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Ayn Rand

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Anthem

Ayn Rand



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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Background/Pre-reading

1. Ayn Rand was born in 1905, which was the same year of the first Russian Revolution, which overthrew the rule of the monarchy. When she was twelve, the second revolution came to Russia and brought Communist rule under the Bolshevik Party. Because the Bolsheviks did not permit private enterprise, her family lost its business and fell into abject poverty.

Imagine yourself in Rand's place, a year or so after her family had lost its business. Write a diary entry from her perspective detailing the tumult that followed the revolution.

2. The British edition of *Anthem* was significantly longer and more descriptive than the American edition. When Rand edited *Anthem* for her American publisher, one of her main goals was to eliminate flowery language, particularly what she called "purple" adjectives, which, in her opinion, added unnecessary emotion.

Write a story about a criminal entering and robbing a convenience store. For every page in your story, you may use only three adjectives.

3. *Anthem* is one of the more famous dystopian novels, in which the author creates a nightmarish society to point out the flaws of his or her own culture. Other examples of this literary form include *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Animal Farm*. There have also been dystopian films, such as *Escape from L.A.*, *Demolition Man*, and *Logan's Run*, among others.

Dystopian literature is a relatively new phenomenon, appearing mostly since 1900. Why do you think that pessimism infiltrated literature during this time period? What technological and social changes do you think made the literature more pessimistic? Do you think this is a reflection of society at large, and if so, why?

Response Journal

9. As a youth, Equality 7-2521 was chastised for being too tall. This may seem comical, because height is an attribute beyond one's control, but the media in our own time puts out images that reflect what the ideal person, male or female, "should" look like.

Find one of these images in a magazine, newspaper, or Internet advertisement. Make a list of the attributes of this "ideal" person. Next to each item, write in one sentence how realistic it would be for the average person to acquire these attributes.

10. In many respects, Equality 7-2521 plays the role of a prophet; he is alone in bringing an unwelcome message of change to a society. He is intellectually and physically superior to most of his peers, and for this he is punished by being assigned the role of Street Sweeper.

If you were making a film version of *Anthem*, who would you cast in the role of Equality 7-2521? Select and name five finalists, and then narrow your choice down to the final actor. Why would you choose this actor? Consider physical attributes as well as the ability to reflect Equality 7-2521's emotional and intellectual depth.

11. *Anthem* is clearly based on life in the Soviet Union after Joseph Stalin has achieved power and has begun his program to eliminate all opposition. However, Rand places the action in a neutral setting to make her warning clear to people everywhere.

Write a poem that might appear in Equality 7-2521's journal, during one of his nights in the tunnel, while all the other Street Sweepers are at the theater. The poem should be at least eight lines in length and should evoke the emotional turmoil going on within him as he struggles not only against the collectivist order, but also against his own desire to be righteous. Your poem should convey Rand's warning message using Equality 7-2521's voice.

Response Journal

Compose three haikus that express the way the Golden One and/or Equality 7-2521 view their new surroundings, based on the events in Part IX. A haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry that is composed of three lines. The first line has five syllables, the second has seven, and the third has five. There is no attempt at rhyming lines either. Make your own haikus follow this syllable form.

33. It seems from reading *Anthem* so far that “I” has been eliminated from language in order to change the focus from the self to the community. Rand’s protagonists reverse this, deciding that the proper focus of human effort is self-gratification and self-aggrandizement.

There is some debate as to what the focus of American culture is. From the beginning, one could say that American values have focused on individual progress and achievement. However, one of the unique aspects of American culture, especially in earlier times, was the way in which people in communities would come together to help one another.

What do you believe? Is the proper focus of one’s life self-fulfillment? Should one put one’s own interests aside and take up the interests of the greater community or is there an alternative somewhere in the middle?

Write a letter to the author expressing your opinion, using evidence to support your ideas.

34. As Equality 7-2521 and the Golden One walk through the forest, she has very little to say. This is in keeping with Rand’s idea that a woman’s wisdom is, in large part, intuitive and unspoken.

Many times, it is the quietest people who have the most going on in their minds. Rather than express their thoughts and opinions verbally, they internalize many of the strongest ideas and do not reveal them to the outside world.

What do you think is going through the Golden One’s mind as they walk through the forest together? Write a diary entry that she might compose after their first day and night together.

Wrap-Up

43. Originally, the title of this book was going to be *Ego*. However, Rand felt that it would give too much away, so she changed it to *Anthem*. The purpose of this new title was to echo the religious language that was found throughout the novel. One of her purposes in writing was to take back religious language from religion and liberate it for use in other genres. An anthem is a song of praise—here, a song of praise for the idea of individualism.

What title would you give this book? Why would you choose that particular title?

44. You are the editor of the newspaper in the City that Equality 7-2521 and the Golden One left behind. Imagine that, when he returns as Prometheus and begins to seek people to join his community, he buys space in the newspaper and prints an advertisement with his intentions and goals.

Your task is to write an editorial. Do you agree with his goals? Would you encourage those who want freedom to join his community? Or would you write that he is a menace to society?

45. The World Council of Scholars rejects Equality 7-2521's light bulb, in large part, because of their desire to protect the new Department of Candles. In our own time, there are those who believe that the American government is doing something similar with such technologies as the fuel cell, hybrid engines, or hydrogen fuel for cars, to protect the oil industry.

Do you believe that alternative fuel technologies to gasoline will be viable in the near future? Or are hydrogen-fueled cars just another fad? Write a letter to the editor of your local paper explaining your opinion.