

The Handmaid's Tale

Sections I and II: Night and Shopping

Chapters 1-2

VOCABULARY

fraternize – to socialize or associate oneself with
insatiability – greed; the inability to be satisfied
palimpsest – a manuscript written over a partially erased document in such a way that the original shows through
parody – a humorous imitation of something
pedantic – showing off one's learning; overly concerned with book learning
prescribed – ordered; laid down as a rule

1. Read the three epigraphs to the book. Based on these quotations, what predictions can you make about the novel?

2. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrol at night with “electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts.” What does this detail, along with others, reveal about the narrator and the situation she is in?

3. The narrator sleeps with old “army-issue blankets...that still said U.S.” What is implied by this detail?

4. Who are the Angels? What is the narrator's hope regarding them?

5. How do the prisoners learn each other's names? What motif does this method of name learning introduce?

6. Why has anything to which a rope could be tied been removed?

7. The reader first begins to notice the narrator's internal fascination with language in Chapter 2. Provide an example and explain why she might be so intent upon the way words work with and play upon each other.

8. What is evidence of the narrator's optimism?

9. Describe the narrator's clothing. What color is it, and how is the color symbolic? What is the significance of the elements of her clothing?

10. In Luke 10:38-42 of the Bible, Jesus enters a village home, and Martha of Bethany prepares food while her sister, Mary, listens to Jesus' teachings. With this Bible verse in mind, explain the significance of Rita and Cora's being called "Marthas."

Chapters 3-4

VOCABULARY

incognito – in disguise
menial – requiring little skill; unpleasant
orthodox – complying to established political or religious beliefs
petit point – a small stitch used in embroidery
precedent – an event or action that can be used as an example or standard
regimented – disciplined, well-ordered, and maintained
reproach – a criticism of what someone does or says
servile – obedient or servant-like
tremulous – shaking, trembling from fear or nervousness

1. Why is it significant that the Commander's Wife is knitting scarves designed "for children," not for the men on the front lines?
2. How long has the protagonist been at her new station? What is her relationship with the Commander's Wife like?

3. What does the question about whether Handmaids should use the front or back door indicate about their social status?

4. Who is the Commander's Wife? Where does the narrator remember her from? What is significant about her name?

5. Who is the Commander's Guardian? How does he, from the very beginning, demonstrate imperfect behavior with the narrator?

6. The narrator's shopping companion is named Ofglen. How do the names of the Handmaids seem to have been formed?

7. What do the guarded barriers and the news about Baptist rebels indicate about society?

8. What is the function of the black painted vans?

9. How does the narrator demonstrate that she still possesses power, as powerless as she is?

Chapters 5-6

VOCABULARY

anachronisms – people or objects misplaced outside of their correct historical time
anarchy – the complete lack of governmental control
atrocities – extreme cruelties
blatant – obvious and offensive
covet – to desire what someone else has
martyr – someone who is willing to suffer for a cause or belief
piously – faithfully

1. How does Atwood manage to continually layer the past upon the present?

2. What has happened to written language in the Republic of Gilead?

3. What are the women's reactions to the pregnant Handmaid?

4. The narrator reminisces about life with Luke. Who was he to her?

5. How does the narrator react to the Japanese tourists' appearances?

6. Who are the somber ancestors depicted in the painting in the church?

7. What is the purpose of the Wall?

8. Who or what is currently on the Wall? What provides relief to the narrator?

9. What can you infer by the comments about people who performed abortions being on the Wall?

10. What is the symbolic significance of the red tulips and the red smile?

Sections III and IV: Night and Waiting Room

Chapters 7-8

VOCABULARY

abstracted – preoccupied; lost in thought
disconsolate – unable to be cheered up
gloating – bragging about one's success to make someone else feel bad
ingratiate – to seek the favor of someone by flattering or pleasing
nostalgic – sentimental about the past
parley – a discussion or negotiation between opposing forces
sanctity – the quality of holiness
sect – a group united by a specific doctrine
sulking – showing moodiness or bad temper due to disappointment or anger

1. Why is the night special and significant to the narrator?

2. Who is Moira to the narrator? Describe Moira's personality.

3. When the narrator saw the cover of a pornographic magazine when she was a child, what was her reaction? How is this reaction different from the expected one?

