

Sample Discussion Questions for Twenty Great Books Texts

The following sets of questions for twenty Great Books texts are taken from anthologies published by the Great Books Foundation. For works originally written in English, the questions are applicable to any edition. For the selections by Gogol, Marquez, Plato, Sophocles, and de Tocqueville, the questions are coordinated to the particular translations that appear in the anthologies. If a question refers to a specific passage in a text with numbered parts or chapters (pages vary by edition), the part or chapter is noted here to help find it. Non-text-specific questions have no such citations.

Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address; Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in "Politics, Leadership and Justice," pp. 3–5.

Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue," in "Introduction to Great Books," First Series, pp. 25–33.

Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," Fourth Series, Vol. 3, pp. 273–308.

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, in "Order and Chaos," pp. 300–305.

William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," in "Living with the Past," pp. 410–416.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in "Living with the Past," pp. 441–446 (questions only, not text).

Plato, *Symposium*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," Fourth Series, Vol. 2, pp. 212–270.

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, in "Love and Marriage," pp. 294–302.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, in "Love and Marriage," pp. 306–314.

Plato, *Apology*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," First Series, Vol. 1, pp. 36–66.

Jane Austen, *Emma*, in "Identity and Self-Respect," pp. 262–268.

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, in "Identity and Self-Respect," pp. 272–280.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," First Series, Vol. 1, pp. 68–171.

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," Fourth Series, Vol. 3, pp. 220–271.

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," Second Series, Vol. 2, pp. 34–124.

Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," Second Series, Vol. 3, pp. 240–265.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," Third Series, Vol. 1, pp. 44–170.

Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence, in "Citizens of the World," pp. 67–73.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Why Americans Are Often So Restless*, in "Introduction to Great Books," Second Series, pp. 164–168.

Sophocles, *Antigone*, in "Great Books Reading and Discussion Program," First Series, Vol. 2, pp. 226–267.

Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Interpretive Questions

In his second inaugural address, why does Lincoln adopt the attitude of "judge not that we be not judged," even though he believes slavery to be an offense to God?

1. Why doesn't Lincoln feel triumphant regarding the successful course of the war? Why does he make no predictions about the war's outcome, but only express "high hope" for the future?
2. According to Lincoln, did the North "accept" war because of its wish to preserve the Union, or because of its abhorrence of slavery?
3. Does Lincoln blame the South for causing the war?
4. Why does Lincoln point out that "the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement" of slavery? Is he suggesting that, in so compromising, the North was trying any means possible to avert bloodshed, or was avoiding its moral responsibility?
5. According to Lincoln, why were people who had so much in common—even praying to the same God—unable to avoid such a terrible conflict?
6. Why does Lincoln suggest that both North and South are being punished by God for the offense of American slavery?
7. Why does Lincoln avoid calling for vengeance against the side who "would make war rather than let the nation survive"?

8. Why does Lincoln think that, rather than a detailed speech outlining a course of action for the next four years, a brief statement about the sin of slavery and his wish that the nation bear "malice toward none" is the appropriate subject for his address?

According to Dr. King, in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," why is most of the white community, including the clergy, blind to the justice of his protest?

1. What does Dr. King hope to accomplish by writing his letter to the Alabama clergymen?
2. Why do the Alabama clergymen consider Dr. King, who was well known as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to be an outsider in Birmingham?
3. If Dr. King is sincere in saying that the Alabama clergymen are "men of genuine good will," how would he account for their failure to recognize that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"?
4. Why does Dr. King call segregation a "disease"?
5. Why does Dr. King find it especially difficult to explain racism to children?
6. Why does Dr. King find "shallow understanding from people of good will" more frustrating than "absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will," and lukewarm acceptance "more bewildering than outright rejection"?
7. Why is Dr. King confident that "national opinion" will reveal the injustices that African Americans face?
8. Is Dr. King's letter intended to suggest that Christian segregationists, both moderate and extreme, are religious hypocrites who should be exposed?

Do Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King share a philosophy of how to combat racial injustice?

1. Why does Lincoln say that everyone involved in the Civil War knew that slavery was "somehow" the cause of the conflict? Is he suggesting that racial injustice is a deeply complex issue or that most people find it a difficult problem to face?
2. Why is Dr. King committed to nonviolent direct action, even in the face of rampant brutality against African Americans?
3. What does Lincoln mean when he says that both sides in the war "looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding"?
4. Would Dr. King call the Civil War a stage of "self-purification" for the nation?
5. Why does Dr. King think that if one breaks an unjust law, he or she must do so openly and lovingly?

6. Does the fact that Lincoln at first only tried to limit the expansion of slavery instead of abolishing the institution prove Dr. King's point that moderates pose the greatest threat to achieving social justice?
7. Why does Dr. King think it difficult for his own people to see that it is "the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest" that will achieve justice, and not "do-nothingism" or the hatred and despair of black nationalism?
8. Do Lincoln and Dr. King share the same conception of a Living God who punishes the perpetrators of injustice?

Evaluative Questions

1. Are Americans as deeply divided today as in the time of Lincoln? As in the time of Dr. King?
2. Would Americans today wage war on each other in order to preserve the Union from division?
3. Are moderates or extremists the greater impediment to establishing justice?
4. Has the "frightening racial nightmare" that Dr. King predicted would arise in America if racial equality were not attained already come about?
5. Are the nation and the world in "dire need of creative extremists"? For what causes?
6. Is it time for Americans to forgive each other for past injustices and "judge not that we be not judged"?
7. Do our leaders today lack a moral core? Do we romanticize past leaders, or do we really not have leaders today of the caliber of Lincoln and Dr. King?
8. Even though separation of church and state is a hallmark of American democracy, do our leaders need faith in God to see the nation through times of crisis?
9. Were the paths of righteous action clearer in the times of Lincoln, and Dr. King, than they are today?

Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue" (from Book 5 of *History of the Peloponnesian War*)

Interpretive Questions

According to Thucydides, are the Melians fools or heroes for refusing the Athenian offer?

1. Why do the Melians decide to risk the annihilation of their 700-year-old city rather than accept the "fair offer" of becoming a tributary state of Athens?

2. Why don't the Melian leaders allow the Athenian envoy to speak before the people?
3. Why are the Melians convinced that they would be guilty of "criminal cowardice" should they submit to the Athenians' superior strength?
4. Why do the Melians place their hopes in the rightness of their cause as well as in the Spartan sense of honor?
5. Why do the Athenians know better than the Melians that Sparta will not come to the aid of their kinsmen? Why do the Melians suffer the misconception that it would be in Sparta's self-interest to come to their aid?
6. Do the Melians have a keener sense of honor than the Athenians, or are they only using honor as a ploy for getting out of a difficult situation?

Why do the Athenians give the Melians a chance to avoid a battle?

1. Why do the Athenians make clear from the beginning that they do not want to speak of justice?
2. Why do the Athenians try to convince the Melians that might makes right, rather than just threaten them with their power?
3. Why do the Athenians desire a practical dialogue with the Melians, rather than long speeches with fine phrases?
4. Why do the Athenians state that "this is not a competition in heroism between equals"?
5. Are the Melians exaggerating, or are they correct when they say that the Athenians are only offering them slavery?
6. Are we meant to accept the Athenians' argument that weak island states that might take a "thoughtless step" pose a greater threat to their empire than strong mainland states?
7. Do the Athenians not allow the Melians to remain neutral because they do not trust the Melians?

Why do the Athenians wipe out the Melians altogether, rather than merely subdue them?

1. Are the Melians or the Athenians more responsible for the devastation of the Melians?
2. Why do the Athenians believe they will fare better if their subjects fear them rather than trust them?
3. Why do the Athenians suggest that being defeated by their own subjects is a worse fate than being defeated by a foreign power?

4. Why do the Athenians destroy the Melians if they believe that the “most successful people . . . treat their inferiors fairly”?
5. Why are we told that treachery from within the city of Melos led to the unconditional surrender of the Melians?
6. Are we intended to see the Athenians as ruthless barbarians, or as doing what is necessary to survive in a dangerous, dog-eat-dog world?

Evaluative Questions

1. Should the Melians have accepted the Athenian offer?
2. Which is more important—freedom or survival? Is honor more important than life itself?
3. Is it prudent or impractical to remain a pacifist in a violent world ?
4. Does the "natural law" that the strong always rule over the weak apply in a democracy?
5. Practically speaking, does the question of justice arise only between people of equal power?
6. Are the standards of justice for nations different than those for individuals? Among countries, if not in our personal relationships, does might make right?
7. Do you want your leaders to be motivated by the realpolitik of the Athenian generals, or by the sense of fair play and regard for justice argued for by the Melians?

Nikolai Gogol, “The Overcoat”

Interpretive Questions

Why does the overcoat awaken Akaky to the world around him, making him “more live, even stronger-minded”?

1. Why does everyone treat Akaky disrespectfully and make him the butt of jeers and jokes? Why does Akaky usually never say a word when the young clerks laugh at and play tricks on him?
2. Why does Akaky walk through the streets without paying the slightest attention to what is going on around him? Why does he see “his own well-formed, neat handwriting” superimposed on everything?

3. When Akaky is forced to admit that he needs a new overcoat, why does he repeat in a dreamlike stupor, “So that’s it! Here’s how it turns out in the end, and I, really, simply couldn’t have foreseen it”?
4. Why does the thought of the overcoat-to-be make Akaky’s existence “somehow fuller, as if he had married and another human being were there with him”?
5. Why does Petrovich, along with Akaky, find dignity through the creation of the overcoat?
6. Why doesn’t Akaky do any copying on the night after he first wears his overcoat?
7. Why do all of Akaky’s fellow workers make such a fuss about his new overcoat? Why does the assistant head clerk insist that Akaky toast his new overcoat with champagne?
8. Why after the party must Akaky restrain himself from galloping after a lady? Why does he find her body, “astir with independent . . . motion,” fascinating?

Why does Akaky’s ghost become an overcoat thief, spreading terror throughout St. Petersburg?

1. Why does no one want to help Akaky find his stolen overcoat?
2. Why does the loss of his new overcoat make Akaky assertive, so that for the first time in his life he decides to “show some character”?
3. Why is the story told so that Akaky sickens and dies after he is reprimanded by the important personage?
4. Why does Akaky use violent language on his deathbed? Why does he both swear and apologize in his final delirium?
5. Why does Akaky’s ghost tear off the overcoats of the meek as well as the high-ranking?
6. Why does the narrator assure us that the story of the ghost is completely true?
7. Why is Akaky’s ghost satisfied after taking the coat of the important personage?
8. Why does the important personage’s encounter with the ghost of Akaky cause him to treat his subordinates with more kindness and respect?

Are we meant to think that Akaky would have been better off had he not obtained the new overcoat?

