

## STUDY GUIDE

**Review these questions after reading the assigned texts, make some notes, bring to class.**

### *Women Writers on Writing*

1. How does George Eliot characterize novels by “lady novelists”? What are her chief complaints concerning what she calls the “mind and millinery” novel? Why are these novels so “silly”? Based on what you’ve read from this excerpt of Eliot’s much longer essay, why might “silly novels” be dangerous? Do you think Eliot is being somewhat intellectually elitist here or does she have another objective?
2. To what extent do we have these same “silly novels” in the contemporary book market? How do you think Eliot might react to books like *Twilight* or *Fifty Shades of Grey* (two of the highest selling mass market publications by women writers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)? Why do you think these books, like the “mind and millinery” novels, are so popular? Do they fulfill a specific interest for female readers that Eliot perhaps failed to consider?
3. In Virginia Woolf’s “Shakespeare’s Sister” (237), how does Woolf dramatize the dilemma early women writers perhaps found themselves in? Why is it so important for a woman to have “a room of one’s own,” and why are they often denied this right (or is it a privilege)? Obviously, the use of the word room stands for much more than a simple room with four walls and a door. What is implied in the way Woolf uses this term? Do you think this point is still valid for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What are the conditions necessary for a woman to have “a room of one’s own”?
4. How would you characterize Woolf’s authorial stance in her literary essay, “Professions for Women” (244)? How might we account for her choice of tone? What does she achieve by adopting such a tone? How might her tone affect her intended audience of the Women’s Service League? Do you think Woolf would have made a different rhetorical choice had her audience been male academics and writers?
5. What do you make of Woolf’s assertion that the Angel’s “fictitious nature was of great assistance to her,” for “it is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality” (245)? Why is it so dangerous for women writers to emulate the notion of femininity represented by the Angel? What kinds of class assumptions are at play in the notion of the Angel in the House? Does Woolf’s inability to imagine or include the lives of Victorian-era laboring or working-class women limit “Professions for Women”?
6. In Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (1296), how does the essay add a racialized dimension to Woolf’s notion of the Angel? In other words, how does she make visible the white privilege that informed Woolf’s text? How does she expand upon Woolf’s ideas to think about creative women and their survival within the contexts of the history of slavery in America?
7. How would you describe the relationship that Walker depicts between her mother and herself? What does Walker realize about her mother and her female ancestors’ thwarted

artistic production? How does Walker see herself as the inheritor of a creative tradition passed down through the women in her family?

8. Walker is clearly working to tell new stories, she's working against the single story told of black female characters in literature. She's also trying to tell new stories about creativity and art—to expand our ideas of what art is. What are the effects of this expansion of the term art? Is it convincing? Not convincing? What do you think?
9. In Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken" (1982), Rich also looks to Virginia Woolf's famous essay on women's writing, *A Room of One's Own*, and finds Woolf trying not to sound angry, even though she is writing for an audience of women. In what ways does Rich argue for the importance and usefulness of women's anger? Why does Rich see anger as positive or necessary for women? What are the problems associated with women expressing anger? Do you think the culture we live in still frowns upon women's anger? Why or how? Is it any different for men? Why or how? Do you think we have or should have strategies for addressing and "working through the anger" as Rich says?
10. According to Rich, what is encompassed by the act of "re-vision" and why is it so important for women writers to engage with this? How does a predominantly male, or masculine-centered, literary tradition influence women's writing, and women's views of themselves as writers? What challenges do women face, as illustrated by Rich's own experiences? What are some of the difficulties in writing about women's experiences?
11. What does Rich have to say about the "special woman"? Note that she returns to Woolf's essay and points to the women Woolf has left out -- who is left out? Why does Rich mention them? How do these different voices improve the goals of feminism for Rich? How does it change her vision of what needs to be done in literature? Also note Rich's awareness of the changes that take place from decade to decade and the historical forces that shape the challenges women face. What do you think has changed since Rich wrote this in the 70s? What challenges remain? What new challenges does she overlook?
12. In "The Path of the Red and Black Ink," Anzaldúa remarks, "Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer." How does the idea of a "Borderland" describe a variety of psychological states, and positions within a society? What is a "Borderland"? What makes living in a "Borderland" a "numinous experience," not a "nightmare"? How is writing—and the author's relationship to her work—"symptomatic of a larger creative process—cultural shifts . . . cultural ambiguity"?
13. Anzaldúa describes the body as a "crossroads," creativity as painful "continuous multiple pregnancies," and her writing desk as an altar composed of ceremonial objects. Overall, what relationship does Anzaldúa construct between Western and tribal cultures? What objects, for instance, can be found on her desk? What is the source of her inspiration? And where (and how) does she find resolution?

