

# **QUESTIONS WE SHOULD ASK**

## **WHEN WE READ A WORK OF FICTION**

### **PLOT AND STRUCTURE**

- A. How does the author handle time? Is it simply sequential?
- B. Are there episodes or scenes? How many of each? In what order do they occur?
- C. Has the author used parallel actions? Why?
- D. Does the pace of the story remain constant? If not, how has the author modified it?
- E. Has the author used flashback or stream of consciousness techniques? To what end?
- F. Does the story ending seem inconclusive or unfinished? Does it end with revelation? Whose? Open or closed plot?
- G. Is there a climactic moment in the story? Why does it occur in that particular time and place?
- H. Who is the protagonist? The antagonist? What are the conflicts--physical? Intellectual? Moral? Emotional? Is the main conflict between sharply differentiated good and evil, or is it more subtle and complex?
- I. Does the story have unity? Are all episodes relevant to the meaning or effect of the story? Does each grow logically out of the preceding incident and lead to the next? Is the ending happy, unhappy, or indeterminate? Is it fairly achieved?
- J. What use does the story make of chance and coincidence? Are these occurrences used to initiate, to complicate, or to resolve the story? How improbable are they?
- K. To what extent is this a "formula" story?

### **CHARACTERIZATION AND CONFLICT**

- A. Who is the central character? What are the character's values. Do the values bring the character into conflict with other characters? With society?
- B. What methods has the writer used to describe the character: physical description, settings, dialogue, action?
- C. Has the author deliberately introduced a protagonist vs. antagonist method of characterization?
- D. Has the author deliberately chosen symbolic names for any of the characters?

- E. Does any character change significantly in the course of this story? How does the author present the change? Is the character aware of the change? Are others? Does it affect any of the relationships among the characters of the story?
- F. What use is made of character contrasts?
- G. Is each character developed fully enough to justify a role in the story? Are the main characters round or flat?

### **POINT OF VIEW**

- A. Through whose eyes does the reader see the story's action?
- B. Has the author used a first person narrator? If so, does the narrator speak primarily about himself/herself?
- C. Does the author use a third person narrative? Do you learn what someone thinks or feels as well as what he does? Or does the writer shift, in the third person, from character to character and probe each one?
- D. Can the reader identify with a major character?
- E. What is the author's attitude toward the characters and their situations? How do you know?
- F. What advantages has the chosen point of view? Does it furnish any clues as to the purpose of the story?
- G. If the point of view is that of one of the characters, does this character have any limitations which affect his interpretations of events or persons?

### **STYLE**

- A. Has the writer used narrative primarily? Dialogue? Why?
- B. Does the author use symbols? To what effect? Where? Does his title have more than one possible meaning?
- C. What kinds of sentences does the author write? Highly descriptive? Consistently long? Or short? What effect does the style have on the story?
- D. Does the writer use metaphorical language? Do the characters use colloquial speech patterns? Does the writer prefer more formal sentences? Why does the writer choose the language? What effects are intended?
- E. How much use does the writer make of sensory perception? Is the description largely visual? Other than visual?

## **SETTING**

- A. What kind of setting does the author use? Does the setting serve to further the story? If so, how?
- B. Does the setting develop mood, contrast, character?
- C. How does the setting relate to the theme of the story?
- D. Is the story independent of its specific setting? Could another setting be employed as effectively? Explain.

## **THEME**

- A. What is the central theme of the story?
- B. How is the theme communicated? Does the author voice the theme in his own persona?
- C. Is the theme stated directly? Must you infer the theme from the action of the story?
- D. How do the details of the story support the theme? Do any details seem irrelevant? How do they fit into the story?
- E. What symbols does the author use? How do they reveal the theme?
- F. Has the author used characterization to make his theme clear? Has he used plot primarily?
- G. Does the theme reinforce or oppose popular notions of life? Does it furnish a new insight or refresh or deepen an old one?

## **IRONY**

- A. Does the story anywhere utilize irony of situation? Dramatic irony? Verbal irony? What functions do the ironies serve?

## **EMOTION AND HUMOR**

- A. Does the story aim directly at an emotional effect, or is emotion merely its natural by-product.

## **GENERAL**

- A. Is the primary interest of the story in plot, character, theme, or some other element?
- B. What are the characteristics of the author's style? Are they appropriate to the nature of this story?
- C. What light is thrown on the story by its title?
- D. Does the story offer chiefly escape or interpretation?