1. Why does Akaky love his work, finding an "interesting, pleasant world for himself" in copying the words of others?

2. Why are we told that Akaky would often copy a paper for his own pleasure, especially if it were unusual for being addressed to some new or important personage?
3. Is Akaky saintly or pathetic for dutifully continuing to work when he is badgered by the young clerks?
4. Why do Akaky's words, "Let me be. Why do you do this to me? . . ." impress upon the new man in the office how badly he has treated the lowly clerk? Why does the author say that upon hearing Akaky's words, the new man seems as if "awakened from a trance"?
5. Why does the author want us to both pity and laugh at Akaky?
6. Why is Akaky allowed only a "brief moment" of happiness with his overcoat?
7. Does Akaky's short reign of terror mean that he, too, has become part of the general "wickedness of man toward man"?
8. Why does the story end with the sighting of a second ghost? Why does the second ghost have a huge fist and a mustache, much like the thief who stole Akaky's overcoat?

Evaluative Questions

1. When does hierarchy in the workplace become a source of chaos rather than order?
2. Which Akaky is better for society—the oblivious, contented Akaky, or the avenging ghost who through his assertiveness makes people behave more humanely?
3. Is the boredom and pointlessness in people's lives just as significant a cause of social unrest as injustice?
4. Are some people natural victims?
5. Can people control whether or not they are liked by others?
6. Do you admire Akaky for finding contentment in a limited, unambitious life?

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Interpretive Questions

Why does Okonkwo commit suicide, an act his tribe considers an offense against the Earth?

1. Why is Okonkwo's fear of failure and weakness "deeper and more intimate" than his fear of evil and capricious gods, magic, and malevolent forces in nature?

2. Are we meant to admire Okonkwo's achievements—his climb to distinction from a shameful childhood—or to condemn him and his overbearing and violent nature?
3. Why does Okonkwo despise everything about his father, Unoka—his gentleness as well as his laziness? Why is Okonkwo impatient with his father even when Unoka imparts encouragement and wisdom to him?
4. Why does fear of being called a coward compel Okonkwo to kill his adopted son, Ikemefuna? Why doesn't Okonkwo follow the tribal order forbidding him to have anything to do with the sacrifice?
5. Why does Okonkwo see laziness and weakness in his son Nwoye, a lad who eventually excels in his studies and becomes a teacher?
6. Why does Okonkwo often think to himself that it would have been better for him had his daughter Ezinma been a boy?
7. Why did Okonkwo survive the tragedies of his first year as a farmer without giving up and despairing as others did that year?
8. Why can't Okonkwo control his anger even during the sacred Week of Peace?
9. Why does Okonkwo prosper in exile and only come to his ruin once he returns to his fatherland?
10. Are we meant to think that it was the destiny of Okonkwo's *chi* to fail—that Okonkwo was doomed with or without the arrival of colonialism?
11. Why do Okonkwo and his father—men whose lives and spirits differed so dramatically—both die of what the Ibo call "abomination"?
12. Is Okonkwo's suicide an act of despair or one of pride and self-assertion?

Why do "things fall apart" for the villagers of Umuofia?

1. Why does the humane way of punishing the murderer of an Umuofia woman (taking a young man and a virgin as compensation) disintegrate into a senseless act of savagery—the boy's murder by his adopted father? Why is Ikemefuna's sad story told in Umuofia to the present day?
2. Why are we told that Umuofia was feared for its power in both war and magic? Does Umuofia fall apart because white culture changed its system of government and religion, or because it undermined its base of fear?
3. Why does Ibo religion condemn any conflict based on "a fight of blame"? Why does Okonkwo reject the idea that Umuofia cannot fight white imperialism because this would constitute a "war of blame"?

4. Why do Okonkwo and Obierika disagree about how the Earth will respond to Okonkwo's involvement in Ikemefuna's death?
5. Why is the duty of Evil Forest and the other egwugwu "not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute"? Why is order preserved and respected when the nine judges of the village assume the roles of powerful spirits?
6. Why is the tribe able to serve as a corrective to Okonkwo's pride, anger, and insensitivity toward others?
7. Why is it for the good of the village that Okonkwo spend seven years exiled to his motherland for the inadvertent killing of a clansman?
8. Why does Uchendu say that men are fools to kill a person who says nothing, but need not fear killing one who shouts?
9. Why doesn't Obierika allow Okonkwo to thank him for looking after his possessions during his exile? Why does Obierika joke about Okonkwo killing his sons or himself?
10. Why, with the white man's government in place, are prisons and executions necessary to maintain order, whereas with tribal governance none were necessary?
11. Why don't Okonkwo's comrades understand why he killed the messenger? Why does the murder diffuse the men's lust for war?
12. Why does tribal power come to an end when a Christian convert unmasks one of the egwugwu?

Does the author mourn the demise of Ibo tribal culture, or does he believe that Christianity offered the Ibo a better way of life?

1. Why does Nwoye, Okonkwo's eldest son, find salvation in Christianity?
2. Are we meant to think that Unoka, Okonkwo's father, would have thrived in a Christian community as his grandson Nwoye did? Did Unoka become an improvident, lazy man because his personality wasn't suited for tribal life, in which agriculture and warfare were the only possible pursuits?
3. Does the author think that Christianity took hold of the Ibo imagination because it had compatible superstitions and beliefs?
4. Why do the Ibo men celebrate the funeral of the great warrior Ezeudu by dashing about in a frenzy and occasionally becoming very violent? Why do they use the occasion of a funeral to act out their impulses and fears in the guise of egwugwu?
5. Why, to the Ibo, is "the land of the living . . . not far removed from the domain of the ancestors"?
6. Why do both Christianity and Ibo religion believe that it is a sin to despair?

7. Why are the first Ibo converts to Christianity not moved by the "mad logic" of the new religion, but rather stirred by its hymns?
8. Why does the first serious trouble between the Mbanta clan and its Christian converts arise from a rumor that one of the outcasts killed a royal python? Why does the situation subside when the outcast dies, proving to the clan that the old gods could "fight their own battles"?
9. Why does the white missionary Mr. Brown, understanding that "a frontal attack" will not convert the Ibo, become successful by joining education with religion?
10. Why are we told that while Mr. Brown runs the church in Umuofia, excesses of zeal are restrained and tribal religion is respected? Why does the author have him succeeded by the intolerant Mr. Smith, who sees everything as "black and white"?
11. Why is it the Christians, and not the Ibo, who want to wage a holy war?
12. Why does Obierika attribute the disintegration of Umuofia's power to the fact that his brothers—members of the clan—embraced Christianity?

Evaluative Questions

1. Must any regime, culture, religion, or personal relationship that is built upon fear inevitably "fall apart"?
2. Do you find Okonkwo a universal, tragic figure?
3. How can a society keep from falling apart when the values and self-determination of the individual take precedence over those of the community?
4. Does the rest of life usually become easier or more challenging when a person achieves great success in youth?
5. Does society fall apart when we forget the strength of kinship bonds?

William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"

Interpretive Questions

In Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," why does the poet look upon "those first affections, / Those shadowy recollections" of childhood as the "fountain light of all our day"?

1. Why does the poet draw strength from his memories of childhood even though he looks upon it as a lost paradise?

2. Why, according to the poet, do we lose our awareness of eternal things as we grow older?
3. Why in the middle of nature's splendor does "a thought of grief" come to the poet "alone"? Why does a "a timely utterance" relieve the poet's sorrow and give him strength?
4. Why do the "Tree, of many, one" and the "single Field" interrupt the poet's joy in the May celebration, and make him wonder instead "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"
5. Why does Earth—"with something of a Mother's mind / And no unworthy aim"—do all she can to make us forget heaven?
6. Why is a child our "best Philosopher" and "Eye among the blind," while the rest of us are toiling in the darkness? Why, despite this natural wisdom, do children rush the "inevitable yoke"?
7. Why does the poet give thanks and praise, not for "Delight and liberty, the simple creed / Of Childhood." but for "those obstinate questions / Of sense and outward things"?
8. According to the poet, why should we not grieve, "Though nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower"?
9. Why has the poet only "relinquished one delight" to live beneath nature's "more habitual sway"? Why does he now love the brooks even more than when he "tripped lightly as they"?
10. Why, according to the poet, does nature become even more beautiful and moving to an eye that has "kept watch o'er man's mortality"?
11. Why can "the meanest flower that blows" give the poet "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"?
12. Are we meant to think that acquiring "the philosophic mind" is preferable to recapturing the spirit of a child, or is it just the best we can hope for?

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Interpretive Questions

Why are both the village of Macondo and the Buendia clan condemned to one hundred years of solitude and then to be "exiled from the memory of men"?

1. Why does the author have the founding of Macondo come about as the result of the killing of Prudencio Aguilar? After his conversation with the ghost of Prudencio

- Aguilar, why does Jose Arcadio Buendia destroy his alchemy lab and lose his mind, lapsing into "a state of total innocence"?
2. Why are we told that in the beginning Macondo was a "truly happy village where no one was over thirty years of age and where no one had died," and whose inhabitants believed they had "lost the evil of original sin"?
 3. Why does the author have the Buendia family tempted by incest and plagued by the fear of incest throughout its history?
 4. Why does the author have the people of Macondo suffer from an insomnia plague that eliminates fatigue but results in a loss of memory, an "idiocy that had no past"?
 5. Why is Macondo unable to derive lasting benefit from contact with the outside world? Why does the arrival of the banana company cause "a colossal disturbance" in Macondo, disturbing even the pattern of the rains and the cycle of harvests?
 6. Why does Jose Arcadio Buendia, a "youthful patriarch" and "the most enterprising man ever to be seen in the village," become lazy and careless as a result of his "urge to discover the wonders of the world"?
 7. Why does the author have the wise Catalonian abandon Macondo, saying that "the past was a lie"? Why does the true history of Macondo come to seem like a hallucination in comparison with the history in the schoolbooks?
 8. Why do Aureliano and Amaranta Ursula achieve the insight that "dominant obsessions can prevail against death? Why is their child "the only one in a century who had been engendered with love"?
 9. Why does the last Aureliano—who seems "predisposed to begin the race again . . . and cleanse it of its pernicious vices and solitary calling"—have the tail of a pig, finally realizing Ursula's fears of one hundred years earlier?
 10. Why are Melquiades' keys revealed to Aureliano Babilonia at the moment that he sees his son being dragged off by ants?
 11. Why does the author have the Buendia family die out at the moment its last living member finally deciphers Melquiades' parchments?
 12. In Marquez's mythic world, are human beings without hope of redemption? Is Macondo an Eden destroyed by the loss of its solitude?

Why does the politically active Colonel Aureliano Buendia end his days making little gold fishes?

1. Why does Colonel Aureliano Buendia not only fail in his effort to bring about a revolution, but wish to destroy "all trace of his passage through the world"?
2. Why does Colonel Aureliano Buendia become "lost in the solitude of his immense power" and "lose direction"?