## *Marriage, Motherhood, and Madness*

### **Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)**

*In the nineteenth century, physicians were the new guardians of morality and the female body. Gilman underwent the so-called rest cure made famous by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, of whom Gilman was actually a patient, and she chronicled her treatment by Dr. Mitchell in “Undergoing the Cure for Nervous Prostration” (1935). In the essay, she writes that Mitchell sent her home to “live as domestic a life as far as possible” and directed her “never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as [she] lived.” When she returned home to follow the treatment, only to get much worse, she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”—a fictionalized account of her experience with what we would now call post-partum depression.*

1. Based on what we read in Gilman’s short story, how might Mitchell’s “rest cure” go against what we know about treating mental health today? Why might such a “cure” be worse than the disease? Why might it be particularly problematic for a woman writer? How does Gilman’s story illustrate that dilemma?
2. Early in the story, the narrator says “John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.” What comment does this make about the role of women in marriage? What gender assumption does it establish/reinforce? Over time, how could it make the narrator or any person feel?
3. What clue does the narrator's repeated lament, “what can one do?” give us about her personality? What conflicting emotions is she having toward her husband, her condition, and the mansion? What clues does Gilman give us about the education of the narrator and her increasingly agitated state? Is she finding it more and more difficult to communicate?
4. By the Fourth of July, what does the narrator admit about the wallpaper? What is the wallpaper beginning to symbolize and what effect is it beginning to have on her mental health? What mental condition is she beginning to manifest? What seems to be John’s attitude about the narrator’s condition? How does this mirror society’s attitude—both past and present—regarding mental health conditions?
5. The narrator describes the figure “behind” the wallpaper as a “strange, provoking, formless sort of figure ... [who] seems to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.” What could the figure represent and why is “behind” the appropriate word? What does the pattern symbolize? What gender assumption do these symbols underscore? Why must the woman in the wallpaper “creep” by daylight, and why must it be “humiliating” for her to do so? What could the daylight symbolize? How does the narrator’s feeling of humiliation contradict the assumptions about women at the time?
6. By the final section, how has the narrator's perspective changed from the start of the story? What change do we see in her actions? What has driven the narrator to the brink of madness? How does she try to free herself from this element? What is her greatest desire? What is the central irony of the story?

### **Pregnancy and Birth: Nin, Lorde, Brooks and Taggard**

*In works like “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Tillie Olsen’s Tell Me A Riddle, women writers express ambivalence about the self-sacrificing expectations of motherhood; however, women writers have also experienced pregnancy and childbirth as incredibly creative times and have celebrated such fecundity in works like Audre Lorde’s “Now That I Am Forever with Child” (1972) and Genevieve Taggard’s “With Child” (1921), poems that celebrate the birth and mothering process as excellent metaphors for artistic and literary creation. As you read these assigned texts, think about the ways in which they represent the act of childbirth as similar to the process of artistic creation.*