4. The narrator describes “parts of women’s bodies, turning to black ash” as people burn the magazines. What does this image symbolize?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
5. Why would the protagonist “like to believe” that the events are “a story [she’s] telling”?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. The narrator states that “[a]ttaching a name attaches you to the world of fact...” Relate this line to the protagonist, who is still unnamed at this point in the novel.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. What is “Gender Treachery”?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Explain how lack of quotation marks in the following lines of dialogue causes ambiguity: It’s French, he said. From *m’aidez*. Help me. *[sic]*
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

9. What is the circumstance of the chance meeting on the sidewalk between the Econowives and the Handmaid, and how does each react to the other? If a miscarried fetus may or may not be an "Unbaby," what exactly is an "Unbaby"?

10. During their routine parting, at which they have each offered the "right" farewell, the narrator thinks that Ofglen is "like my own reflection in a mirror from which I am moving away." What is significant about the fact that Ofglen is so similar to the protagonist? Is her loyalty a façade, as the narrator's is, or is it truly genuine?

11. When Aunt Lydia says, "All flesh is weak," the narrator mentally corrects her, "All flesh is grass." What does she mean? Explain the allusion.

12. Explain the situational irony in Serena Joy's career of making speeches about women and the sanctity of the home.

13. Analyze the encounter at the end of Chapter 8 between the Commander and the narrator. What is significant about the narrator's emotions? How does she refer to her room?

Chapters 9-10

VOCABULARY

amputated – severed
communing – sharing ideas or sentiments
lugubrious – mournful and gloomy
melodramatic – sensationalized; overly dramatic
minuteness – an attentiveness to detail
taboo – forbidden
unfathomable – impossible to understand

1. What does the narrator reveal about the way her relationship with Luke began?

2. Atwood juxtaposes flashbacks of the hotel room where the narrator and Luke had their affair with the narrator's current room in the Commander's household. What is the effect of this contrast?

3. What does the narrator discover in the cupboard on the third day?

4. From her conversation with Rita, what does the narrator learn about the previous Handmaids?

5. Why are songs such as "Amazing Grace" outlawed?

6. What are the "things" that used to happen to women? Who did Aunt Lydia blame for these "things"?

7. What does the narrator offer as an excuse for this way of life taking over?

Chapters 11-12

VOCABULARY

barren – incapable of producing offspring (often referring to a female)
covertly – secretly; in a hidden manner
coyly – shyly; modestly
obligatory – required; mandatory
salvation – a deliverance from danger
sterile – incapable of producing offspring (often referring to a male)

1. What attempt is made to keep the doctor's appointment completely impersonal?

2. What offer does the doctor make, and what appears to motivate him? What is the narrator's reaction and response? Why does she respond as she does?

3. How were women "vulnerable" in the bathroom at one time?

4. How is the narrator's interpretation of her own nakedness unique?

5. What does the narrator's daughter's near-abduction at the supermarket foreshadow? What does the narrator suggest about the isolated nature of this incident?

6. What emotions does the narrator feel as she remembers her daughter?

7. What event does Atwood foreshadow taking place that night?

8. What small subversive act does the narrator commit?

Sections V and VI: Nap and Household

Chapters 13-14

VOCABULARY

animation – the state of being lively or energized
bracken – an overgrown area with large ferns
candid – honest; sincere
congealed – solidified and fixed
espionage – the act of spying
fretwork – a decorative patterned design
heretical – against established religious beliefs
lethargic – sluggish; tired
sedentary – inactive; tending to laziness
translucent – clear; able to be seen through

1. What was the narrator unprepared to deal with in her situation? How does this make her feel?

2. Moira has a bruise on her left cheek; what does this injury indicate?

3. When Janine tells her story of being gang-raped, how does the Aunts' conditioning of Janine and the other Handmaids prove to be extremely effective?