3. Why, whenever he is facing death, does the Colonel recall the experience of going with his father to see ice?
4. Why does Colonel Aureliano Buendia decide that he is fighting the revolution because of pride, whereas Colonel Gerineldo Marquez is fighting "for something that doesn't have any meaning for anyone"?
5. According to the author, why can't Colonel Aureliano Buendia and General Moncada carry out their plan to set up "a humanitarian regime that would take the best from each doctrine" of the liberal and conservative parties?
6. After defeating the army forces occupying Macondo, why does Colonel Aureliano Buendia give strict orders that no one, not even Ursula, should come closer to him than ten feet?
7. Why does Colonel Aureliano Buendia refuse to commute the death sentence of his friend General Moncada? Why does he sack the General's widow's house when she refuses to let him in after the execution?
8. When Colonel Aureliano Buendia decides that his party has compromised so much that it is now fighting only for power, why does he say, "Since that's the way it is . . . we have no objection to accepting"? Why does he first condemn Colonel Gerineldo Marquez to death for calling it "a betrayal," then relent and spare him, saying, "the farce is over"?
9. Why is Colonel Aureliano Buendia destined to lose all thirty-two of his uprisings and have none of the seventeen Aurelianos—"all skillful craftsmen, the men of their houses, peace-loving people"—survive?
10. When the Colonel makes "one last effort to search in his heart for the place where his affection had rotted away," why is he unable to find it? Why can he "understand only that the secret of a good old age is simply an honorable pact with solitude"?
11. Why is Ursula the only human being who succeeds in penetrating Colonel Aureliano Buendia's misery? Why does Ursula say that he "had not lost his love for the family because he had been hardened by the war, as she had thought before, but that he had never loved anyone"?
12. Before he dies, why does the Colonel fall into the "trap of nostalgia" and see "the face of his miserable solitude"?

Are we meant to think that Ursula, rather than her husband or her son the colonel, represented the best hope for the Buendia family to survive and succeed in the modern world?

1. Why is it Ursula, "with the secret and implacable labor of a small ant," who thwarts the plan to move Macondo? Why does she insist she is willing to die if that's what it takes for the rest of her family to remain?

2. Why does the author have Jose Arcadio Buendia's killing of Prudencio Aguilar and his decision to leave the peaceful Indian village come about as a result of Ursula's fear of begetting a child with a pig's tail?
3. Why does the author make Ursula the titular matriarch and moral leader of the Buendia clan, but perpetuate the family through Pilar Ternera?
4. Why does Ursula not hesitate to abandon Macondo to search for her son Jose Arcadio? Why does the author have the connection between Macondo and the outside world discovered accidentally by Ursula after Jose Arcadio Buendia's efforts to find it had failed "in his frustrated search for the great inventions"?
5. Why is Jose Arcadio destroyed by his guilt over Prudencio Aguilar's death, while Ursula is not?
6. Why is Ursula able to restrain the cruel despotism of her nephew Arcadio, but not that of her son the Colonel?
7. Why does Ursula connect names with personalities in the Buendia family, concluding that "while the Aurelianos were withdrawn, but with lucid minds, the Jose Arcadios were impulsive and enterprising, but they were marked with a tragic sign"? Why is she disturbed by the mixing up of the identity of the twins?
8. Why does Ursula almost "go mad" when she realizes that "it was as if the defects of the family and none of the virtues had been concentrated" in both Aureliano Segundo and Jose Arcadio Segundo? Are we meant to think that her plan for Jose Arcadio to become pope in order to "restore the prestige of the family" is harebrained?
9. Are we meant to agree with Ursula's insights about her family—that the Colonel "was simply a man incapable of love," that Amaranta "was the most tender woman who had ever existed," and that Rebeca "was the only one who had the unbridled courage that Ursula had wanted for her line"?
10. Why does Ursula ask God, "without fear, if he really believed that people were made of iron in order to bear so many troubles and mortifications"? Why is she tempted to draw "out of her heart the infinite stacks of bad words that she had been forced to swallow over a century of conformity"?

Evaluative Questions

1. Is it important for the citizens of a country to share an accepted version of its history?
2. Is the history we have been taught in school a myth?
3. Is Marquez's imaginative world amoral, or does it present an implicit set of values to guide us?

4. Is solitude—for a person or a culture—a blessing or a curse?
5. Do you agree with the wise Catalonian that the wildest and most tenacious love is an ephemeral truth in the end?
6. Which do you think is more important: openness to exuberant love and passion, or developing a sense of order and responsibility?

Plato, *Symposium*

Interpretive Questions

Why are human beings so confused about the nature of love, according to the *Symposium*?

1. Why does Plato present his dialogue on love as a symposium that considers the views of speakers other than Socrates?
2. Why is the story of the symposium retold by Apollodorus, a follower of Socrates who runs down others for wasting their lives "doing absolutely nothing"?
3. Why do all of the speakers feel qualified and eager to speak on behalf of love? Why do all agree that love is misunderstood and defamed, and stands in need of a hymn of praise?
4. Why does Socrates complain that none of the previous speakers have spoken the truth about love, even though all have upheld its virtue and power for good?
5. Why does Pausanias focus on how the laws and attitudes of Athens are contradictory with regard to love? Why are the two kinds of love Pausanias describes—the earthly and the heavenly—both sexual?
6. Are we meant to think that Socrates has difficulty reconciling true love with Pausanias' longing for boys—in which the "compliance" of the beloved is bought with the lover's "wealth" of wisdom and virtue?
7. Why does Aristophanes suggest that "mankind has never had any conception of the power of Love"? Why does he portray love as a yearning to be merged into an "utter oneness"?
8. Why does Socrates disparage Aristophanes' idea that lovers are searching for their other halves?
9. Why do Aristophanes' globular beings have to fall from perfect happiness in order to become human?
10. Why do Socrates and Aristophanes agree that love is a longing lovers feel for "something to which they can neither of them put a name"?

11. Does following the Socratic ideal of love involve a denial of nature?
12. Does Socrates agree with Pausanias that love can be a temptation to vice, or does he believe that the soul moved by love can do no wrong?

Why does Diotima characterize the essence of love as a longing after wisdom?

1. Why does Socrates say that love is the one thing in the world he understands, although he complains of lacking wisdom?
2. If women are incapable of the virtue of a man, why does Socrates claim to have learned the nature of love from Diotima?
3. Why does Socrates downplay the physical in giving the true account of the nature of love?
4. Why do Socrates and Diotima use the "method of inquiry by question and answer" to teach about love?
5. Why does Diotima teach that love is not a longing for the beautiful, "but for the conception and generation that the beautiful effects"?
6. Is the vision of the "very soul of beauty" described by Diotima a divine revelation or the final achievement of reason?
7. Is the earthly love of Pausanias a step on the heavenly ladder to Diotima's final vision?
8. Does Socratic love "bridge the gulf between one human being and another," or does it merely spur the lover on in the quest for an inhuman beauty?
9. Why does Plato have Diotima portray love in the image of Socrates—as barefoot and "at once desirous and full of wisdom, a lifelong seeker after truth"?
10. Is "discourse" the essence of all forms of love for Socrates?
11. Is love for Socrates an intellectual or an emotional journey? Does Diotima's account of love become more impersonal and less emotional the further one progresses on the heavenly ladder?
12. Has Socrates achieved the final vision, or is he still climbing the heavenly ladder?

Why does the *Symposium* conclude with the arrival of a drunken Alcibiades, who both loves Socrates and wishes him dead?

1. Why does Socrates have the power to turn Alcibiades' "whole soul upside down" and make him feel ashamed?
2. Why is Socrates unable to impart his wisdom to Alcibiades and convert him?

3. Why does Socrates play his "little game of irony" when he squabbles with Alcibiades over Agathon?
4. Why does Alcibiades compare Socrates and his ideas to a hollow statue of Silenus with "little figures of the gods inside"?
5. Is it arrogance or lack of self-love that keeps Alcibiades from ascending the heavenly ladder?
6. Why does Plato include the story of how Socrates refused to be seduced by Alcibiades?
7. Why does Plato bring out not only Socrates' love of wisdom and beauty, but his courage, temperance, and ability to bear privations?
8. Does Socrates' philosophy enable him to enjoy life more fully than others?
9. Does Socrates purposely make a show of standing still for hours when considering a philosophical problem? Does he mean to irritate others by living life so simply?
10. Why does the *Symposium* end with an invasion by a crowd of revelers who join the party uninvited and create a drunken, indecent uproar in which Socrates is the only one left standing?
11. Why is the final discussion about whether the same person can write both comedy and tragedy?
12. Is Socrates successful in teaching others the way of love?

Evaluative Questions

1. Is a love relationship between equals more stable or less stable than one in which there is a dominant and a subordinate personality?
2. Can understanding Socrates' philosophy of love help us to love wisely?
3. Is love a search for truth, beauty, and wisdom? Is sexual attraction a part of this search?
4. Is love essentially an expression of our physical or biological natures, or is the ability to love an indication that we have a higher nature?
5. Are some people, by their natures, unable to climb the heavenly ladder?
6. Do you agree with Aristophanes that true lovers want to become one with the beloved?
7. Is love a longing for immortality?

8. Are human beings "lovers of the good" only, or can they also love the ugly and the destructive?
9. Does love lead the soul to the good and the true?
10. Should love be regulated by law, as Pausanias suggests?

Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*

Interpretive Questions

Why is Lily unable to achieve the intimacy she longs for with Mrs. Ramsay?

1. Why does Mrs. Ramsay both admire and condescend to Lily?
2. Why does Lily's love for the Ramsay family allow her to experience life as a whole, rather than as "little separate incidents"? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
3. Why does Lily think that the rapture Mr. Bankes feels when he watches Mrs. Ramsay reading to James is meant to be "spread over the world and become part of the human gain"? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
4. Why does Lily laugh hysterically at the thought of Mrs. Ramsay "presiding with immutable calm over the destinies which she completely failed to understand"? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
5. Why does Lily, sitting with her head in Mrs. Ramsay's lap late one night, imagine pressing through into the older woman's "secret chambers" of the "mind and heart"? Why is it "unity" more than knowledge that Lily desires? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
6. Of all Mrs. Ramsay's guests, why is only Augustus Carmichael immune to her civility and beauty? (Section 1, Chapter VIII, Section 3, Chapter XI)
7. Why does Lily conclude that Mrs. Ramsay, and people in general, are "sealed" and can only be known by buzzing around them like a bee around a hive? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
8. Why, when Mr. Bankes looks at her painting, is Lily able to experience a sense of intimacy with him that she is unable to achieve with Mrs. Ramsay? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
9. Why does Mrs. Ramsay feel freedom and peace only when she is alone? Why does she experience this as "losing personality" and a "triumph over life"? (Section 1, Chapter XI)
10. Why does Lily come to Mrs. Ramsay's aid at the dinner party by responding kindly to Charles Tansley? Why does Lily think that this act cost her a little of her self-respect? (Section 1, Chapter XVII)

11. What is the "coherence in things," the "stability" that Mrs. Ramsay senses the moment she feels that everything is right at her dinner party? (Section 1, Chapter XVII)
12. Why does Lily reject Mrs. Ramsay's view that "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life"? Why does Lily choose not to marry Mr. Bankes, despite her love for him? (Section 1, Chapter IX and Section 3, Chapter V)

Why does Mr. Ramsay need the sympathy of his wife in order to feel a part of life?