1. In Anais Nin’s short prose piece “Birth” (1938), what are some of the key metaphors, similes, and imagery, and how do these connect to illustrate both the explicit and implicit themes in the text? How is the imagery used to express emotions and to introduce issues of gender oppression? Where does the speaker’s anger come from? How does the act of giving birth affect the speaker’s perceptions of life? How does this piece explore what we might call “birth trauma”? How might the poem represent the fluidity of identity? How does this connect to acts of creativity?
2. What is the overall tone in Genevieve Taggard’s “With Child” (1921) and Audre Lorde’s “Now That I Am Forever with Child” (1976)? How is pregnancy and the pregnant body represented in these poems? Are the speakers simply describing the “ordinary” relationship between her a mother and her unborn child or is something else going on here? How might either poem read as a metaphor for the poet’s relationship to writing, as well as the product of that writing, the poem itself? Does knowing Taggard and Lorde were also women of color change the dimensions or meanings of their poems?
3. Gwendolyn Brooks’s “the mother” (1963) is a poem that has been championed at different times by both pro-life and pro-choice groups, and provides an important look at the problems and issues involved in the abortion debate. The poem also implicitly speaks to issues of reproductive justice for women of color within the contexts of poverty and a history of forced sterilizations. What attitude does the poem express toward the mother’s “choices” as well as her ambivalent sense of loss and mourning? Is the mother's suffering outweighed by her “deliberateness” (one assumes there were compelling reasons behind these abortions)? If abortion is a killing and a robbing (as the speaker asserts), what are we to make of her deliberateness (that wasn't deliberate)?

### **Mothers and Daughters: Kingston and Olsen**

#### **Maxine Hong Kingston, “No Name Woman” (from *The Woman Warrior*, 1976)**

1. The mother-daughter relationship in *The Woman Warrior* has been described as “bittersweet.” Based on your reading of the novel’s first chapter, “No Name Woman,” to what extent do you agree with this view? How would you describe this relationship?
2. Why does Kingston’s mother tell her the story of her aunt? What lesson is Kingston’s mother trying to pass on to her daughter? How does Kingston interpret the story? Why is it important for Kingston to retell her aunt’s story according to her own vision?

3. How is the conflict between individualism and community represented in Kingston's text? Which characters struggle to define themselves as individuals in a community-oriented society? Are they successful in claiming their personal voices? How are women silenced and in what ways does Kingston feel complicit in this silencing? Why does Kingston say she that she has participated in her aunt's punishment?
4. If No Name Woman had had a baby boy rather than a baby girl, would she have committed suicide by drowning herself and the baby in her family's well? Why, or why not? What is significant about the term "ghost" in Kingston's text?
5. What are some of the similarities between Kingston and No Name Woman? What are their differences? How does the story explore the role of reproduction and sexuality in both women's lives?

**Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing" (from *Tell Me a Riddle*, 1961)**

1. At what point in her life did Emily's mother have her? What was going on in the world at that time? Why did Emily's father leave? Why did Emily have to be separated from her mother? Does Emily's mother feel she failed her? Why or why not? What expectations does Emily's mother have for her eldest daughter?
2. Who is the mother talking to? Why is this person interested in Emily? Does it seem like they understand Emily better than the speaker does? Who or what is responsible for what happened? Are Emily's circumstances similar to those of many children today? How? Were you surprised that Emily was a funny comedic actress? Why/why not?
3. What is the external conflict between mother and daughter? What is the mother's internal conflict? The narrator refers to "all that life that has happened outside me, beyond me." What economic, personal, and/or historical factors beyond her control have affected her relationship with her daughter? What are the factors/circumstances within her control for which the mother seems to be willing to take blame and accept as her mistakes?
4. Analyze the summary paragraph (the penultimate one) that begins, "I will never total it all." Why does the narrator say this equation would not be an adequate explanation of Emily's character? Does this seem like excuse making on her part for her daughter's trouble? Consider the "help" Emily receives at the convalescent home: how does it connect to or influence the mother's statement "Let her be," at the end?
5. Explain the ending: "Only help her to know—help make it so there is cause for her to know—that she is more than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron." What is the significance of this image? In what way does the story's final paragraph express the narrator's feeling of resignation and/or affirmation? How would you interpret the "ironing" metaphor? How might this illustrate the mother's wish for her daughter as well as the mother's view of her own life?