4. How has the narrator's view of her body been altered?

5. What do the narrator's dreams reveal concerning her fears about Luke?

6. What is the protagonist's worst dream?

7. How does the sitting room scene at the beginning of Chapter 14 show Serena Joy's and the narrator's positions in relation to each other?

8. Why does the narrator wish to steal something from the sitting room?

9. In what way does Nick exhibit a familiarity with the narrator? Is it intentional? How does she know?

10. What is the normal order of things as the household gathers for the Ceremony?

11. Explain how the news is propaganda.

12. Ham is a biblical figure whose descendants are believed to have populated Africa. Based on this information, what can the reader infer about Gilead's "[r]esettlement of the Children of Ham"?

13. The narrator reveals that she is called "Offred" in this society. Why is the name Offred symbolically significant?

14. How does Offred feel about the loss of her name?

15. Where were the narrator, Luke, and their daughter traveling to?

Chapters 15-17

VOCABULARY

acquisitive – emotionally driven to obtain things
benevolence – kindness or goodwill
effigy – a carved or sculpted image of someone
frivolity – a silly or trivial behavior or object
genial – pleasant; friendly
incendiary – causing conflict or excitement
innocuous – harmless; inoffensive
squandered – wasted
superfluous – in excess of what is necessary
tableau – a picture of a scene in which people are posed in costume
titillate – to excite or arouse

1. How does the Commander abandon protocol?

2. In what way might the Bible be an “incendiary device”?

3. What effect does use of the word “tableau” have on Offred and the telling of this story in general? What does it reveal?

4. Which Beatitude did the Aunts add to the list the Handmaids learned? How have you seen this Beatitude demonstrated throughout the novel thus far?

5. What is Moira planning? What does this plan reveal about the primary difference between her and Offred?

6. What does Serena always do after the Commander finishes his reading? What is Offred's usual reaction?

7. What is Moira's punishment for attempting to escape? Why is this method particularly effective, according to the Aunts?

8. What is the one thing that Offred thinks makes the act of intercourse bearable for the Handmaids? Why does it do so?

9. What does Offred do with the pat of butter she saved from earlier? How is the butter symbolic?

10. Who made the decree that Handmaids cannot have hand lotion? Why?

11. For what purpose does Offred go to the sitting room? Explain her compulsion.

12. Who does Offred encounter in the sitting room, and what happens?

Sections VII and VIII: Night and Birth Day

Chapters 18-19

VOCABULARY

delusion – a mistaken or false belief
disembodied – ghost-like
granular – rough, coarse
gravid – pregnant
incubate – to nurture, develop, and protect
litanies – long, drawn-out lists
paranoid – excessively and unreasonably suspicious of other people
profusion – extravagance; wasteful spending; an abundance
scorning – holding in contempt

1. Explain the simile “I am like a room where things once happened and now nothing does, except the pollen of the weeds that grow up outside the window, blowing in as dust across the floor.”

2. What does Offred believe about Luke? Why are her thoughts of him contradictory? What purpose does this ambiguity serve?

3. What is significant about the pillow with the word “FAITH” stitched on it?

4. What does the egg that Offred marvels over symbolize?

5. What "proclamation" does Offred hear as she is eating her breakfast? What does it herald and call her to do?

6. How are behavioral expectations for the Handmaids modified somewhat on Birth Days?

7. What are the chances that a baby will be born healthy? Why is this so? How is Atwood using this statistic as a political and social commentary?

8. How has labor and childbirth changed greatly from before? Why has it changed?

Chapters 20-21

VOCABULARY

emaciated – very thin, especially due to starvation or illness
furtive – secretive; stealthy
incarnation – a person or thing that represents a quality, idea, or person
matrix – an archaic term for the womb; a point of origin
pronatalist – a person or government policy that encourages childbearing
revile – to insult; to verbally abuse
transition – the last phase of labor during birth
vindicate – to clear someone of guilt or suspicion

1. Describe Commander Warren's Wife when Offred enters their home. How is her positioning farcical?

2. Why is life hardest for Offred's generation of Handmaids, the "transitional generation"?

3. Who does Offred see in the Unwomen film the Aunts show the Handmaids? What is the person doing? How does Offred react to seeing her?

