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Jonathan Swift

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Jonathan Swift



Prestwick House

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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.

Gulliver's Travels

Note to the Teacher

Gulliver's Travels contains several references to bodily functions. Part II, Chapter V contains a short episode in which Gulliver is treated as a sexual plaything, but this episode contains no explicit description or language.

Introduction: The Publisher to the Reader

3. This letter, seemingly by Richard Simpson, explains why Gulliver's account of his journeys was edited: in Simpson's opinion, Gulliver wrote far too much about the mundane details of sailing. Simpson claims that the book "would have been at least twice as large" had he not cut out this excess material. However, he also implies that he cut the material *without* Gulliver's permission.

Assume the role of a member of the Nautical Association of Radical Whalers and Honorable Anti-Landlubbers (NARWHAL), a somewhat offbeat organization of sailing enthusiasts. Write the text for a NARWHAL-published pamphlet detailing why the information Mr. Simpson cut from Gulliver's Travels is actually the most important part of the book.

Introduction: A LETTER

4. Gulliver is none too happy that Simpson edited his original manuscript. He claims that Simpson deleted several items, changed the dates of his voyages, and inserted material that Gulliver finds highly objectionable. Gulliver writes that Simpson has made him "say the thing that was not."

A euphemism is a mild word or phrase used in place of an offensive one. For example, a student who failed his or her grade level is said to be "held back." Using the word *failed* may damage the student's sense of self-worth and so is softened by using the phrase "held back." Other examples of common euphemisms include: *downsizing*, which replaces *firing employees*; *correctional facility*, which replaces the word *prison*; and *passed away*, which replaces *died*.

You may have already determined that to "say the thing that was not" is a euphemism for lying. However, does the use of euphemism, in itself, constitute lying? Write a couple of paragraphs in which you answer this question. Then, prepare a short list, containing at least five items, of other euphemisms you can think of. Be sure to include the terms that the euphemisms replace, but take care not to list terms that are inappropriate for the classroom.

Part I: Chapter VIII

18. In Chapter VIII, the Emperor of Blefuscu receives word that Gulliver is to be tried for treason in Lilliput. The Emperor of Lilliput demands that Gulliver be returned to Lilliput, but the Emperor of Blefuscu refuses. The Emperor of Blefuscu gives several reasons for why he cannot return Gulliver to Lilliput, but the reader hears these reasons through Gulliver, not through reading the message as written by the Emperor of Blefuscu.

As Emperor of Blefuscu, write a message to the Emperor of Lilliput. Explain why you cannot and will not return Gulliver to Lilliput. As an Emperor writing to another Emperor, you should use formal language. Use the information that Gulliver provides in Chapter VIII as the basis for your message.

19. As Gulliver prepares to sail back to England, the Emperor of Blefuscu asks Gulliver not to take any of Blefuscu's subjects back to England, even if they wish to go. There are two points to consider about the Emperor's decision: it keeps his subjects from going to a place where everything is much larger than they are and where they may be in constant danger as a result; however, the Emperor is placing restrictions on where his subjects can travel, effectively limiting their freedom.

Do you think that the Emperor is right to ask Gulliver not to take any of Blefuscu's subjects back to England? Write a letter to the editor of *Rights NOW!*, a magazine dedicated to chronicling human and civil rights struggles, detailing whether you agree or disagree with the Emperor's decision, and why.

Part II: Chapter I

20. The beginning of Chapter I details Gulliver's adventures at sea and how he came to be stranded once again on a strange island. His description of the sea-voyage includes a lot of naval jargon and is meant to satirize the travel books that were popular at the time. If it was Swift's intent to show the reader how boring and purposeless passages from these books could be, it can be argued that he has succeeded.

Part II: Chapter IV

25. So that Gulliver is more comfortable, the Queen orders that a small wooden chest be made to serve as his bedchamber. The chest resembles a room of a house and includes windows and furniture. When Gulliver and Glumdalclitch go out on the town, Gulliver is always carried in the wooden chest, which he calls his “traveling-closet.”

Though Gulliver can now be carried safely throughout the country, the traveling-closet is still a restriction of his movement. In your opinion, which of the following does the traveling-closet represent to Gulliver: freedom or entrapment? Explain your opinion in a couple of paragraphs.

Part II: Chapter V

26. Gulliver relates a story in which a massive frog enters the tiny boat the Queen has had built for him. Because the frog is so big and near, Gulliver describes it as appearing to be “the most deformed animal that can be conceived.” Gulliver knows the frog is just a normal frog, but his perspective makes it seem uglier than it is.

The closer one is to something, the more easily one can see its component parts separately from the whole. Details become sharper. For example, from a distance, a forest appears to be a united whole. When one draws near, individual trees can be seen. From far away, a beach appears to be a solid white or yellow plain; up close, one can see that the beach is made up of millions of grains of sand of varying colors and sizes.

Think of three things that look much different at a distance than they do from a closer perspective. Write two descriptions for each of these three things: one description of how it appears from far away and one of how it appears up close.