***(Re)Writing Eve: Revisionary Approaches toward Religion***

1. As a cautionary tale involving forbidden fruit, Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" provides a retelling of the Genesis narrative. How does the lusciousness of Rossetti's banquet of fruit undermine the renunciative point the poem ostensibly makes? What do you make of such a contradiction? What does it suggest?
2. Laura Riding's "Eve's Side of It" (NALW2 544) is a revolutionary text in which Riding imagines Lilith and Eve together constituting the central principle, replacing God and Christ coming out of the void. How does Riding re-imagine Eve as an archetype? And to what end?
3. In Ursula Le Guin's short story "She Unnames Them" (NALW2 953), how does Le Guin construe the power to name as an act of colonization in her story? Why does Eve give up her God-given power to have "dominion" over the world? How do the newly unnamed creatures react to their unnamed status?
4. American poet Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" provides a contemporary revision of the gospel story of Christ's raising of Lazarus (NALW2 1062) Why does Plath rewrite the original story through the eyes of a female speaker? How does the poem take the original story and craft something surprising from it? What similarities and differences can you identify between the biblical narrative and Plath's version?
5. What are some of the major images and themes in Margaret Walker's "For My People"? How do these relate to the depiction of black life in 1930s America? What is the effect of the repetitive use of gerunds throughout the poem? What kind of rhythm is established and how does this link to the poem's message and content? How does the poem build to the last two stanzas? What do you make of the final images? How do they connect to the *Book of Revelations*? What kind of justice does the poem seek?

**Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)**

**Chapters 1-17**

1. What is Lockwood's initial impression of Heathcliff? How does his view change by the time he leaves Wuthering Heights? What does this reveal about Lockwood's character?
2. How are the properties of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange set up as doubles of each other? What do these places reveal about the people who live there?
3. In what ways does Catherine have a "double character"? How does this affect her relationship with Heathcliff? With Edgar?
4. Why does Catherine decide to marry Edgar when she claims she is in love with Heathcliff? How does Nelly react to Catherine's decision?

**Chapters 10-17**

5. How does Heathcliff's plan for revenge affect Edgar, Catherine, Hindley and Isabella?
6. How do Edgar and Catherine react to Isabella's feelings for Heathcliff?
7. Why is Nelly so upset when she sees Hareton? How has Heathcliff influenced Hareton's behavior?
8. How are Isabella and Catherine literally "fish out of water" in the residences they married into? How does each woman respond to an environment which is unnatural to her?
9. Does Catherine have legitimate feelings for her husband, Edgar? Or does she only love Heathcliff, as Heathcliff insists?
10. Has Catherine truly gone insane, or is she acting insane for purely manipulative reasons? To what extent does Nelly manipulate our view of Catherine?
11. Why does Heathcliff want Catherine's soul to know no rest until he is dead? Do you feel he is selfish or self-absorbed, as Catherine accuses him before she dies?
12. Are Hindley and Isabella equally victims of Heathcliff's scheming, or did they in some manner "deserve" their abuse? To what extent does Brontë intend us to pity them?

**Chapters 18-34**

13. Why is Cathy drawn to Linton? Do you believe she is genuinely in love with him? How is Cathy similar to her mother? How does she differ?
14. How are the love triangles between Hareton-Cathy-Linton and Heathcliff-Catherine-Edgar similar? What is the fundamental difference?
15. If Heathcliff truly loved Catherine, why does he treat Cathy, her own daughter, in such a horrible way? After seeing the way he treats Linton and Hareton, do you think he would treat Cathy differently if he, not Edgar, was her father?
16. By the end of the novel, do you think Heathcliff is a redeemable character? How does he die? According to the novel's closing passages, do you think either he or Catherine have found peace?

