career if he loses the paper?

3. What does Tom’s determination suggest about his willingness to take risks?

4. Tom imagines that if the ledge were only a yard off the ground, the task of retrieving the paper would be easy. How high is the ledge? If you cannot remember, look back at the beginning of the story to find out.

11 stories high

5. Describe the pace of the passage. How do you think this contributes to the feeling of the suspense?

The pace of the story is very slow and detailed. This helps create suspense.

6. What might the apartment represent to Tom?

Hope and safety, warmth, security

7. Identify examples of imagery (appeal to your senses) that allow you to picture the scene.

“buttons of his jacket scraping steadily along the rough bricks”
“shuffled along crabwise”

Pages 20-21
1. After purposely trying to avoid looking at the street below, Tom accidentally does so. What effect do you think this will have on him?

It might make him tremble because he is scared.
Or he might freeze. He might fall.

2. What nearly causes Tom to fall?
He shakes from panic when looking down.

3. Why is Tom astonished to feel the paper beneath his fingers?
He forgot why he came out on the ledge in the first place. He was not focused on the piece of paper.

4. What is the only thing keeping Tom from reaching his apartment?
His fear

Pages 22-23

1. Why is it ironic that so little time has passed?
The minutes that had passed (8 minutes) felt like an eternity to Tom.

2. Based on the title of the story, Do you think Tom is going to die?
No, he is not going to die.

3. Why is Tom stuck outside the window? What caused it to jam closed?
He can’t control his fear and the window is jammed shut. The dried paint and he shut the window.

4. How does the mention of what Clare is doing affect the reader’s perception of time?
It shows how life can change dramatically in an instant of time. (Clare is at the movies and Tom thought he was going to have an ordinary night of working. Now Tom is experiencing a life threatening event.)

Pages 24-26

1. Why wouldn’t anyone else understand the contents of the yellow sheet?
It is a personal project with notes, facts, etc. that no one knows about but Tom.
2. What effect does the realization that he might die have on Tom?

He realizes his life was wasted and regrets not spending time with his wife for the sake of his work.

3. What earlier episode do these events recall? How does this episode differ?

4. How has Tom resolved his conflict?