1. Why does Mrs. Ramsay revere her husband, a man whom Lily describes as "petty, selfish, vain, egotistical"—a spoiled tyrant, who "wears Mrs. Ramsay to death"? (Section 1, Chapter IV)
2. Why is the young James filled with anger and hate for his father when Mr. Ramsay intrudes upon him and Mrs. Ramsay with his demands for sympathy? (Section 1, Chapter VII)
3. Why are Mr. Ramsay's demands for sympathy compared to both a suckling infant and a rape—the sterile male plunging its "beak of brass" into Mrs. Ramsay's "delicious fecundity"? (Section 1, Chapter VII)
4. Why does Mrs. Ramsay dislike, "even for a second, to feel finer than her husband"? Why does she not let herself put this dissatisfaction into words? (Section 1, Chapter VII)
5. Why does Mrs. Ramsay believe herself happiest when carrying a baby in her arms? Why does she think that the world could condemn her—"say she was tyrannical, domineering, masterful"—but she wouldn't mind if she could always have a baby? (Section 1, Chapter X)
6. Why are we told that Mrs. Ramsay has a more pessimistic view of life than Mr. Ramsay? Why is she more in tune with the sorrows and terrors of life than her husband, the metaphysician? (Section 1, Chapters X and XII)
7. Why does Mrs. Ramsay have a presentiment of death as she merges with the Lighthouse beam? (Section 1, Chapter XI)
8. Why does Mrs. Ramsay feel that the whole effort of bringing together the people at the dinner party rests on her? Why does a part of her wish that she could give up the effort and, like a sunken ship, whirl round and round to rest on the floor of the sea? (Section 1, Chapter XVII)
9. Why does Mr. Ramsay like to exaggerate his wife's simplicity and her lack of book learning? (Section 1, Chapter XIX)
10. Why isn't Mrs. Ramsay able to tell her husband, in words, that she loves him? Why does she experience a sense of triumph when she communicates her love to him without saying the words he longs to hear? (Section 1, Chapter XIX)

11. Why does Lily go to such lengths to avoid Mr. Ramsay's demands and "imperious need"? Why does she feel accused of being an "ill-tempered, dried-up old maid" when she refuses to give Mr. Ramsay the sympathy he wants? (Section 3, Chapters I and II)
12. Why does Lily's praise of Mr. Ramsay's beautiful boots cause his self-pity to dissipate? Why does Lily finally feel genuine sympathy for Mr. Ramsay while he talks about his boots and demonstrates how to tie them? (Section 3, Chapter II)

Why does the trip to the Lighthouse help resolve everyone's feelings about the death of Mrs. Ramsay?

1. Why does chaos reign in the Ramsay family after Mrs. Ramsay dies? Why are they "a house full of unrelated passions"? (Section 3, Chapter I)
2. Why does Mr. Ramsay insist that only James and Cam—his two youngest children—accompany him to the Lighthouse ten years after the first trip was aborted?
3. Why do James and Cam have a silent pact never to give in to Mr. Ramsay's tyranny? Why is Cam more wavering in her commitment to the pact than James? (Section 3, Chapter IV)
4. Why do Cam and James think their father is going to the Lighthouse "in memory of dead people"? Why don't they want to honor their mother in this way? (Section 3, Chapter IV)
5. Why does Mr. Ramsay end up comforting himself through his daydream of how women would soothe him and sympathize with him? (Section 3, Chapter IV)
6. Why does Lily Briscoe watch the boat's progress to the Lighthouse?
7. Why does James insist that his childhood image of the Lighthouse—"a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye"—is just as "true" as the stark and straight tower he sees ten years later? Why does the true look of the Lighthouse satisfy James and confirm "some obscure feeling of his about his own character"? (Section 3, Chapters VIII and XII)
8. Why does James enter into his father's imaginings, saying, "We are driving before a gale—we must sink," half-aloud, exactly as his father said it? (Section 3, Chapters VIII and XII)
9. Why does Cam feel "this is right, this is it" when she thinks about being protected by her father? Why does she tell herself her father's own heroic imaginary story, "but knowing at the same time what was the truth"? (Section 3, Chapters VIII and XII)
10. Why does Mr. Ramsay compliment James on his piloting of the boat to the Lighthouse? Why is James "so pleased" that he is "not going to let anybody share a grain of his pleasure"? (Section 3, Chapters VIII and XII)

11. Why, at the moment that his two children would give him anything he asked, is Mr. Ramsay silent, asking and saying nothing? (Section 3, Chapters VIII and XII)
12. Why has Lily's effort of looking at the Lighthouse and thinking of Mr. Ramsay landing there "stretched her body and mind to the utmost"? When the boat finally lands, why does Lily feel that she has at last given Mr. Ramsay "whatever she had wanted to give him"? (Section 3, Chapter XIII)

Why is Lily finally able to finish her painting?

1. Why, in her painting of Mrs. Ramsay and James, does Lily make no attempt at likeness, focusing instead on "the relations of masses, of lights and shadows"? Why does she strive for "unity"? (Section 1, Chapter IX)
2. Early in the dinner party, why does Lily become inspired to avoid an "awkward space" in her painting by moving a tree further into the middle? Why does this thought occupy her throughout the dinner? (Section 3, Chapter XVII)
3. Why has Lily's unfinished picture "been knocking about in her mind" for ten years? Why, upon her return to the house, does she remember the dinner party and how "it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody"? (Section 3, Chapters I and V)
4. Why is Lily so disturbed by Mr. Ramsay's "insatiable hunger for sympathy" that she cannot paint until he and the children leave for the Lighthouse? Why does she think of him as bearing down on her, bringing ruin and chaos every time he approaches her? (Section 3, Chapters I and II)
5. Why is Lily's act of creation described in much the same way as Mr. Ramsay's solitary quest for truth? Why are her doubts about the importance or quality of her paintings so similar to Mr. Ramsay's concerns about his work? (Section 3, Chapter III)
6. As she works on her painting, why does Lily begin thinking about Mrs. Ramsay and how she "resolved everything into simplicity"? As she recalls Mrs. Ramsay's ability to transform strife into unity, why does Lily reflect that these moments of friendship "stayed in the mind affecting one almost like a work of art"? (Section 3, Chapter III)
7. Why does Lily consider Mrs. Ramsay's wish to make life stand still a way of answering "what is the meaning of life"? Why does Lily say she owes her "revelation" to Mrs. Ramsay? (Section 3, Chapter III)
8. After thinking she does not mourn Mrs. Ramsay, why does Lily suddenly, physically, feel her heart wrung by her memory? Why does she experience Mrs. Ramsay's absence as a "centre of complete emptiness" in the garden and house, and as a "hollowness" in her body? (Section 3, Chapter V)
9. Why does Lily feel that if she and Mr. Carmichael together demanded an explanation for why life is so short and inexplicable, then Mrs. Ramsay would return? (Section 3, Chapter V)

10. In order to finish her painting, why must Lily realize that she—like Mrs. Ramsay—is a lover "whose gift it was to choose out the elements of things and place them together . . . giving them a wholeness not theirs in life"? (Section 3, Chapter XI)
11. Why must Lily "start afresh" on her painting—and rely on inspiration, rather than concentrate on its design? Why is her painting finished when she draws "a line there, in the centre"? (Section 3, Chapters XI and XIII)
12. Why does Lily feel that it no longer matters whether her painting is hung in an attic or destroyed? What does Lily mean when she thinks, "I have had my vision"? (Section 3, Chapter XIII)

Evaluative Questions

1. Are we better or worse off with the disappearance of the Mrs. Ramsays of the world who sacrifice themselves for the sake of others?
2. Why is it so difficult to balance the mutuality of marriage with the autonomy necessary for intellectual or artistic achievement?
3. Is it still true that most men strive for knowledge and most women strive for intimacy?
4. Why do married people want everyone else to be married?
5. Is a capacity for empathy like Mrs. Ramsay's more a phenomenon of gender or of individual personality?

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

Interpretive Questions

Why does Humbert, an intellectual European gentleman, choose vulgar, ignorant, and conventional Lolita as the great love of his life?

1. Why does Humbert claim at the beginning of his confession that "in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel," his adolescent Riviera love? (Part 1, Chapter 4)
2. If, as Humbert claims, he is able to break Annabel's "spell" with Lolita, why is his sexual relationship with her so compulsive? (Part 2, Chapter 2)
3. Why does Humbert say that he was not concerned with "so-called 'sex' at all," but rather with the greater endeavor of fixing "once for all the perilous magic of nymphets"? (Part 1, Chapter 29)

4. Why does Humbert so abhor grown-up women, or even the “ ‘college girl’—that horror of horrors”? (Part 1, Chapters 15 and 17)
5. Why does the "bland American Charlotte" frighten Humbert in a way that his first wife, Valeria, never did? (Part 1, Chapter 20)
6. What does Humbert mean when he says that what drives him insane is the mixture in Lolita of "tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity . . . the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death"? (Part 1, Chapter 11)
7. Why do we learn that Humbert’s mother died in a freak accident when he was three, and that nothing of her remains in his memory except "a pocket of warmth in the darkest past"? (Part 1, Chapter 2)
8. Why does Humbert say that Lolita had "already proved to be something quite different from innocent Annabel" and that there was "nymphean evil breathing through every pore of the fey child"? (Part 1, Chapter 28)
9. Why does Humbert dream that "Our Glass Lake" is glazed over with a sheet of emerald ice and that a pockmarked Eskimo is trying in vain to break it with a pickaxe? Why does Humbert say that Dr. Blanche Schwarzmann would have paid a sack of schillings for such a "libidream"? (Part 1, Chapter 11)
10. If Lolita has already been "utterly and hopelessly depraved" by American mores, why does Humbert feel a "horror" that he can’t shake off after having intercourse with Lolita for the first time? (Part 1, Chapters 29 and 31)
11. Why does Humbert praise Lolita’s innocence and grace in language that echoes his extolling of the "heartrendingly beautiful" American wilds with their "quality of wide-eyed, unsung, innocent surrender"? (Part 2, Chapter 20)
12. Why does Humbert say that his long journey across America with Lolita had "only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country"? (Part 2, Chapter 3)

Why does Humbert say that what he had madly possessed was not Lolita but his "own creation, another, fanciful Lolita . . . having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own"?