4. Describe the relationship between Offred and her mother. What conflict existed? How does Offred feel about it now, in retrospect?

5. How does Atwood evoke a sense of community in the scene in which Janine gives birth? Give specific examples of the language Atwood uses to create this feeling.

6. How does the naming of the baby illustrate the power dynamic between Wives and Handmaids?

7. What is Janine's reward for a successful pregnancy and delivery?

8. At the end of Chapter 21, Offred thinks about her mother, "Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists." How is this "women's culture" not exactly what the feminists would have wanted? What flaws do you observe in the interaction between women on this Birth Day?

Chapters 22-23

VOCABULARY

approbation – approval
audacity – boldness; overconfidence
beseeching – expressing earnest begging or pleading
bestow – to give
candor – complete honesty
collusion – the plotting between two or more people to commit an illegal act or wrongdoing
concubine – a lover; a mistress
nuances – subtle differences
shanghaied – tricked or forced into doing something
sheepish – embarrassed; awkward
sniveling – whining or crying
totems – objects serving as symbols of a clan or society, often used in rituals
zygote – a cell that is formed once an egg is fertilized

1. What exception is made for the Aunts? Explain, from both a practical and a social standpoint, why this exception would be made.

2. How does Offred characterize Janine?

3. What does Aunt Lydia tell Janine about Moira? What does Aunt Lydia want in return?

4. Explain the wordplay of Offred's calling Moira a "loose woman."
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
5. Paradoxically, how do the other Handmaids react to the idea of freedom?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. How is Offred's story a "reconstruction"?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. Offred says, "Maybe none of this is about control. Maybe it isn't really about who can own whom, who can do what to whom and get away with it, even as far as death... Maybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it." What might she mean?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Describe the risk Offred is taking in meeting the Commander secretly. Why is their private meeting forbidden? What could happen to her?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

9. How does the Commander greet Offred when she meets with him secretly? How does she react and why?

10. Offred sees that the Commander's study is "filled with books. Books and books and books...." What is the effect of this repetition?

11. What does the Commander want to do with Offred? Why?

12. Offred spells out the words "Larynx," "Zygote," and "Limp." What is the significance of these words?

13. What does the Commander ask of Offred at the end of the evening? How does he react to her response? Why do you think he reacts in this manner?

Sections IX and X: Night and Soul Scrolls

Chapters 24-25

VOCABULARY

banal – ordinary; commonplace; boring
brioche – a light, sweet roll
clamor – to noisily demand
curio – an unusual or rare object that is viewed as a curiosity
ectoplasm – the clear gel inside of a cell; the substance believed to surround spiritual beings
emphysema – a lung disease that causes shortness of breath
insinuating – implying or hinting
peccadillo – a small fault or offense
penance – an act of self-punishment or atonement for a sin or wrongdoing
prolix – excessively wordy
subversive – likely to undermine or overthrow a government or other organization
suffuses – spreads throughout or over
swoon – to faint or lose consciousness
tactile – relating to the sense of touch
viable – capable of developing normally; workable or doable
yen – a strong desire

1. Why does the narrator think that she must forget her “secret name” and accept her identity as “Offred”?

2. What is Offred's interpretation of Aunt Lydia's teachings about men?

3. What is the point of the story of the Nazi camp commander's mistress?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
4. What is the effect of the lack of end punctuation as Offred listens to her heart "opening and closing, opening"?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
5. What awakens Offred the morning after she met with the Commander? What does Cora believe when she sees Offred lying on the floor? How does Offred explain her position?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. What does Offred mean when she refers to Serena's garden as "subversive"?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. Why does Serena knit scarves for the Angels?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Why are the Marthas and the Handmaids careful to avoid any appearance of illness?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

9. Why does Offred hesitate to accept the *Vogue* magazine to read?

10. What is the Commander's response when Offred asks why he chose to reveal the magazine to her?

11. What does the Commander's response confirm to Offred about her presence in his study?

12. Offred comes to realize that the relationship between her and the Commander is now one of give and take. What does Offred request of the Commander at this time? How does his reaction to this request indicate his understanding of a Handmaid?

