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Reflections: A Student Response Journal



Inherit the Wind
Jerome Lawrence &
Robert E. Lee

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Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938

www.prestwickhouse.com

800-932-4593

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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.

Playwrights' Introduction

1. The incident described in the play *Inherit the Wind* is based on an actual event that occurred more than 80 years ago. It was an emotional and painful battle between a teacher who wanted to introduce his students to the theory of evolution and the religious fundamentalists, who were faithful to the words and doctrines of the Bible and opposed to the teaching (or even discussions) of evolution.

By using a quote from the Bible as the inspiration for this play's title, explain to a classmate what mood you think the playwrights wanted to set. Consult a Bible, the Internet, or other resource and find two other Bible quotes that you think could be used as titles for the play, just by reading the Introduction.

2. The playwrights mention "Bryan and Darrow" (William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow). Both men were born during the American Civil War (Darrow in 1857, Bryan in 1860). The playwrights say, "The collision . . . was dramatic but it was not a drama."

Watch one of the "legal" dramatic shows on TV and analyze whether what happens seems real and whether it could happen in a courtroom. Explain why (from what you have observed of courtroom procedures) most trials, even the newsworthy ones, are not actually very "dramatic."

3. In addition to their borrowing from the Bible ("*He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind.*"), the playwrights state in the first paragraph of their Introduction that the true events of July 1925 are the "genesis" of the play but that it has "an exodus entirely its own."

Beyond the dictionary definitions of these two names of Biblical books, and before reading the play, write a sentence each for "genesis" and "exodus" that expresses what you feel the playwrights are hinting will take place in this play.

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7. The play begins with two young characters, one of them a barefoot boy about to go fishing, the other a young girl who begins by teasing and almost flirting with him. But she expresses more argumentative opinions, while at first he appears disinterested and lethargic.

What does this say about how we might be persuaded to view the conflict about to arise? Write a few lines of dialogue for the young fisherman about the upcoming trial, as if the girl had not mentioned it first.

8. Melinda is disgusted with the worms that Howard is catching so he can go fishing, but she is even more horrified when he reminds her about what they've apparently both heard or been taught about the origins of life, including their own. Howard says, "[Y]ou and your whole family was worms." Using the information you already understand about evolution, write a short note to Howard, explaining how his statement is either true or false.

Howard asks the worm, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" This is obviously meant to be humorous. However, it reveals Howard's misunderstanding of what he learned in class.

Can evolution take place within a single generation? Look up and write a sentence or two about some change in behavior, appearance, or any other aspect of life that has affected anything during your lifetime. As an example, you might write about a disease that once was easy to treat, but has become more difficult to cure recently, or you could write about Earth's changing climate.

9. From her last name and her conversation with the bailiff Meeker, Rachel Brown, who enters after the younger characters exit, is obviously the daughter of Reverend Brown. She doesn't want her father to know she's been to see Bert Cates, the accused teacher.

Write a note to her explaining why a courthouse or jail is an improper place for a minister's daughter, especially at this time in a small town in the Bible belt.

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18. Pay attention to the local touches in this play, such as the mother telling her son to “spit down” his hair, or the local dialect such as: “The Good Lord guv us the glands to sweat with.” This specific dialect and lack of formal English may be unfamiliar to you, or you may understand it perfectly.

Think of a series of proverbs, sayings, or “old wives” tales” that have some validity, but which are not completely true. Try to come up with at least ten, and then rewrite them in your own words. As an example, you might choose, “He who hesitates is lost,” and then change it to “If you’re sure, don’t hesitate.”

As an alternative, take the sayings you thought of and write them on one side of a paper; across from each one, write another saying that contradicts the first. Using the same example as before, you might come up with, “Look before you leap,” which expresses the opposite idea of hesitating before taking action.

19. The newspaperman Hornbeck enters with “contempt.” After all, he is from a large city and is surrounded by people he considers backward and unsophisticated; he is also covering a trial whose outcome will be decided by these same people. Hornbeck is sarcastic and certainly feels the townspeople will render a verdict based on their understanding and interpretation of the Bible, not on the facts of the case.

As the town’s newspaper editor, write a note to Hornbeck explaining that you think this prejudice will make his news reports of the trial and the town journalistically biased. Let him know what you, as his editor, really expect him to do.

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28. There is a threat of a betrayal when Rachel admits that Brady has told her she has to testify against Bert by repeating what Bert said to her in private. Bert's statements about "what might be on the back side of the moon" or "what the stars are for" might him sound bad or dangerous. These comments between Bert and Rachel are private, but they do pertain to Bert's beliefs.

As Rachel, write a letter to a columnist like *Dear Abby* asking advice on your situation. Explain this specific incident and request help in solving it. Then, as the columnist, write an answer to the letter.

29. There are many strong and sincere characters in the play, but they reflect the isolation of the town or the convictions on one side or another of the evolution-vs.-Bible debate. Pick a character you would like to address to explain the perspective of someone from more than 80 years in the future.

Write a letter to the character in the play whom you've chosen. Be honest in talking about how you feel about what that character has said or done publicly or in court.

Act II, Scene I

30. In the press conference with Brady, a hostile exchange develops between Brady and Hornbeck, representing a Baltimore paper that has hired Drummond to defend Cates. Why would Brady consider what Hornbeck had written "biased," but believe his own (Brady's) statements are "true" and unable to be challenged? This will become one of the central arguments of the trial: religion, which cannot be challenged or questioned, versus science, which has constantly to be questioned in order to grow and develop and move toward discovery.

As Hornbeck, tell Brady why you believe he is the one who is biased.