1. Why does Humbert introduce the erotic lap episode as if it were a scene from a play or a segment of film—laying out its main character, time, place, and props? Why does Humbert assert that if his readers participate in the erotic scene he is about to ‘replay,’ they will see for themselves how "chaste" the whole event is? (Part 1, Chapter 13)
2. Just prior to climaxing during the lap scene, why does Humbert envision Lolita as "safely solipsized"? Why does he feel "above the tribulations of ridicule, beyond the possibilities of retribution"? (Part 1, Chapter 13)

3. Why does Humbert instruct his readers to take down the remark "the artist in me has been given the upper hand over the gentleman," and soon after declare, "But I am no poet. I am only a very conscientious recorder"? (Part 1, Chapter 17)
4. Why does Humbert claim that there are "nymphets"—certain girl-children between the ages of nine and fourteen—who put men of "Infinite melancholy" under their spell? (Part 1, Chapter 5)
5. Why does Lolita "seduce" Humbert when she wakes up to find him in bed with her at the Enchanted Hunters? (Part 1, Chapter 29)
6. Why does contemplating Lolita's physical grace and beauty when she plays tennis give Humbert the delirious feeling of "teetering on the very brink of unearthly order and splendor"? Is Humbert's appreciation and pursuit of such rapture intended to justify his obsessive love for Lolita? (Part 1, Chapter 20)
7. Why does Humbert say that Lolita's tennis was the highest point to which he could imagine a young person "bringing the art of make-believe"? Why does he add that for Lolita, however, it was probably "the very geometry of basic reality"? (Part 1, Chapter 20)
8. What does Humbert mean when he says that "the very attraction immaturity has for me lies not so much in the limpidity of pure young forbidden fairy child beauty as in the security of a situation where infinite perfections fill the gap between the little given and the great promised"? (Part 2, Chapter 27)
9. Why does Humbert prefer the "mental hygiene of noninterference" when he is confronted with Lolita's unspoken pain at the loss of her mother? Why do both Lolita and Humbert become strangely embarrassed whenever Humbert tries to discuss anything genuine? (Part 2, Chapter 32)
10. Why does Humbert find a cure for his second bout of insanity in the sport of duping psychiatrists with invented dreams and fake "primal scenes"? (Part 1, Chapter 9)
11. Why does Humbert say that the only remedy for the misery of his guilt is the "very local palliative of articulate art"? Why does he quote the lines "The moral sense in mortals is the duty / We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty"? (Part 2, Chapter 31)
12. Why does Humbert say that "sex is but the ancilla of art"? (Part 2, Chapter 26)

Why does Humbert kill Quilty, even though he realizes that while Quilty had broken Lolita's heart, he had broken her life?

1. Why does Humbert think it "intolerable bliss" to have Quilty trapped "after those years of repentance and rage"? (Part 2, Chapter 35)

2. Why does the author have Quilty write a play—The Enchanted Hunters—with the "profound message that mirage and reality merge in love"? (Part 2, Chapter 13)
3. Why does the author put Humbert back on the road with Lolita, involved in an elaborate cat-and-mouse game with priapic Quilty? Why does the author have Humbert, a lover of games, become enmeshed in Quilty's "demoniacal game," his "cryptogrammic paper chase"? (Part 2, Chapter 23)
4. Why does the author have Lolita fall in love with Quilty? Why does Lolita tell Humbert that Quilty is the only man she has ever been crazy about? (Part 2, Chapter 29)
5. Why does Humbert need Lolita to tell him that it was Quilty she ran away with—something he had known "without knowing it, all along"? (Part 2, Chapter 29)
6. Why does Humbert think of Quilty as his brother and note that the "tone of his brain" had affinities with his own? Why does the author make Quilty almost impotent, as opposed to the sexually voracious Humbert? (Part 2, Chapter 35)
7. Why is Humbert's account of Quilty's murder a mixture of horror and burlesque?
8. Why does Humbert compose a poem that begins "Because you took advantage of a sinner" and make his victim read it aloud? Why does Quilty pause during his reading to give a critique of the poem's merit? (Part 2, Chapter 35)
9. Why do Quilty and Humbert seem to merge ("I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us.") during their fight for the gun? (Part 2, Chapter 35)
10. Why does the author make it necessary for Humbert to shoot and wound Quilty multiple times in order to kill him? Why does Humbert think that his bullets, far from killing Quilty, were injecting "spurts of energy into the poor fellow"? (Part 2, Chapter 35)
11. After assuring himself that Quilty is dead, why does Humbert say that "a burden even weightier than the one I had hoped to get rid of was with me, upon me, over me"? (Part 2, Chapter 35)
12. Why does Humbert think of the murder as "the end of the ingenious play staged for me by Quilty"? (Part 2, Chapter 35)

Does Humbert transcend the destructive nature of his love for Lolita, or does he remain solipsistic to the end?

1. What does Humbert mean when he says that he had "broken" something within Lolita? Why does the author have Humbert undercut this realization by immediately adding that if Lolita had become a "girl champion," he could have been her "gray, humble, hushed husband-coach, old Humbert"? (Part 2, Chapter 20)

2. How are we meant to respond to Humbert's claim that there is "no other bliss on earth comparable to that of fondling a nymphet," that it was "a paradise whose skies were the color of hell-flames—but still a paradise"? (Part 2, Chapter 3)
3. Why is Humbert suddenly struck by the thought that he does not know a thing about Lolita's mind when he overhears her say, "You know, what's so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own"? (Part 2, Chapter 32)
4. Is Humbert's moving description of Lolita's despair and helplessness, her efforts to keep some part of herself inviolable, an act of self-mortification or self-pity? (Part 2, Chapter 32)
5. Are we meant to think of Humbert's passionate admission of his immorality in having inflicted his "foul lust" upon Lolita, thus depriving her of her childhood, as entirely authentic? (Part 2, Chapter 32)
6. Why is the story told so that Humbert is captured by the authorities when he is driving on the wrong side of the road? Why does he say that he purposely disregarded the traffic rules "not by way of protest, not as a symbol but merely as a novel experience"? (Part 2, Chapter 36)
7. Does Humbert redeem himself when he declares that he loved "this Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still gray-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still Carmencita, still mine"? (Part 2, Chapter 29)
8. While waiting to surrender himself to the police, why does Humbert recall the time that he listened to the melody of children at play, and knew that "the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord"? (Part 2, Chapter 36)
9. Why are we told that Lolita (Mrs. "Richard E. Schiller") died giving birth to a stillborn girl? Why does the author embed this information in the fictional foreword by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.?
10. Is the foreword correct in stating that Lolita is a "tragic tale tending unswervingly to . . . a moral apotheosis"?
11. Given the chance, would Humbert take possession of Lolita all over again, or would he leave her free to live out the remainder of her childhood unencumbered by his lust and love? (Part 2, Chapter 36)
12. Why does Humbert end his confession with the recognition that the "refuge of art" is the only immortality he and Lolita may share? (Part 2, Chapter 36)

Evaluative Questions

1. While not pornographic, can *Lolita* justifiably be regarded as an "obscene" book?

2. Is Humbert pitiable or contemptible?
3. Does *Lolita* have a moral purpose in addition to an artistic one?
4. Is Humbert correct in linking evil and passionate love?
5. Does *Lolita* offer insight into the nature of love, or only portray the mind of a sick personality?

Plato, *Apology*

Interpretive Questions

Is Socrates' primary aim in the *Apology* to defend himself or to continue to examine the citizens of Athens?

1. Is the tone of Socrates' defense humble or proud?
2. Why does Socrates say he will make his defense "in the same words I customarily use at the tables in the Agora"?
3. Why doesn't Socrates answer Meletus's charge by stating his religious beliefs directly? Why does Socrates display his method of inquiry to the court by questioning Meletus?
4. Why does Socrates mention as part of his defense his belief that he will be convicted?
5. Why does Socrates tell the judges, even before they have found him guilty, that he is not afraid of the death penalty?
6. Why does Socrates tell the judges that if they try to prohibit him from continuing his inquiry, "I shall obey the God rather than you"?
7. Why does Socrates compare the city to a large, well-bred horse that has grown sluggish and sleepy and needs a gadfly to awaken it?
8. Why does Socrates say that a man who intends to fight for what is just must avoid public life in order to survive?
9. Why does Socrates propose as a penalty "some good thing" after the judges have found him guilty? Why doesn't he worry that this will offend them?

Why does Socrates preach that "the unexamined life is not for man worth living"?

1. Why does Socrates begin to investigate the meaning of the oracle "with great reluctance"? Why does he persevere in this course, despite "perceiving with grief and fear" that he was becoming hated?

2. Why does Socrates believe that in testing the oracle he is helping and obeying the god?
3. Why does Socrates interpret the oracle to mean that the wisest person is one who "realizes that he is truly worth nothing in respect to wisdom"? According to Socrates, does wisdom consist solely in recognizing how little we know?
4. Why does Socrates think that his examination of Athens' citizens is the greatest good the city has ever gained? Why does he think he is "a gift from the God to the City"?
5. Why does the voice that guides Socrates only turn him away from what he is about to do, and never toward it?
6. Why does Socrates think that it is so important to discover who is wise that, if it is possible, he will continue to question people in the afterlife?

Does the condemnation of Socrates stand as proof that he failed in his mission to improve and educate the people of Athens?

1. Why is Socrates found guilty and sentenced to death by the gentlemen of Athens?
2. Why does Socrates find that those men with the greatest reputation for wisdom "fell little short of being most deficient"? Why does Socrates find it difficult to find even one citizen of Athens who is wise—or at least wise to some small extent?
3. Does Socrates believe that no one is qualified to educate young people?
4. Why does Socrates fear "the grudging slander of the multitude" more than the accusations of his public accusers? Does Socrates oppose the principle of majority rule?
5. Why does Socrates tell the judges, "I have never been teacher to anyone"? Why does he say, "I rouse you. I persuade you. I upbraid you," but then deny he is a teacher?
6. Why does Socrates tell the judges that he is making his defense for their sake rather than for his own?
7. Why does Socrates claim that he makes the citizens of Athens "happy in truth"?

Evaluative Questions

1. Do you agree with Socrates that "he who intends to fight for what is just . . . must of necessity live a private rather than a public life"?
2. Does society need gadflies like Socrates to improve it? Do we have someone like him now?
3. How does knowing that you don't know anything promote virtue?

4. Do you agree with Socrates that it is irrational to fear death, and that it is easier to live a life of virtue if one does not fear death? Do you agree with Socrates that "there is no evil for a good man either in living or in dying"?
5. What is wisdom? Is it more or less nonexistent, as Socrates suggests, or much more common?
6. Is Socrates a good role model for young people?
7. Would you have condemned Socrates?

Jane Austen, *Emma*

Interpretive Questions

Why does the intelligent and observant Emma imagine everything wrong when it comes to love?