Chapters 26-27

VOCABULARY

amalgamated – combined two things into one
blasphemy – a comment or act against something or someone considered sacred
breach – the violation of a law, promise, or trust
compunction – a feeling of guilt about doing something wrong
copulation – sexual intercourse
defunct – no longer working or valid
filching – stealing something, usually of little value
ignominious – deserving of disgrace or shame
perfunctory – dutiful without thought or attention
propriety – the accepted standards of correct behavior or morals

1. In what way is the Ceremony different from the last time?

2. How does Offred feel toward Serena? Why does she feel this way?

3. What is Aunt Lydia's dream for future generations? Do you think this dream is reasonable?

4. The name of the store "Loaves and Fishes" is an allusion to the New Testament story of Jesus' dividing the loaves and fishes to feed the multitudes. Why is the store name ironic?

5. What is the Soul Scrolls franchise? Describe the irony inherent in such a franchise.

6. What does Offred see as she stares into the glass of Soul Scrolls? What occurs at that moment?

7. What does Offred learn about Ofglen?

8. What happens to frighten Offred as she and Ofglen make their way home?

Chapters 28-29

VOCABULARY

animosity – hostility
antiquarian – one who deals in antiques and rarities
censored – edited to remove material believed to be objectionable or offensive
macabre – gruesome or morbid
obsolete – outdated or no longer in use
precocity – the quality of having advanced abilities at a young age
reminiscent – suggestive of the past
semaphore – a signaling system using hand-held flags

1. How was the Republic of Gilead able to overthrow the United States government so easily? Describe the state of events, as Offred relates them, that led to the way things currently are.

2. What is Moira's response to the regime's actions, and what does it indicate?

3. What detail about the army does Offred recall?

4. Once people realize that the regime is bent on changing the entire American way of life, some of them protest. How is this protest dealt with? How does Offred handle the changes to her way of life? Why do people react as they do?

5. What does Offred's thought that she "would like to think better of him" reveal about her feelings for Nick?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. What does Gilead's shift of power do to the relationship between Luke and Offred?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. When describing her reading habits, Offred says, "If it were eating it would be the gluttony of the famished...." Explain the significance of this metaphor.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. What is the meaning of the phrase "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*"? When Offred learns the meaning, what else does she learn?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
9. When Offred asks the Commander why it is so important that she continue to come to him, how does he respond? How is the information he provides different from her earlier assumption?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

10. What would Offred like from the Commander, besides hand lotion?

Sections XI and XII: Night and Jezebel's

Chapters 30-32

VOCABULARY

affable – friendly; easygoing
allure – an attraction or something that draws attention
anecdotes – short, and often humorous, stories
appeased – made calm by fulfilling a want or need
coquettishly – flirtatiously
deign – to do something considered to be beneath one's status
dissipation – the overindulgence in pleasure (usually related to sex, drugs, or alcohol)
implacable – relentless; unable to be soothed
importunate – demanding; persistent
obliterated – completely destroyed
ostentation – a showy display
palpable – able to be perceived by the senses
perfidy – an act of betrayal; disloyalty
querulous – complaining to the point of being difficult to get along with
stolidity – the state of being unemotional

1. What does Offred think is the reason her nightgown was made with long sleeves?

2. What does Luke decide to do with the cat before he and Offred make their escape?

3. Describe how Offred prays. Despite everything, does she seem to believe in God?

4. When Offred makes the statement "this isn't a jail sentence," is the implication that her time in the Commander's home is better or worse than time spent in jail? Explain your response.

5. How has Labor Day changed?

6. What has happened to Jews in the Republic of Gilead?

7. What is the password to recognize others in the network?

8. In what ways does Serena act out of character upon Offred's return home? Describe their conversation.

9. What is Serena's surprising suggestion to their shared dilemma? Fully describe her manner as she convinces Offred to agree to her proposition. What is going through Offred's mind at this time?

