

Grade Twelve World Lit. CP/Reading and Composition – Summer Reading Thought Questions

A BOOK OF LUMINOUS THINGS: AN INTERNATIONAL ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY

ed. by Czeslaw Milosz

Read as many poems as you like for enjoyment. To prepare for class, pick two poems from each section and be prepared to talk about them in September. You will be asked to explain what you think each poem means and why and how each was interesting to you.

Please note that the anthology has eleven sections, beginning with *Epiphany* and ending with *History*. This means you should prepare approximately twenty poems for discussion.

JOY LUCK CLUB

by Amy Tan

1. Each of the mothers has endured some kind of terrible loss or struggle. Be prepared to discuss the conflict faced by June's mother, Suyuan Woo; Ying Ying St. Clair; Lindo Jong; and An-Mei Hsu.
2. For what reasons did Ann-Mei Hsu's family send her away? To what extent is she responsible for her problem?
3. Consider how the motif of "balance" relates to the idea of assimilation in the novel.
4. Be prepared to discuss the ways in which Waverly and the other daughters interact with their mothers. Is there a prevailing attitude in their relationships?
5. "I wiped my eyes and looked in the mirror. I was surprised at what I saw. I had on a beautiful red dress, but what I saw was even more valuable. I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could touch. I was like 'the wind'" (p. 53). Identify how the presence of inner strength as part of identity is important in the *Joy Luck Club*. What complicates the ability of the women in Tan's novel to feel certain and secure about their own identities?
6. How are the conflicts confronting Chinese-Americans in the novel similar to those confronting other ethnic groups in the United States?
7. Inadequate or absent communication constitutes an important motif in the novel. Be prepared to discuss examples from the text.
8. Why is there a conflict between June and Waverly?

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9. “How to lose your innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever” (p. 239). What is the significance of this excerpt? To what degree and in what ways do the mothers succeed in passing on a message of hope to their daughters?
10. Describe what the daughters appear to have in common. Identify the elements found in each of the mother/daughter conflicts. To what extent are these conflicts resolved by the novel’s end?
11. How does the format of the stories told in the novel mirror its content?

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA
by Ernest Hemingway (to be read before the Huntley book)
THE HEMINGWAY BOOK CLUB OF KOSOVO
by Paula Huntley

Paula Huntley writes about her experience teaching English as a Second Language while in Kosovo; it is by exploring, reflecting, and considering her experiences with Albanians, in writing, that she gains an awareness of what it means to live in a war torn country, one in which its inhabitants are riddled with fear and the consequence of hate, yet are hopeful in their quest as people of a developing nation. She also recognizes how little Americans know of other cultures; yet, Americans, for the most part, enjoy international acclaim. --- Be sure to look on a map and familiarize yourself with the region of Kosovo.

1. Note the features of a literary journal. Be sure to describe its strengths, weaknesses, credibility, lack thereof, and any other elements a successful literary journal possesses.
2. Familiarize yourself with the terms apartheid, diaspora, KFOR, Kanun of Lek,
3. Using the Internet, research the political parties of Kosovo. What are their fundamental differences?
4. On pages 46 – 48, Huntley describes a “parallel society” the Albanians needed to create during Serb occupation. What does it mean to form a parallel society within a country? Be prepared to discuss the need for such a parallel society, its nature, and what it offers to those within it and to explain whether parallel societies exist within the United States.
5. “Tradition can be the cruelest prison of all” (p. 64) is an important metaphor Ms. Huntley uses to describe the situation she finds in Kosovo. Using evidence from the text to support your analysis, explain its significance within the text.
6. “Words. The power they have. They can heal and encourage, but they can do such damage” (p. 65). What does it mean to for words to have power? Extrapolate the meaning of this passage as it relates to the conflict between the Albanians and the Serbs.

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7. Huntley uses Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* because she feels the language is accessible to her students. Her students are able to connect to the metaphor of chasing the "big fish" in ways similar to that of the Old Man in the text. What does it mean to chase the big fish? Guided by what you have read, draw connections between Huntley's students and the Old Man of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Why must they persistently wait for and hope for the big fish to come along?
8. What is meant by the statement "a man can be destroyed yet not defeated"? In what ways does this seeming paradox apply to the Albanians of Kosovo?
9. The Albanians of Kosovo are linked to the country of Kosovo as well as their ethnicity as Albanians. What is the significance of this cultural connection? Discuss in depth why it is difficult to differentiate between the two, but also the importance of identifying as an Albanian.