1. Why is Emma an "imaginist," who will not submit her fancy to her understanding? (Chapters 12 and 39)
2. Why does Emma insist that she has little intention of marrying and say that it is not in her nature to fall in love? Why does Emma—a devoted daughter, sister, and friend—believe that she lacks the "tenderness of heart" possessed by her father, Isabella, and Harriet? (Chapter 31)
3. Why does Emma call matchmaking "the greatest amusement in the world"? Why does she want to be the first to plan the marriage between Harriet and Mr. Elton? (Chapter 4)
4. Why can Emma imagine the kind of man she might marry, but not recognize him in Mr. Knightley until she thinks she has lost him to Harriet? (Chapters 38, 46 and 47)
5. Why does Emma take on Harriet as a friend if she knows that Harriet's nature is not "of that superior sort in which the feelings are most acute and retentive"? (Chapter 16)
6. Why can Emma discern that the flirtations of Mr. Elton and Frank Churchill are not signs of real love, and yet not recognize that Mr. Knightley's steady, heartfelt conduct toward her is love? (Chapters 16, 38 and 43)
7. Why can Emma perceive Mr. Elton's lack of elegance, but not his social ambitions? Why does Emma rationalize away every indication of Mr. Elton's pursuit of her—even the fact that he pushes the "courtship" charade toward her instead of toward Harriet? (Chapters 8, 9, 13 and 16)
8. Why does Emma leap to the unseemly conclusion that Jane Fairfax is involved in a "reprehensible" attachment with Mr. Dixon, the husband of Jane's intimate friend? (Chapters 19 and 28)

9. Why does Emma "entertain no doubt" that she has fallen in love with Frank Churchill after his first two-week stay in the neighborhood? (Chapter 30)
10. Is it Emma's vanity that leads her to believe that Frank Churchill is in love with her, or does Frank's delight in deceiving everyone make him overplay his attentions to Emma? (Chapters 31 and 37)
11. Why can't Emma, who loves romantic intrigues, perceive the secret attachment between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax? Why does Emma laugh at Mr. Knightley's hint at such an attachment and protest his observations so vehemently, even though she knows that he possesses "penetration" in such matters? (Chapters 16 and 41)
12. Why does Emma become fully convinced that Harriet is beloved by Mr. Knightley? Why is Emma more threatened by Harriet's avowal of love for Mr. Knightley, despite the improbability of its being requited, than she is by Mrs. Weston's reasonable suggestion that Mr. Knightley might love and marry Jane Fairfax? (Chapters 26 and 47)

Why does Emma come to recognize her faulty conduct only when Harriet confesses her attachment to Mr. Knightley?

1. Why does everyone in Emma's circle, with the exception of Mr. Knightley, think that Emma is "perfect"? (Chapter 1)
2. Why is Emma "blind" to the abilities and social status of Harriet Smith? Why is Emma so dismissive of the relative discrepancy between their positions in society when she is so particular in other instances? (Chapter 8)
3. Why is Emma so fixedly against Harriet's association with the Martins even though the family enjoys the good opinion of everyone—including Mr. Knightley—and Emma herself is impressed with their delicacy and warmth?
4. Why doesn't Emma learn from her error in promoting a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton? While understanding that her conduct was wrong, why is she unable to keep herself from "adventuring too far" with Harriet's future when Frank Churchill arrives on the scene? (Chapter 16)
5. Why does Emma persist in her plan to make Harriet's visit to the Martins a short, formal one, even though her own heart doesn't approve and she is pained by her role in the "bad business"? (Chapter 23)
6. Why can't Emma, despite all her good intentions, bring herself to befriend Jane Fairfax? Why doesn't Jane's interesting past and melancholy future ignite Emma's imagination and compassion? (Chapters 10, 21 and 24)
7. Why is Emma so quick to give Frank Churchill her honest opinion of Jane Fairfax—that Jane's reserve makes friendship with her impossible and suggests that Jane has

- something to conceal? Why does Emma, who values elegance and propriety, confide in Frank her idea that Mr. Dixon is in love with Jane? (Chapters 24 and 26)
8. When agonizing over how she had unknowingly encouraged Harriet to attach herself to Mr. Knightley, why does Emma conclude that "she had been imposing on herself"? (Chapter 47)
 9. Why does Emma mistake Mr. Knightley's remonstrance of her behavior toward Miss Bates as a sign of his indifference toward her? (Chapter 48)

Why does Emma violate her own principles of good behavior during the excursion to Box Hill?

1. Why is Emma's vanity flattered by Frank Churchill's false gallantry? Why does Emma find Frank Churchill "insufferable" when he is silent and unamusing? (Chapter 43)
2. Why can Emma "not resist" telling Miss Bates that she will be limited to saying only three dull things? Why does Emma ignore the fact that she has caused pain to her grateful old friend? (Chapter 43)
3. Why does Emma take pleasure in the idea of being coupled with Frank Churchill in her friends' imaginations? Why doesn't Emma allow herself to imagine marriage to Frank, thinking only "of finding him pleasant, of being liked by him to a certain degree"? (Chapter 14)
4. Why does Emma participate in empty exchanges with Frank Churchill at Box Hill, even though she realizes that to others it appears that they are flirting excessively? Why does Emma's disappointment in the excursion make her act gay and thoughtless? (Chapter 43)
5. Why does Frank Churchill make Emma appear to act without propriety, saying that she presides over the party and desires to know what everyone is thinking? Why does he make Emma the tool for affronting almost everyone in the party? (Chapter 43)
6. Why does Emma find much to laugh at and enjoy in Mr. Weston's silly, flattering conundrum? (Chapter 43)
7. Why doesn't Emma see anything odd in the exchange between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax about attachments formed in public places? (Chapter 43)
8. Why does Emma need Mr. Knightley's reprimand to make her realize how cruelly she has treated Miss Bates? Why does Emma at first try to laugh off her insensitive conduct? (Chapter 43)
9. Why does Mr. Knightley's remonstrance make Emma more upset and unhappy than at any other time in her life, even though she is used to his telling her "truths" about her obligations and judgment? Why does Emma see her conduct at Box Hill as being more faulty than her other misdeeds? (Chapter 43)

10. Why does Emma conclude, after everything is resolved, that there is "a little likeness" between her and Frank Churchill? (Chapter 54)

Evaluative Questions

1. Is self-knowledge a requisite of healthy romantic love? Can one be in love without knowing oneself?
2. Do you find Emma "faultless in spite of all of her faults"? Why do some readers despise Emma, while others love and forgive her?
3. When do confidence and self-respect turn into vanity?
4. Are there elements of building a self-identity in a small village like Highbury that are missing in modern American urban life?
5. Is the reluctance to find fault in those dependent on us a serious flaw, undermining their ability to achieve self-knowledge?

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Interpretive Questions

Why does his grandfather's disturbing advice to overcome the white man with "yeses" and "undermine 'em with grins" become a "constant puzzle" and "curse" to the narrator?

1. Why do the dehumanizing rites of the battle royal fail to shake the narrator's commitment to his formula for personal success—humility and hard work? (Chapter 1)
2. Why does the narrator dream that his grandfather tells him to open the briefcase and read the engraved document with the message, "To Whom It May Concern . . . Keep This Nigger-Boy Running"? (Chapter 1)
3. Imagining himself back at school, why does the narrator wonder if the statue of the college Founder is lifting a veil from the face of a kneeling slave or lowering it more firmly in place? (Chapter 2)
4. Why does Mr. Norton insist that the narrator, and the other students at the college, are his "fate"? (Chapter 2)
5. Why do we learn that the source of Mr. Norton's fascination with Jim Trueblood's story is his own unacknowledged incestuous desires? (Chapter 2)
6. After leaving the Golden Day, why is the narrator so shaken by Mr. Norton's anger that he feels he is losing the only identity he had ever known? (Chapter 3)

7. Why does the narrator feel a numb, violent outrage when Dr. Bledsoe tells him, "This is a power set-up, son, and I'm at the controls"? (Chapter 6)
8. Why does the revelation of Dr. Bledsoe's and the trustees' treachery cause the narrator, for the first time, to ask himself who he is? (Chapter 9)
9. Why is Lucius Brockway the black father figure at whom the narrator finally strikes back? Why does "a wild flash of laughter" struggle to rise from beneath the narrator's anger at the old man? (Chapter 10)
10. Are we meant to admire Lucius Brockway, the secret machine "inside the machine" of Liberty Paints, who enthusiastically allows himself to be exploited by the white industrial system? (Chapter 10)
11. Why does the author have the factory hospital doctors cure the narrator by means of an electric lobotomy machine? Why are we told that inside the hospital machine the narrator feels utterly alone, and lost in a "vast whiteness"? (Chapter 11)
12. Why is the narrator's release from the confinement of the machine described in terms that suggest a surreal birth? Upon leaving the hospital, why does the narrator feel as if he is in the "grip of some alien personality lodged deep within" him? (Chapter 11)

Why does the narrator feel that working for the Brotherhood will save him from "disintegration"?

1. Why is the narrator's first real act of positive self-assertion to eat a yam while walking along the street? Why does the narrator—declaring "I yam what I am"—resolve never to be ashamed again of the things he likes? (Chapter 13)
2. Why does the narrator fear the rush of empathic feeling that draws him to the old couple evicted onto the street? Why is the narrator especially disturbed by the sight of the old man's free papers? (Chapter 13)
3. Staring at the old couple's belongings on the street, why does the narrator feel as if he himself "was being dispossessed of some painful yet precious thing" that he "could not bear to lose"? (Chapter 13)
4. When recruiting the narrator for the Brotherhood movement, why does Brother Jack emphasize that the narrator is not like the old people, that he is emerging as "something new"? Why does he tell the narrator that he mustn't waste his emotions on individuals—"they don't count"? (Chapter 13)
5. Why does the narrator decide to rely on the judgment of the Brotherhood when they demand that he leave Mary and live elsewhere in order to be a Harlem leader? Why does he accept without questioning their providing him with a new name? (Chapter 14)

6. Why does the narrator feel compelled to hide from Mary the shattered bank with its grotesque caricature of a grinning Negro? Why are we told about the narrator's unsuccessful attempts to get rid of the cast-iron bank and the coins that filled it? (Chapter 15)
7. Why does the narrator tell the audience in the arena that "Something strange and miraculous and transforming" was taking place in him—that he feels suddenly more human? Why does he tell the audience that he has found his "true family! . . . true people! . . . true country!"? (Chapter 16)
8. Why does the narrator say that he felt as if he had awakened from a dream when Jack tells him he wasn't hired to think and he realizes that Jack doesn't "see" him? (Chapter 22)
9. Why does the "scientific objectivity" of the Brotherhood—its practice of sacrificing the weak—remind the narrator of being locked inside the hospital machine? (Chapter 23)
10. Why is Hambro unable to convince the narrator of the correctness of the Brotherhood's methods? Why does the narrator insist that Hambro see him as an individual? (Chapter 23)
11. Why must the narrator be disillusioned with the Brotherhood and articulate his invisibility—before he is finally able to accept his past with all its humiliations? (Chapter 23)
12. Why does the narrator determine to use his invisibility to destroy the Brotherhood by overcoming them with yeses? (Chapter 23)

Why does Tod Clifton, a political activist, decide to fall out of history and sell Sambo dolls?