**Critical Questions:**

1. How are Lockwood and Nelly Dean unreliable narrators? In what ways does Lockwood function as a double for the reader?
2. Discuss the theme of the divided self, specifically how our natural instincts exist in conflict with society's adopted rules and values. Using Edgar and Catherine as examples discuss how these two aspects of human nature can or cannot be reconciled.
3. Describe the Yorkshire Moors and explain why its characteristics are essential to the novel.
4. Identify at least three Gothic elements in the text. Does Brontë subvert our expectations of these elements? In other words, does she do something different from how these elements are usually employed in a Gothic novel? Explain your answer.
5. Why do Isabella and Catherine seem so disinterested in motherhood? Why would neither woman regard maternity as a source of joy? What were their own relationships to their mothers like? How should we interpret the novel's attitude towards or treatment of the mother-child bond?
6. *Wuthering Heights* is often perceived or described as a "love story." Would you agree or disagree, and why? What is ideal and/or problematic in the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff? How do their actions "haunt" the second generation?
7. Is Heathcliff a monster or a victim? Explain your answer with specific examples from the text, taking into consideration whether or not his revenge is justified.
8. How would you interpret the final paragraph of the novel, paying particular attention to language, imagery, and speaker? According to your interpretation, does this passage provide the text with closure or further ambiguities and/or questions?

***(Re)Writing Difference: Bodies & Sexualities***

1. How is “Anorexic” compared to “Poem to My Uterus” when describing women losing control over their own bodies and how they feel about their bodies changing?
2. How is bodily freedom and empowerment depicted differently by society in “Close Encounters with the Clueless” and “Woman with Girdle?”
3. The poem “Woman with Girdle” portrays natural imperfections of women. How do the negative and destructive feelings toward the body in “Anorexic” compare with the negative feelings in “Woman with Girdle?” Are they the same negativity? How are these women trying to hide their flaws? How is fat portrayed in each poem?
4. In Lucille Clifton’s poem “To My Last Period” there are contrasting moods, of both joy and sorrow, displayed by the narrator, as well as a sense of longing for an age past. In what ways does the narrator of “Poem to my Uterus” cling to the past? In what way does it differ from her attitude in “To My Last Period”?
5. Winterson in “The Poetics of Sex” addresses questions that she receives about her sexuality. She not only answers them, but challenges them. How does Rousso in “Close Encounters with the Clueless” accomplish a similar effect? How do Rousso and Winterson describe their frustrations of ignorance, misunderstanding, and misconceptions about their “condition” or “state”?
6. Comparing “Close Encounters with the Clueless” and “The Poetics of Sex,” how is the level of confidence in one’s sexuality portrayed? Do you think they are the same in both texts or completely different? Explain your reasoning.

***(Re)Writing Difference: Race, Class, and Gender***

**Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”**

1. This essay is flippant, irreverent, and sometimes sarcastic (find specific evidence to support). What point does Hurston make by choosing this tone to discuss the subject of race? How are some of the rhetorical strategies used by Hurston, such as anecdote and analogy, used to depict experiences and traits that she considers distinctively African American?
2. Twice, Hurston uses metaphor to compare herself to inanimate objects (a “dark rock” and a “brown bag”). What is the purpose of these comparisons? What mental images do they evoke? How can you relate the use of this literary device to her feelings about being black?
3. The author Alice Walker, one of Hurston’s greatest admirers, finds Hurston’s views sometimes “exasperating.” She notes that this essay “presents two stereotypes: the ‘happy ducky’ who sings and dances for white folks, for money and for joy; and the educated black person who is, underneath the thin veneer of civilization, still a ‘heathen.’” Do you agree with Walker’s views? Why or why not?

4. Hurston says, “I am not tragically colored. . . No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife” (2). How does this quote reveal Hurston’s view of herself as a writer and how she presents herself in this work? What are some of the ways Hurston makes this essay about more than just the story of a single individual?

### **Nella Larsen, from *Passing*, Chap. 3**

1. Under the constructs of segregation, what “place” is available for those of mixed-race heritage? How do the characters in *Passing* define race? In negotiating the social component of identity, what does it mean to perform—either “putting on” or “taking off”—particular racial identities? How might the title also connect to the politics of “passing” in other marginalized communities (such as queer or transgender)?
2. Why does Clare decide to pass as white? Why does Irene decide not to pass? Is Irene interested in learning about Clare's life or does she disapprove of her choices? What role does Gertrude play in the story? How is the author using her to express another view of “passing”? Is this view similar to or different from the ones expressed by Irene and Clare?
3. After meeting Clare's husband, Irene regrets not speaking out against his racist remarks. Why did she keep quiet in the moment? Is it genuine concern for Clare or is it a failing in her own confidence? Why does she feel “she had only herself to blame for her disagreeable afternoon and its attendant fears and questions”?
4. In what ways (and with what consequences) do Irene, Clare, and Gertrude manipulate white America's obsession with color, hue, and racial distinction? As highlighted by their discussion, what are the discernible costs and benefits of passing? To what degree does Larsen critique these representatives of the black middle class for privileging economic standing and social status?