10. Locate the sentence that encapsulates Offred's situation in this society.

11. Why is Rita's gift of the ice cube important?

12. What does Offred do with the match she gets from Rita?

13. What does the Commander reveal about the wants of men?

14. What philosophical idea does the Commander share about the results of the new society?

Chapters 33-35

VOCABULARY

anomaly – a variation from what is expected or considered standard
contingencies – uncertainties; unforeseen events
cupolas – domes on top of buildings
flotilla – a small fleet of boats
frieze – a decorative band around something
maudlin – foolishly emotional
plebeian – common; crude
precarious – uncertain; risky
prurience – the state of having unwholesome sexual interest
revisionists – people who re-examine long-standing, stated truths and practices
sobriety – the quality of being serious-minded
susurrations – a soft whisper or rustle

1. What has happened with Janine and her child?

2. What is common knowledge throughout the network about Janine and the child's conception?

3. What does Offred recall about Janine's mental status at the Red Center? What does this recollection foreshadow?

4. What is the purpose of the Prayvaganza?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
5. How does the Commander justify the new system?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. What, according to the narrator, did the system fail to take into consideration? How does the Commander feel about this?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. How are men's and women's Prayvaganzas different?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Why don't the Handmaids like to draw a recanted nun for a shopping partner?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
9. What does Ofglen know, and what does she want from Offred?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

10. What invalidated the marriage between Luke and the protagonist and forced her into the position of Handmaid in the first place, even making it possible for her daughter to be taken from her?

11. What is the difference in the way Offred and the Commander view love?

12. How has time affected Offred and her daughter? Note the simile Offred uses to describe herself.

Chapters 36-37

VOCABULARY

apathetic – indifferent and uninterested
assimilated – merged into a larger group; adjusted to a new environment or situation
deferential – showing respect to a superior
flaunting – showing off
frowzy – messy; untidy
gawk – to stare openly and rudely
glister – glitter
inscrutable – without expression; incapable of being understood
jocularly – playfulness; merriment
lurid – garish and gaudy
mélange – a clashing mixture or medley
monotony – a boring sameness
procure – to acquire
snigger – a smothered (and sometimes disrespectful) laugh

1. How do the Commander's evening plans change for Offred?

2. What sense does Offred get from Nick?

3. How does Offred feel without the headdress she wears as a Handmaid?

4. In what ways does the Commander change as he spends more time in the hotel with Offred? What occurs to Offred?

5. What excuse does the Commander offer for the club's existence?

6. What person does Offred spot, and how does she appear to be dressed?

Chapters 38-39

VOCABULARY

aversion – a feeling of dislike or extreme distaste for something
bathos – a disappointing conclusion
fatalistic – submitting to fate; believing that all things are inevitable
filigree – a decorative work of metal wires
incorrigibles – people who are difficult or impossible to change or reform
lassitude – a state of weariness and lack of energy
peremptory – authoritative and expecting obedience
plausible – conceivable; likely
volition – determination; the power to make choices
walleyed – having wild, staring eyes

1. What does Offred learn about the women at the hotel? Who is the woman at the door of the Ladies' room? Who are the majority of the other women? How did they come to be there?

2. Why does Moira think the Commander brought Offred to the hotel?

3. What did Moira use to help make her escape? What is this reminiscent of in US history?

4. According to the films shown to Moira, what is life like in the Colonies?

5. What upsets Offred the most about the choice that Moira has made?

6. As Offred explores the hotel room, as she once did when she waited for Luke, how is everything the same and yet so different?

7. Where has Moira seen Offred's mother?

8. What is Offred's reaction to the Commander's attempt at sexual intimacy?

Sections XIII and XIV: Night and Salvaging

Chapters 40-41

VOCABULARY

adroit – skillful; practiced
munificent – characterized by generosity
obverse – a counterpart; a complement
sardonic – mocking; showing disapproval
somnambulant – [*somnambulant*] sluggish; like a sleepwalker
sordid – immoral; wretched; disgusting
surliness – unfriendliness; rudeness

1. How is Offred's experience with Nick considerably different than her interactions with the Commander, even though she knows that "it's an assignment"?