1. Why does Clifton knock Ras down when the black nationalist accuses him of being a "black traitor to the black people for the white people"? What is the silent question that Clifton seems to ask Ras as he looks gravely down at the black militant? (Chapter 17)
2. Why does Clifton tell the narrator that "sometimes a man has to plunge outside history . . . Otherwise he might kill somebody, go nuts"? (Chapter 17)
3. Why is the Sambo doll described as having two faces, one that grinned back at Clifton while the other grinned forward at the crowd? Why are we told that Clifton "had been making it dance all the time and the black thread had been invisible"? (Chapter 21)
4. After the narrator spits on the Sambo doll, why does the potbellied man point at the doll, then at him, and explode with laughter? (Chapter 20)
5. Are we meant to view Clifton's final, violent act of self-assertion as deliberately suicidal? (Chapters 20 and 21)

6. Why does it suddenly occur to the narrator that it might be transitory ones like the zoot suiters—"men out of time" whose lives are too obscure to be recorded in history—who are the "true leaders, the bearers of something precious"? What does the narrator mean when he says, "What if history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment, and the boys his ace in the hole"? (Chapter 20)
7. Why does the narrator conclude that it was his job to get inside the "groove of history" all of the black men and women who had previously been invisible to him? (Chapter 20)
8. Why does the narrator's discovery that Rinehart inhabits a world of possibility—a "vast seething, hot world of fluidity"—profoundly shake his view of reality? (Chapter 23)
9. Why does the narrator say that perhaps "only Rine the rascal" was at home in a world without boundaries? Why are we told that Rinehart, the man of multiple identities, has a smooth tongue, a heartless heart, and is ready to do anything? (Chapter 23)
10. What does the narrator mean when he says that "somewhere between Rinehart and invisibility there were great potentialities"? Does Rinehart suggest a way out of the narrator's double bind—"Outside the Brotherhood we were outside history; but inside of it they didn't see us"? (Chapter 23)
11. Why are we told that the narrator moves as one with the "black river" of rioters, his "personality blasted"? Why does the author describe the rioters in language that recalls the fluid world of Rinehart? (Chapter 25)
12. Why does it turn out that by pretending to agree with the committee, the narrator made himself its tool just when he had thought himself most free? Why does the reality of the riot—a mutual destruction of blacks engineered by and for the purposes of whites—recall the battle royal? (Chapter 25)

Why is the narrator compelled to put his "invisibility down in black and white"—to exchange the role of orator and rabble-rouser for that of hibernating writer—in order to discover who he is?

1. Why does the narrator say that being imprisoned and invisible in the coal hole is a kind of living death? Why does the narrator compare himself to Jim Trueblood's jaybird that "yellow jackets had paralyzed in every part but his eyes"? (Chapter 25)
2. Why does the narrator dream, in a state between sleeping and waking, that he is castrated by Jack, Bledsoe, Norton, Ras, and others from his past? Why does he tell them that his testicles hanging from the bridge are their sun and moon, and that his seed wasting upon the water is all the history that they will make? (Chapter 25)
3. Why does the narrator's dream end with the bridge striding off like "an iron man, whose iron legs clanged doomfully," and the narrator screaming, "No, no, we must stop him"? (Chapter 25)

4. While listening to the music of Louis Armstrong in his warm, bright basement hole, why does the narrator have a vision of an old woman who tells him that freedom "ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head"? (Prologue)
5. Why does the narrator have another storyteller, Jim Trueblood, resolve his feelings about how he's both guilty and not guilty by singing the blues? Why does Trueblood's resolution take the form of deciding "I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen"? (Chapter 2)
6. Why does the narrator end his prologue with the threat of violence, asserting that all "dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all"? (Prologue)
7. Why does writing down his story show the narrator that at least half the blame for his invisibility, what he calls his "sickness," lay within himself? (Epilogue)
8. Having learned to view the world as possibility, why does the narrator see "imagination" as the alternative to "chaos" when a person opts to step outside the borders of reality? (Epilogue)
9. What does the narrator mean when he suggests that black people must "affirm the principle on which the country was built" because, given the circumstance of their origin, they "could only thus find transcendence"? (Epilogue)
10. Why does the narrator conclude that he has overstayed his hibernation—that "even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play"? (Epilogue)
11. What does the narrator mean when he says that he wants more than simply "the freedom not to run"? Are we meant to think that by the end of the novel he has found a way to rejoin society without being made to run? (Epilogue)
12. Why does the narrator end his epilogue with the suggestion that his listeners may also be invisible? Why does he say this idea frightens him? (Epilogue)

Evaluative Questions

1. Does the narrator in Ellison's novel speak for young black people today? Are blacks in the United States still required to conform to roles defined for them by whites?
2. Do you agree with Ellison's suggestion in *Invisible Man* that the strength of America as a democracy lies in its cultural diversity?
3. How can we best realize Ellison's vision of returning all Americans to a sense of personal moral responsibility for democracy?
4. Taking into account all of the images of failed leadership in *Invisible Man* (Bledsoe, Norton, Jack, Ras, Clifton, and the narrator), what might Ellison's definition be of a great American leader for the black community?

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Interpretive Questions

Why does Marlow remain loyal to Kurtz?

1. Why is Marlow both attracted to and revolted by Kurtz?
2. When he discovers that Kurtz is gone, why is Marlow seized with "pure abstract terror" as if something ". . . monstrous . . . and odious to the soul" had been thrust upon him?
3. Why is Marlow so anxious to keep to himself the confrontation with Kurtz in the jungle?
4. Why are the foundations of the intimacy between Kurtz and Marlow laid when Kurtz is "irretrievably lost"?
5. Does Conrad want us to think that Marlow saves Kurtz's soul?
6. Why does Marlow lie to Kurtz's Intended?
7. Why does Marlow claim that he is not trying to excuse or explain, only trying to account to himself for Kurtz?

What power does Marlow think the wilderness holds?

1. Why does Marlow describe the stillness of the jungle as "an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention"?
2. Why does Marlow equate the wilderness with "evil or truth"?
3. Why does the earth seem "unearthly" as Marlow penetrates deeper into the "heart of darkness"?
4. Why does Marlow say that if one were "man enough," one could admit to a kinship with the primitive Africans?
5. Why does Marlow speak of travel up the river as travel "towards Kurtz"?
6. Why does Marlow say of Kurtz that "the wilderness had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own"?
7. Why does Marlow say of England that "this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth"?

8. Why does Marlow feel that solitude and silence made "all the difference" in leading Kurtz to his fate?

Why, in telling his story, does Marlow say it is like relating a dream?

1. Why does Marlow conclude that "we live, as we dream—alone"?
2. What does Marlow mean by saying that when he is concentrating on "mere incidents of the surface . . . the reality . . . fades. The inner truth is hidden—luckily . . ."?
3. What does Marlow mean by saying, "I like what is in work—the chance to find yourself—your own reality"?
4. Why does Marlow claim that only his boat kept him from going ashore for a "howl and a dance"?
5. Why does Marlow reflect that the journey toward Kurtz was like a fairy tale?
6. What does Marlow mean by observing that the wilderness drew Kurtz to it "by memory of gratified and monstrous passions"?
7. In what sense is the "meaning" of Marlow's tale "not inside like a kernel, but outside"?
8. Why does the narrator call Marlow's experiences "inconclusive"?

Why does Kurtz's soul go mad in the "heart of darkness"?

1. Why are Kurtz's dying words "The horror! The horror!"?
2. Why does Marlow think Kurtz's last words are "an affirmation, a moral victory"?
3. Why does Marlow conclude that Kurtz was "hollow at the core"?
4. What does Marlow mean when he says that Kurtz was a remarkable man because he "had something to say"?
5. Why does Kurtz become a god to the savages?
6. Why does Kurtz change from one who believed that white men could "exert a power for good" to one who wrote of the natives: "Exterminate all the brutes!"?

Evaluative Questions

1. What is the "justice" due to Kurtz?
2. Is it justified for one people to civilize another through conquest?

3. Why does excessive idealism sometimes lead to corruption?
4. Is Marlow a moral or an amoral man?

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*

Interpretive Questions

1. Why do the authors appeal to reason for the establishment of the Constitution if they think that people usually act from interest and prejudice?
2. Do the authors consider the purpose of government to be only the protection of the rights of the people?
3. Why do the authors believe that government must guard against the perversion of laws more than against their violation?
4. Is every political group or party a faction?
5. Would the authors prefer that few factions exist or that there be as many as possible to cancel each other out?
6. Does the rise of modern mass communications invalidate the authors' plan to control factions?
7. What constitutes the public good if it can be different from the ruling passions or interest of a majority faction?
8. Would the authors consider modern political parties as means of strengthening or of controlling faction?
9. Why are the people more capable of choosing representatives than of deciding policies firsthand?
10. Can objective and disinterested judgments be made in political matters, according to the authors?
11. How does the delegation of the government in a large republic work to "refine and enlarge public views"?
12. Why would it be worse for differences among executives to "split the community" than to "frustrate the most important measures of the government"?
13. Why isn't a government's dependence on the people sufficient to control it?
14. Do the authors believe that government helps improve people morally?

15. Do the authors intend for their principles of government to be used by America alone, or by other nations as well?

Evaluative Questions

1. Are all our political decisions based on self-interest?
2. Is the United States suffering from the oppression of factions now?
3. Do you believe that, as a citizen, you have a strong enough voice in government?
4. Is the system of checks and balances outlined in *The Federalist* still working efficiently today?
5. Do you believe that any other nation could successfully adopt the United States Constitution?

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor*

Interpretive Questions

Is Billy portrayed as a flawed Christ figure or as greater than Christ in his perfect innocence of evil?

1. What is the nature of the "spontaneous homage" which Handsome Sailors like Billy receive? (Chapter 1)
2. Why does Melville imply that Billy's stutter is the work of the devil? (Chapter 2)
3. Does Billy fall from grace when he strikes Claggart dead?
4. Does Billy's cheerfulness in leaving his companions on the *Rights of Man* indicate a lack of human feeling? (Chapter 1)
5. Why can't Billy understand the concepts of salvation and savior? (Chapter 24)
6. Why are Billy's last words "God bless Captain Vere"? Why does the crew echo them? (Chapter 25)
7. Is it goodness that prevents Billy from looking beyond appearances?
8. Why does Melville compare the final meeting between Captain Vere and Billy to a "sacrament"? (Chapter 22)
9. Is it a miracle that no "muscular spasm" occurs when Billy is hanged? (Chapter 26)

Is the execution of Billy Budd a crime in Melville's eyes?

1. Why does Melville have Vere, a man of cultivated intellect, judge between Billy, a man of natural goodness, and Claggart, a man of natural depravity?
2. Why does Captain Vere immediately know that Billy must die? (Chapter 19)
3. Why does Melville suggest that both Claggart and Vere may be insane in their efforts to destroy Billy? (Chapters 11 and 20)
4. Is Vere's secrecy in conducting Billy's trial compatible with justice? (Chapter 21)
5. Are we meant to compare Claggart's minions—his "compliant ones"—with the judges Vere chooses for his drumhead court? (Chapters 8 and 21)
6. Why does Vere suggest to his fellow judges that it is not they who would condemn Billy but "the martial law operating through [them]"? (Chapter 21)
7. Is Melville suggesting that Vere's sacrifice of Billy was warranted by the "mysterious and prodigious" menace posed by the French Revolution? (Chapters 1, 2, 8, 21 and 27)

Why is Captain Vere an "exceptional" character to Melville?