### **Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”**

1. With Twyla and Roberta we have one Afro-American character and one Caucasian-American character. But which character is which? And, how did you arrive at your decision? What is your evidence?
2. Why does the story continually return to references to the orchard and to Maggie? What is significant in these continual references? When she thinks about Maggie, Twyla says to herself, “I wouldn’t forget a thing like that. Would I?” What are we to make of the confusion Twyla experiences in her memories of these things? Why might Twyla not remember Maggie the same way Roberta does?
3. Circumstances change throughout the story: the late 1960s culture gives way to the materialism of the 1970s and 1980s. How are Twyla and Roberta carried along and to some extent transformed by the changing times? When Twyla says that she and Roberta had to discover “How to believe what had to be believed,” what does she mean?

4. Why does Twyla stay at the demonstration even when the disorder of the group has made her own placard meaningless? Why do you think Twyla asks Roberta, in each of their encounters as adults, “How is your mother?” Do you think she succeeds in whatever she wants that question to accomplish? Why? How has Morrison used the characters’ dialogue about their mothers to illustrate the changes in their relationship over time?
5. Why does the story end the way it does? Do you think Twyla and Roberta will ever see each other again? Is this ultimately a pessimistic story? Or do identity, and friendship, show themselves as transcendent somehow, undamaged in their essence by change? What details in the story help you to decide on your answer? How does Morrison’s title connect to the themes and structure of her story?

### **Leslie Marmon Silko, “The Yellow Woman”**

1. How does the story view the issue of adultery and of the narrator abandoning her family to follow Silva? Is she judged or condemned for it? Does she feel guilty about it? Why does the narrator give in to Silva's desires? Are they also her desires? In what way? What does her lack of resistance suggest? What does Silva have to offer her?
2. What does Pueblo mythology seem to suggest regarding human identity and social roles? Is personal identity in the story always the same and always stable? Can a person have more than one identity? Why? How? What forces determine those identities? How or why does identity change? What are the causes, implications, and effects of changes of role or identity?
3. How does physical space function in the story? What is its meaning? How are boundaries established? What is the significance of the crossing or transgression of boundaries?
4. Why does Silva say he steals from others? What does he steal? Is his stealing significant in any way? How is it connected to the issues of boundaries and divisions? What does his stealing accomplish or suggest? How does he look at private property? What is the significance of their encounter with the fat, white man?
5. How are gender issues treated in this story? Is Silko a feminist or is she merely reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes? Is the narrator breaking free from oppression or merely giving in to a new oppressor? How about cultural and social norms? Are they criticized or upheld?
6. How does this story define spirituality? How is that spirituality connected to the relations between individuals and between different cultures? How is spirituality connected to the relations between human beings and the natural world? How is myth employed in the critique of a given social and cultural order? Can myth and fiction play a role in the transformation of the real world? What does the story suggest?