2. Why does Offred present the encounter with Nick three different times, each one false?

3. What is the effect of Offred's direct address "By telling you...I'm at least believing in you...I tell, therefore you are"? To whom is she speaking?

4. What does Offred do with Nick that she does with no one else? Why does she do this?

5. What, in particular, does Offred tell Nick? Why is this occurrence significant?

6. Why do Nick and Offred not ever use the word "love"?

7. What does Ofglen want Offred to do? What is Offred's feeling about this request and why?

8. What has Nick warned Offred about and why?

9. What is Offred certain of by the end of Chapter 41?

Chapters 42-43

VOCABULARY

cordon – a line of military personnel enclosing or guarding an area
crèche – a Nativity scene
platitudes – pointless comments made to appear significant and helpful
prerogative – a right or privilege, usually restricted to people of a particular rank
revulsion – distaste; loathing

1. What is the purpose of a Salvaging? Who is being salvaged?

2. What will happen to those who are salvaged? What, more than likely, were the crimes they committed?

3. Offred describes the rope leading to the stage as “like a fuse, or the string of a balloon.” What is the significance of these similes?

4. What is a Particicution? Why, according to Aunt Lydia, is the Guardian to be subjected to one?

5. Describe the scene of the Particicution. After the horror Aunt Lydia has described, what are the Handmaids feeling? What do they do immediately after she blows the whistle, giving them permission to kill the Guardian? What does the Guardian do?

6. What does Ofglen do? Why?

7. What does Offred notice about Janine?

Chapters 44-45

VOCABULARY

abdicate – to give up a position of authority
abject – wretchedly miserable
consolation – a source of comfort
engrossed – completely occupied by something
fervent – passionate; enthusiastic
incriminate – to prove someone's involvement in a crime
infinitesimal – tiny and unimportant
melodrama – exaggerated or overly emotional behavior
placid – calm; not easily disturbed
talisman – a charm or object used to ward off evil

1. What draws Offred's attention to the fact that Ofglen is not the person she has known?

2. How is the new Ofglen different from the previous Ofglen?

3. How does the new Ofglen respond when Offred asks, "Has Ofglen been transferred, so soon?"

4. What is Ofglen's response when Offred tests her with the password "Mayday"?

5. What information, finally, does Ofglen impart?

6. What mood is being established in this segment of the novel? How does Atwood accomplish this?

7. What does Serena Joy discover?

Section XV: Night and Historical Notes

Chapter 46-Historical Notes on The Handmaid's Tale

VOCABULARY

appended – attached; affixed
Byzantine – characterized by complex scheming, usually for political power
censure – to condemn
echelons – levels of rank within a system or society
edifying – uplifting; improving moral or spiritual character
homage – a show of respect toward someone
infallible – perfect; without fault
liaisons – illicit sexual relationships
post facto – [*Latin*] after the fact
progeny – offspring
redolent – reminiscent
repatriation – the process of returning someone to their country of origin or allegiance
soi-disant – [*French*] so-called
sumptuary – designed to regulate personal behaviors on moral or religious grounds
symposium – a conference; a seminar
synchronicity – a sequence of events that seem to be meaningfully related
transcript – a written or printed record
vouchsafe – to give in a gracious or condescending manner

1. In Chapter 46, what conclusion does Offred come to concerning faith?

2. Who comes for Offred in the end?

3. Look carefully at the university, professor, and department names listed preceding the historical notes. What do they reveal?

4. According to Professor Pieixoto, how did *The Handmaid's Tale* come to be titled?

5. What tone does Pieixoto take with the "item" and the women in general? Given this, why do you think Atwood included the Historical Notes as part of the novel?

6. What is Professor Pieixoto's attitude toward Gileadean society?

7. Professor Pieixoto mentions that, before Gilead, Rumania banned birth control and imposed "compulsory pregnancy tests." Why did Atwood include this historical detail?

8. What were the justifications for the Particution ceremony?

9. Pieixoto spends much of his keynote speech discussing Frederick R. Waterford and B. Frederick Judd, one of whom was likely Offred's Commander, rather than talking about Offred herself. What does his focus suggest about women in history?