1. Does Vere fail to attain Nelson's "fullness of fame" because his sense of duty outweighs his love of glory? (Chapters 4 and 28)
2. Had he risked mutiny and allowed Billy to live, would Vere then have been as exceptional a commander as Nelson?
3. By emphasizing Vere's pedantry and impatience with "talking," is Melville implying that Vere's knowledge of great books leads him into injustice?
4. Is the "intellectuality" that dominates Claggart the same faculty that rules Vere?
5. Is Vere's cultivated morality as reliable as the spontaneous moral intuition of the "natural man," such as Billy, or the other "mere sailors"?

Does good triumph over evil when Billy kills Claggart?

1. Why does Billy's reflex to strike out at envious enemies work to his advantage on the *Rights of Man*, yet cause his downfall on the *Bellipotent*? (Chapters 1, 12 and 19)
2. Why is there a touch of soft yearning in Claggart's hatred of Billy? (Chapter 17)
3. Why is the evil in Claggart portrayed as intellectually superior to the good in Billy? (Chapters 11, 12 and 16)
4. Why isn't the Dansker able to help Billy—if he has both knowledge of the world and knowledge of human nature? (Chapters 9 and 15)

5. Why does knowledge of the world blunt the finer spiritual insight that's needed to understand exceptional good or evil? (Chapter 11)
6. Why does Melville excuse the vices of sailors as "frank manifestations in accordance with natural law"? (Chapters 2 and 16)
7. Why does Melville conclude his "inside narrative" with a false official account of Billy's story and a simple sailor's ballad memorializing him? (Chapters 29 and 30)

Evaluative Questions

1. Is the average person incapable of recognizing evil when it hides behind rational methods? (Chapter 11)
2. Should we trust our instinctive moral responses or does morality depend on use of reason?
3. Can normal people fathom "the mystery of iniquity" by looking within themselves? (Chapters 11 and 21)
4. If heroism is but "vainglory" and needless expenditure of life, why do we spontaneously acclaim it in great epics and drama? (Chapter 4)
5. In entering the military, do we cease to be free moral agents, as Vere asserts? (Chapter 21)

Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

Interpretive Questions

1. What has caused the moral failure of American democracy, according to Thoreau?
2. According to Thoreau, how can government work if the individual has priority over the state?
3. Why doesn't the state ever have priority over the individual, according to Thoreau?
4. Why does Thoreau think that voting is ineffective?
5. Why does Thoreau refer to government as a machine?
6. Does Thoreau believe that the majority is always in the wrong?
7. Does Thoreau advise tax revolt?
8. Why should Americans respect "the right" but not "the law"?

9. Does Thoreau believe that all men, like himself, came into the world "not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad"?
10. Does Thoreau consider himself a friend of the state?
11. How can Thoreau consider himself a "good neighbor" if he seeks to "live within [himself], and depend upon [himself] always"?
12. Why does Thoreau feel no obligation to right the wrongs he writes about?

Evaluative Questions

1. Should a citizen be able to "bend [government] to his will"?
2. What rights does a state owe citizens?
3. Does life in a civil society change people?
4. Is Thoreau typical of American character, or does he reject it?

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Interpretive Questions

Why doesn't Hamlet "sweep to his revenge" immediately as he promises the ghost?

1. Does Hamlet want to avenge his father's death? (Act III, Scene One; Act I, Scene Five; Act II, Scene Two)
2. Why does Hamlet "put an antic disposition on"? (Act I, Scene Five)
3. Is Hamlet mad?
4. Why does Hamlet sum up his problem as "To be or not to be . . ."? (Act III, Scene One)
5. Does Hamlet arrange for the play because he doubts the ghost, or for some other reason? (Act II, Scene Two)
6. Why is Hamlet oppressed by a consciousness of his own sinful nature? (Act III, Scene One)
7. Is Hamlet's decision not to kill Claudius at prayer an example of "thinking too precisely on the event"? (Act III, Scene Three; Act IV, Scene Four)
8. Is Hamlet a coward? (Act III, Scene One; Act IV, Scene Four)

9. Why is Hamlet spurred to revenge by the sight of Fortinbras' army if he believes their goal is merely a "straw"? (Act IV, Scene Four).
10. Why, despite his forebodings, does Hamlet agree to fence with Laertes? (Act V, Scene Two)
11. Why is it only when he himself is dying that Hamlet can kill Claudius?

Is Hamlet more troubled by his mother's marriage to Claudius than by his father's death?

1. Why is Gertrude so quick to marry Claudius?
2. Why does the ghost warn Hamlet not to punish Gertrude but to leave her to heaven and her conscience? (Act I, Scene Five; Act III, Scene Four)
3. Why does Hamlet reprove Gertrude? (Act III, Scene Four)
4. Why doesn't Hamlet tell Gertrude plainly that Claudius murdered her husband? (Act III, Scene Four)
5. After Hamlet has killed Polonius, does Gertrude believe he is mad or only say so to keep their conversation a secret? (Act IV, Scene One)
6. Why does Gertrude not want to see Ophelia? (Act IV, Scene Five)
7. Does Claudius love Gertrude or does he marry her only to strengthen his position as king?
8. Does Claudius want to be a father to Hamlet? (Act I, Scene Two)
9. Does Hamlet envy Claudius?

Does Hamlet love Ophelia? (Act III, Scene One)

1. Does Shakespeare believe that Ophelia is right to obey her father and brother and break off her ties with Hamlet? (Act I, Scene Three)
2. Why does Hamlet go to Ophelia's room appearing mad and terrifying? (Act II, Scene One)
3. Why does Hamlet tell Ophelia that he loved her not? (Act III, Scene One)
4. Does Hamlet notice that Polonius and Claudius are overhearing his conversation with Ophelia? (Act III, Scene One)
5. After spurning Ophelia, why does Hamlet jest with her while they watch the play? (Act III, Scene Two)
6. Why in her madness does Ophelia sing a bawdy song? (Act IV, Scene Five)

7. Why does Hamlet show little concern about his part in causing Ophelia's madness and death?
8. Why is Hamlet angry at Laertes' grief for Ophelia? (Act V, Scenes One and Two)
9. Does Shakespeare portray Ophelia as truly virtuous or merely untested?

Why does Shakespeare have so many innocent people destroyed in the course of Hamlet's revenge?

1. Why does Shakespeare have Hamlet kill Polonius?
2. Why does Hamlet feel no regret at the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? (Act V, Scene Two)
3. Does Shakespeare believe that justice is satisfied when Laertes kills Hamlet?
4. Why does Shakespeare have Hamlet killed by the poison on Laertes' sword? (Act V, Scene Two)
5. Does Shakespeare consider Fortinbras a model for Hamlet to follow?
6. Is Hamlet corrupted in the course of his revenge?

Evaluative Questions

1. Does too careful thought inhibit action?
2. If someone wronged you in a way that couldn't be punished legally, would you consider it right to take revenge?
3. Is there a difference between seeking justice and pursuing revenge?

Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence

Interpretive Questions

1. Why do Jefferson and his fellow authors of the Declaration of Independence think they have to explain their actions to the world?
2. Why do the authors declare that it is "self-evident" that "all men are created equal"?
3. Why do the authors think that it is their duty, as well as their right, to change the government?

4. Why do the authors appeal to the Laws of Nature in justifying their break with Great Britain?
5. Why, according to the authors, are people slow—while "evils are sufferable"—to take action against a government that mistreats them?
6. Are the authors worried that their revolt will set a bad example for the world?
7. Why does the Declaration of Independence list the "history of repeated injuries and usurpations" committed by the King of Great Britain?
8. Are the authors of the Declaration of Independence opposed to monarchy or only to the "present King of Great Britain"? Did the colonists object to King George's policies, or to being ruled by a king at all?
9. Why was it important to the colonists to have a greater voice in their government?
10. Did the colonists rebel from moral outrage, or because they thought they could profit from it?
11. If the colonists' rights are self-evident, why haven't these rights been appreciated and respected?
12. Why do the colonies have the "right" to be "Free and Independent States"?

Alexis de Tocqueville. "Why Americans Are Often So Restless"
(Volume II, Chapter 13, Section 2 of *Democracy in America*)

Interpretive Questions

1. Does Tocqueville think Americans are unhappy because they have a mistaken view of happiness?
2. Why does a society devoted to equal opportunity weaken each individual?
3. Why does Tocqueville think absolutely equal conditions of life would be a misfortune?
4. According to Tocqueville, how should people live to be happy?
5. Does Tocqueville think Americans are restless because they don't know what they want or because what they want is not attainable?
6. What kind of equality does everyone in a democracy long for? Why does Tocqueville think that "men will never establish an equality which will content them"?
7. Does Tocqueville think a "taste for prosperity" is incompatible with happiness?

8. Why does Tocqueville suggest that political activity is a symptom of restlessness in a democracy?
9. Why, according to Tocqueville, do Americans seek activity as a "distraction" from their happiness?
10. Why does Tocqueville describe the restlessness of the Americans as "a spectacle as old as the world"?
11. Why does Tocqueville feel that "the more equal men are, the more insatiable will be their longing for equality"?
12. Why does Tocqueville equate restlessness with unhappiness?
13. Why does Tocqueville think that men can find a level of liberty that is satisfactory to them, but not a level of equality?
14. Does Tocqueville think that hope and ambition weaken people?
15. Does Tocqueville think that happiness is more easily reached in countries where life is not as good as it is in America?
16. Why is Tocqueville disturbed by the restlessness of Americans?

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Interpretive Questions

1. According to Sophocles, do Creon and Antigone represent equal dangers to the state?
2. Why does the Chorus think Antigone is wrong throughout most of the play?
3. Why is Creon sure that if he does not punish Antigone he will show himself "weak before the people"?
4. Is Antigone doomed because she is the daughter of Oedipus, or does she make her own fate?
5. Why is Creon absolutely insistent that his edict prohibiting the proper burial of Polyneices be observed? Why does he want to punish Polyneices even beyond death?
6. Why does Antigone confess so readily to having buried Polyneices? Are we meant to think that Antigone is "in love with death"?
7. Why does the Choragus find merit in what both Haimon and Creon say to each other in their argument?

8. Is Haimon sincere when he says to his father, "No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom"?
9. Why does Creon refuse to listen to Haimon's advice regarding Antigone? Why does he declare that his son is an "adolescent fool"?
10. Why does Creon continually make wild accusations about bribery and anarchy? Why does Creon believe that those who defy him are bribed?
11. Is Antigone, like Creon, guilty of "stubborn pride"?
12. Why does Antigone refuse to judge Polyneices even though he attacked Thebes and killed his own brother?
13. Why does Creon change Antigone's punishment from stoning to having her locked in a cave with food, which would "absolve the State of her death"?
14. Why does Creon reverse the order of actions the Choragus recommends, and bury Polyneices before he frees Antigone?
15. Why does Ismene want to die with Antigone for a crime she did not commit? Why does she claim that she and Antigone are "equally guilty"?
16. Why does Creon condemn Ismene but then later spare her life?
17. Why does Antigone have so little sympathy with Ismene's decision to obey the law? Why does Antigone later reject Ismene, saying she has no "right" to share in her guilt?
18. Why does Creon finally change his will in response to the words of Teiresias? Why is Creon punished, even though he relents and agrees to release Antigone and bury Polyneices?