## Sandra Cisneros, “Woman Hollering Creek”

1. How does the assumption that “to suffer for love is good” (para. 8) help shape Cleófilas’s behavior? Does she ultimately reject this view? How can you tell? Why are *telenovelas* important in this story? What role do they play in women’s lives? How do they affect Cleófilas’s views about love and relationships?
2. Why didn’t Cleófilas behave as she thought she would when Juan Pedro first struck her? Why do you think she was “speechless, motionless, numb” (para. 24)? How does becoming a mother change Cleófilas’s outlook on her situation? Does she define herself through motherhood? Explain.
3. In her new home in Texas, Cleófilas lives between Dolores and Soledad. In Spanish, *Dolores* means “sorrow” and *soledad* means “solitude.” What does the author’s choice of these names for neighbors suggest about Cleófilas’s life in this Texas town? What other evidence can you find to support this interpretation of Cleófilas’s life in Seguin?
4. How does Cisneros portray the situation of both men and women—the community in general—who have immigrated to the United States from Mexico? Judging from the depiction in the story, have they found a better life than the one they left?
5. How does Cisneros’s language reveal her attitude toward the men in the story? Does she condemn them? Pay careful attention to the section describing “The men at the ice house” (paras. 26–28). For instance, what does the metaphor “the fists try to speak” (para. 28) suggest about the men in this story and the lives they lead?
6. Explain the role La Gritona (Woman Hollering Creek) plays in the story. What does it symbolize? How does the meaning of the symbol change over the course of the story? How does this compare to “The Yellow Woman”?
7. What references do you find to speaking up, staying silent, being heard or not heard, whispering, yelling, speaking in different languages, and telling stories? How do these descriptions work together to develop the theme of finding voice?

### *(Re)Writing Myth and Fairy Tale*

1. The American Jewish poet Denise Levertov writes about the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility, in “Song of Ishtar” (861), the African-American poet Audre Lorde reaches back to African myth when she writes “The House of Yemanjá” (1072). Read both poems and compare the different poets’ use of the myth. What are the similarities? Differences? Why do you think either poet alludes to Middle Eastern or African myth rather than to Greek, Roman, or other European myth?
2. What is the significance of the animals and nature imagery in “Eurydice” (H.D. 285), “Medusa” (Bogan 505), “Circe” (Duffy 1426), and “Leda” (Clifton 1123), and how do these representations differ?

3. “Leda” and “Eurydice” both include resentment, where does this resentment come from? How are their resentments similar or different? Is there any resentment in “Medusa”? Why or why not? How do the tones in these poems help justify caution towards men and warn against disenfranchisement?
4. In “Tiresias, impersonated,” by Trish Salah, what is meant when Tiresias claims, “You don’t have words for what I am” (line 7)? How does the poem both utilize and critique myths surrounding sex and gender? Who is doing the “impersonating” in the poem? What does it mean to “impersonate” and why is this an inadequate description of gender identity (line 20)?
5. In Anne Sexton’s “Her Kind,” what feminine constructions does the poem address? Why and how does the speaker identify with the witch archetype? Why is a “woman like that ... not ashamed to die” (line 20)?
6. What are some of the strategies used by Margaret Atwood in her rewriting of fairy tale? How does her story, “There Was Once” deconstruct the narrative form or generic conventions of fairy tales? Who is speaking in this text?
7. In Angela Carter’s short story “The Company of Wolves” (1221), how does Carter subvert the original cautionary tale? What does her representation of Little Red Riding Hood say about female sexuality? In “Ashputtle,” how does repetition contribute to the story? What might the mother’s words at the end of the third version foreshadow in Ashputtle’s future?
8. Why does Suniti Namjoshi call her collection “Feminist Fables”? What is a fable? What do each of the selections have in common? How does Namjoshi use fairy tales to provide a commentary on the ways in which we, as a society or culture, tell stories?

### *(Re)Writing Pasts and Futures: Feminist Utopia/Dystopia*

#### **Rokheya Shekhawat Hossein, “Sultana’s Dream”**

1. Through what strategies does Hossein convey her attitude toward feminism? What is the effect of these strategies? What are the implications of a feminist utopia? How does the text portray this utopia?
2. How is the relationship between technology and nature explored in “Sultana’s Dream”?
3. How does the tone of “Sultana’s Dream” add to the comparison of gender segregation in the utopia of Ladyland and in society today?
4. How are the gender roles or norms changing in the separate worlds? How does Hossein’s reversal of gender roles emphasize and reflect the actual position of women in society?

**Ursula K. Le Guin, “Sur” (941)**

1. How do the women in “Sur” subvert traditional gender roles? What are the reasons for their subversion according to the text?
2. What is the motivation behind the women’s expedition? Why is it so important for the women to reach their destination even when the whole expedition is kept a secret?
3. How are the women treated by Captain Pardo and how do the women react to his suggestions?
4. What is the narrator’s tone in their report and how does it affect how we, as an audience, understand the story?