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Kosovo – the Historical Context



From the Serb nationalists' catalog of fears: Kosovar Albanians as the toothy Tito's malevolence and equally toothy children, ready to overwhelm and literally devour the Serbian nation.

Milenko Mihajlović for *Kniževne novine* (Literary Gazette), the organ of the Association of Serbian Writers, Belgrade, 1990.

When seeking to understand Kosovo as a scene of conflict between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, it is necessary to be aware of some seemingly ancient history. The significance of the region to Serbian national identity derives from its status in Serb nationalist historiography as the heartland of the medieval Serbian kingdom and as having been originally inhabited almost exclusively by Serbs. In this narrative, the many ancient monasteries and churches dotting the Kosovo landscape represent the deeply Orthodox Christian cultural heritage of the Serbian nation. Furthermore, beginning with the nationalist ideology of the 19th century language reformer Vuk Karadžić, the defeat of Serbian Prince Lazar by the invading Ottoman Turks in the battle of Kosovo Polje (The Field of Blackbirds) in 1389 has been presented as the decisive moment in the history of Serbia. It is not uncommon for eastern European nationalisms to celebrate military defeats as foundational myths, but in the case of Kosovo Polje this tendency has been taken to almost fetishistic levels. The battle is seen as a glorious sacrifice by Prince Lazar, the Serb defeat as a result of treachery, and the ensuing subjugation of the Serbs by Ottoman Turks as a period of nearly Christ-like suffering, from which the Serbian nation would ultimately be redeemed by the building of a greater Serbia. It is no coincidence, therefore, that as the Yugoslav communist system began to disintegrate in the late 1980's, Kosovo would become the natural setting for a grand gesture by a former Communist Party boss seeking to establish his nationalist bona fides as the leader of the Serbs. Not only did Slobodan Milosevic stage massive nationalist rallies on the Field of Kosovo; he also overturned the constitutional structure of Yugoslavia, the work of the long-standing Yugoslav leader Tito, thus taking away the political and cultural autonomy of Kosovar Albanians who now constituted some 90% of the population of Kosovo.

In the Serb nationalists' catalog of fears, which began to gain full expression in the brutal disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation in the latter half of the 1990's, the threat of ethnic Serbs being overwhelmed by the predominantly Muslim Kosovar Albanians always figured prominently. It was therefore only a matter of time before the methods of ethnic cleansing and outright genocide that had been characteristic of the Bosnian War in 1992-1995 would appear in Kosovo, as well. This process was accelerated by the appearance, in 1996, of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), whose goal was the creation of an independent, and ethnically Albanian, republic of Kosovo. The militant campaign of the KLA, which included armed attacks on the Serbian federal forces and on ethnic Serb civilians, soon gained the support of many more Kosovar Albanians than the peaceful methods favored by the literary scholar and pacifist Ibrahim Rugova, who had been the unofficial president of a unilaterally-declared Kosovar republic since 1992. Violence escalated in 1997, when Serbian security forces began a concerted campaign of intimidation and terror against real and perceived supporters of the KLA. This included several massacres of entire extended families of Kosovar Albanians, the forced removal of ethnic Albanians from their communities, and the subsequent flight of hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees from Kosovo. Despite repeated condemnations by the UN and Western governments, followed by threats of military intervention if the violence were not stopped, the Milosevic government continued to escalate its campaign of ethnic cleansing throughout 1998 and early 1999, resulting in the launching of a NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in March 1999. Milosevic's initial defiance was ultimately broken by the extensive damage caused by the bombing, including the destruction of virtually the entire Serbian power grid, and a peace deal

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was finally brokered in June 1999. This included the withdrawal of Serbian federal forces from Kosovo, the disarmament of the KLA, and the insertion of a NATO-manned peacekeeping force (KFOR) in Kosovo. Despite sporadic violence, including revenge killings of ethnic Serbs, the settlement has proved relatively stable, resulting in the creation of a de facto independent Kosovar Republic.