

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

A DOLL'S HOUSE by Henrik Ibsen

1. Writing more than two thousand years ago, Aristotle advises a wife to, “hearken to her husband in all respects, agreeing with him and obeying his wishes.” He further asserts that, “It is fitting that a woman of a well-ordered life should consider that her husband’s wishes are as laws appointed for her by divine will...“(Oikonomikos, c. 330 BCE). Be prepared to discuss how this characterization does or does not apply to Nora.
2. In order to please her husband, Nora regularly conceals from him whatever independent actions she takes. Identify some examples of this, and be prepared to explain how her deception influences plot development and characterization.
3. The “masculine world” of a *Doll’s House* is characterized by power struggles, ambition, and money, while Nora’s experience, as a woman living in the late 19th century, is often described with language that seems to trivialize her. Be prepared to discuss examples of this in the play.
4. How do Nora’s and Torvald’s differing views of the value and use of money reflect their basic natures and foreshadow their conflict?
5. How does the generous use of verbal irony, dramatic irony, and irony of situation throughout the play create a tension between the characters and in the presentation of theme?
6. In what ways does Dr. Rank contribute to Nora’s growing awareness of the true nature of her relationship with her husband?
7. Functioning as a subplot, the story of Krogstad and Mrs. Linden acts as a type of commentary on the main plot. Be prepared to explain how this is so.
8. In many respects, Mrs. Linden functions as a character foil for Nora. Yet, on a psychological level, she can be seen more as a doppelganger, or a “subconscious self” of Nora. Find examples that support both characterizations of Mrs. Linden’s role in the drama.
9. Be prepared to discuss marriage, identity, and gender as they relate to the play’s themes.

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Confucius Lives Next Door

by T. R. Reid

Impressed by his experiences on assignment from *The Washington Post*, journalist T. R. Reid offers insights and opinions concerning the social, economic, and political forces characterizing East Asia today. As defined by Reid, the region includes China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, all countries that until the 2008 global economic crisis were experiencing (or had recently experienced) unprecedented economic growth, leading many to refer to the 21st century as the “Asian Century.” While reading this book, students should try to form their own opinions about Reid’s thesis; i.e., after twenty centuries, Confucius continues to exert profound influence on many aspects of life in modern Asia.

In order to discuss *Confucius Lives Next Door* in the fall, students should annotate the text, prepare **brief** summaries of each chapter, and bear in mind the following questions:

*Why does a Chinese philosopher who was born during the Buddha’s lifetime and who died just a few years before the birth of Socrates matter today?

*Why are statements (*The Analects*) attributed to him and recorded after his death still powerful enough to influence government policies on many levels and, possibly, shape national economies?

*Why are Confucian teachings about harmony, the importance of reading and language, the essential nature of five key social relationships, and the definition of what is “good” still important in the modern world?

*Although Saturday “Confucius Schools” are springing up all over China today and a popular weekly television series examines his teachings, why did Mao Zedong ban even the slightest reference to Confucius during the Cultural Revolution?

It is hoped that students will be guided in their Summer Reading assignments by the first lesson in the first book of *The Analects*:

“Isn’t it a pleasure when you can make practical use of the things you have studied?”

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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 An-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?
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?

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FOURTH SELECTION

For the fourth selection, World Literature CP students should choose a poet from the list below and read at least 10 poems written by him or her, in order to discuss that poet in class, from an informed perspective. Feel free to explore the poetry of as many poets on the list as you would like, but try to become reasonably familiar with at least one. Photocopy or write out a few of your favorite poems to bring to class in September.

Martin Espada
Pablo Neruda
Howard Nemerov
Lisel Mueller
Joseph Brodsky
Adrienne Rich
James Dickey
Anne Sexton
Sylvia Plath
Dudley Randall

Elizabeth Bishop
Rita Dove
Mary Oliver
Robert Pinsky
Marge Piercy
Seamus Heaney
Dylan Thomas
Richard Wilbur
Louise Erdrich