**James Tiptree, Jr., “The Women Men Don’t See” (687)**

1. Do you think Don changes his ideas about women’s roles by the end of the story? Why or why not? What is the purpose of the narrative being told from a man’s perspective instead of a woman’s? How does Tiptree change the traditional role of the ‘hero’ in her story?
2. Both men, Don and Esteban, are injured at some point in this text. How do both men handle their injuries and why might they be embarrassed by them?
3. Why is it important to be seen, particularly by men, in any society, particularly a patriarchal one? How is this importance altered in a feminist utopia?
4. What was the significance of the aliens? Why did the women choose to leave earth with them when they seem unbothered by Don trying to save the day?

**Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild” (1307)**

1. How does Butler’s science fiction piece mirror real life societal norms and ideologies?
2. What does the imagery Butler uses in “Bloodchild” symbolize?
3. Xuan Hoa is willing to do anything for T’Gatoi, however she is not chosen to carry T’Gatoi’s young. Why is Gan chosen? Why did he not sacrifice Xuan since “she has always expected to carry other lives inside of her”? Why are men chosen to birth/carry/feed the young rather than the women?
4. How do the relationships between the humans and T’Gatoi reflect today’s view of sex roles? What or who might T’Gatoi represent? How does her relationship with Gan change by the end of the story, and what is the significance of that change, if any?

**Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (2018)**

1. How would you describe Cedar Hawk Songmaker? What traits does she possess that enable her to navigate this new world? What about her adoptive parents, Sera and Glen Songmaker? Has Erdrich drawn them as parodies or as authentic liberals?
2. Why does Cedar decide to make the trip up to the reservation to meet Mary? What are her expectations for the three Mary Potts—and do the women fulfill those expectations? Was Cedar condescending in her attitude toward the women? What about Eddy—what is he like? Were there elements of his character that surprised you (or Cedar)?
3. Why did Cedar convert to Catholicism? How would you describe her spiritual/religious beliefs? Why is she so fascinated by the article, “The Madonna's Conception Through the Ear,” and in what way is her curiosity connected to the coming birth of her own child? Why does Cedar refer to the baby's father as an “angel” and to his brown wings?
4. Cedar writes, “The first thing that happens at the end of the world is that we don't know what is happening.” What does she mean? Are there parallels (or warnings?) in Erdrich's book that pertain to our own world, the one we're living in? In what way are our current societal anxieties given voice in this novel?
5. Why is the government rounding up pregnant women? How are women seen as the possible salvation of the human species? Why is Sera, as she admits to Cedar, not happy about Cedar's pregnancy? Is it right that she's unhappy? How would you feel in her situation?
6. Eddy tells Cedar, “Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we'll all keep adapting.” Then he adds, “[The world's] always going to pieces.” Is he right—that societies have always regrouped, reformed, and rebuilt after disasters? Or is this current disaster, the one in the novel, different?
7. Earlier, Cedar writes that “Our bodies have always remembered who we were. And now they have decided to return. We're climbing back down the swimming-pool ladder into the primordial soup.” Is there a cause given for the devolution of the species? Is it the activation of redundant genes that have lain dormant for millions of years (p. 106)? If so, why is it happening all at once—throughout the animal and plant kingdoms? Or is it that God has simply tired of human kind, as Phil suggests?
8. As society begins to collapse in the novel, does it unravel the way you would expect it to? Consider the New Constitution or the postal service's hiring of private contractors to protect the mail deliverers on their rounds. Does the unraveling seem unrealistic? Or is Erdrich's dystopian vision realistic, perhaps even feasible—can you see it actually happening?
9. What is the meaning of the book's title? On August 9, as Cedar is driving up to meet Mary Potts, she passes a billboard in a bare, weedy field that reads “Future Home of the Living God.” Why might Erdrich have taken it as the title for her novel? What do you make of the ending? What do you think will happen to Cedar? Does she (or even humans) have a future?