

## **Loner**

*A loner is a person who is often, though not necessarily, alone. Simply being alone doesn't qualify a person as a loner. One can be a lighthouse keeper on the Maine coast, a prisoner in solitary, an eremite in the woods; and in all those conditions one can still be a sociable being, and think, dream, and write in terms of one's social setting. To be a loner one must feel and think like a loner. One may feel lonely; one may be a visionary; one may be wary; but the essence of the loner is to feel isolated even in a crowd, and, often, richly complete even when alone.*

### *Examples*

#### **1 The loneliness of the loner**

I walk the track in the mornings with a guy, John, who describes himself as a loner. He is married, has three children, and lives in a town where he grew up and knows many people. Therefore he does not lead an isolated life, but rather a life in which, though always surrounded by people he knows, he feels he exists in and by himself. In the present instance, loner means lonely, though it needn't. Clearly, in this hungry and anxious environment that the West calls society, the condition of many loners will be loneliness—the loneliness of Werther, of Joseph K, or of Nagel (in Hamsun's *Mysteries*)—the loneliness of the homeless or the bankrupt or the morally confused on the streets of our own big cities. John is one more example of this essentially alone condition, in which he finds the satisfaction of a private world, but feels the pain of empty rooms full of empty voices.

#### **2 Portrait of a loner**

One of my friends is a loner. He is a quiet man who works as a custodian in a large building complex, and is responsible for keeping the place in order. This job requires him to be at work by five in the morning, to sweep, brush, clean, and keep his eyes out until closure at two thirty in the afternoon. All this he does carefully, and to the great satisfaction of his employers. S has very little interface with the busy business life that transpires around him—men in dark suits hurrying by to appointments, secretaries moving quickly past on high heels, security men wearing keys and sometimes concealed weapons. S carries on a quiet and capable small job, in the midst of these testimonies to the bustle of our time. S is a loner. And pretty happy.