

*Anthem* by Ayn Rand  
Seminar Questions

Please answer each of the following questions thoroughly and thoughtfully. You will use these answers as preparation for the Seminar that will be held on **April 16, 2015**. Be fully prepared to discuss any and all aspects of these questions in class on those days.

All questions and answers are to be typed and single-spaced. To facilitate this process, I will post this document on the class website. These questions will be a portion of your reading and writing grades for fourth term.

As always, with the Harkness Method, each individual within your group will work together to determine the overall grade for the seminar. So be on your toes, and be prepared, not only for yourself, but also for your fellow scholars and peers.

Please understand, that this is not a debate; this is a forum for discussion. This is a chance for you the student to delve more deeply into the issues and thoughts that you encounter while reading. The idea is to build upon each other's thoughts and comments in order to gain a greater individual understanding of, not only the text and the themes and ideas within the work, but also of yourselves as individuals.

**World Connection Questions:**

1. How do you think you would react if you were exiled from a group, team, clique, or organization because of your thoughts or ideas?
2. How do you think you'd feel if you discovered that everything you know was a lie?
3. Explain your opinion about the following statement, "Economic progress depends upon freedom, and it is only the uncoerced mind that can be a source of technology, prosperity, and progress?"
4. Is philosophy an integral part of human existence?
5. Which nations today do you think are the most like the society in *Anthem*?
6. Which nations are least like the society depicted in *Anthem*?
7. The absence of industrial technology and other man-made inventions characterized the society of *Anthem*. Compare this to the society that devotes and aims for environmentalism.
8. While recounting man's struggle for freedom throughout history, Equality 7-2521 laments that, "**at first, man was enslaved by gods....then by kings....then by his birth.... then his kin...then his race.** But he broke their chains. He declared to all his brothers that a man has rights which [no men] can take away from him. And he stood on the threshold of freedom....But then he gave up all that he had won, and fell lower than his savage beginning" (119).
  - A. Find a specific example from history for each of these five stages in mankind's political history, including an example from the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the final stage.
  - B. What, according to this novel, must man understand to enable him to pass through the threshold of freedom that, in the past, he so nearly reached?

### Open-Ended Questions:

1. Why did Equality 7-2521 say he was born with a curse?
2. Why doesn't the Council allow the citizens to think?
3. In a world that places the good of society above all else, why is a man with a revolutionary invention that would benefit everyone forced to run for his life?
4. Why is the hero willing to risk being burned at the stake in order to discover the meaning of the unspeakable word "I"?
5. As fires ravaged the cities of the world at the close of the Unmentionable Times, what crucial values did men lose?
6. What was gained or lost at the Dawn of the Great Rebirth of society?
7. What does Equality 7-2521 discover in the Uncharted Forest that removes his original dread of the place?
8. Consider the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden with the story of Equality 7-2521. For what "sins" were each condemned?
9. In what ways are Equality 7-2521 and Adam similar? How do they differ?
10. Equality 7-2521 states that it is very unusual for men to reach the age of 45. What are some possible explanations for why life expectancy is so short in his society?
11. What point about technology was Ayn Rand making by portraying such a primitive future, and how do the events of the story establish that point?
12. Of the whole range of feelings possible to man (joy, excitement, anger, embarrassment, etc.) why is fear the prevalent emotion in this society?

### Universal Themes/Core Questions:

1. Is it better to be concerned with your own self-interest or the self-interest of others?
2. The society depicted in *Anthem* is a collectivist society. Collectivism, according to Ayn Rand, means the subjugation of the individual to the group – whether to a race, class, or state does not matter. In such a society, the individual is owned by the group; he has no right to a private existence, which means no right to lead his own life, pursue his own happiness or use his own property. The individual exists only as a part of the group, and his worth is determined by his service to the group.
  - A. Which of our laws today is collectivist?
  - B. Is the world of *Anthem* more like the United States of 1776 or the United States today?
3. The alternative to collectivism is individualism. Individualism, according to Ayn Rand, regards man – every man – as an independent, sovereign entity who possesses an inalienable right to his own life, a right derived from his nature as a rational being. Individualism does not mean that one can do whatever he feels like doing; it means that every man is an individual and has the same rights. "An individualist is a man who says: 'I will not run anyone's life – nor let anyone run mine. I will not rule or be ruled. I will not be a master nor a slave. I will not sacrifice myself to anyone – nor sacrifice anyone to myself.'"
  - A. Which of our laws today is individualist?
  - B. How would your teachers react if you had Equality's "curse"?
  - C. Why do Equality's teachers disapprove of his quick mind?
  - D. Can a Eugenics program like the one in the book ever work?
4. Why do people try to control others?
5. If fighting for your rights was considered a crime, how would you fight for them?

6. One of the oldest and most important philosophic issues is the problem of free will vs. determinism. Those like Ayn Rand, who advocate free will, contend that people can make choices, can make up their own mind, can make decisions, can direct their own lives by the ideas and values they adopt. Those who advocate determinism contend that people are by nature in the grip of forces beyond their control, that their beliefs and values are the result of some force such as God, other people, the stars, economic conditions, instincts or one's racial heritage. *Anthem* shows what it means to have free will, and it does so in a particularly interesting way. It depicts a world where people's lives seem to be determined, but it's actually a world where people have free will. Students often believe that in *Anthem* only the heroic characters have free will, that the masses are indeed brainwashed, with no power to control their own lives. However, as Ayn Rand presents them, even those who submit to the authorities have free will. They are robots, but they are robots by choice: they were not forced to obey; they do so because they voluntarily abdicated the responsibility to think for themselves. They are depressed, without hope or ambition; they make no effort to accomplish anything; they merely obey and go along with orders. Ayn Rand holds that free will means "the choice to think or not." Most of the citizens have chosen not to think, which leaves them no alternative but to do whatever they're told to do.
- A. How is free will manifested in *Anthem*?
  - B. In what ways does this society try to obliterate each individual's mind (and self) by quashing personal choices, desires and values?
  - C. Would you want to be friends with someone like Equality 7-2521?

Literary Analysis Questions:

1. Ayn Rand wrote *Anthem* in diary form, using first person major point-of-view. Consider the merits of this form and point-of-view for this particular novel.
  - A. Why is the diary form crucial to plot and character development in *Anthem*?
  - B. How does the point of view help reveal the setting and establish the nature of society?
  - C. How does the diary contribute to the mystery surrounding the Unspeakable Word?
  - D. How would using a different point of view change or weaken the novel?
2. Ayn Rand wrote *Anthem* in a deliberately simple, austere style. Explain why this style is appropriate, given the novel's setting and characters.
3. Figurative language is employed effectively, if sparingly, in this novel. Often, a well-chosen simile captures the essence of a character, or the significance of an event. Discuss the meaning and significance of the following similes in *Anthem*.
  - A. "We blew out the candle. Darkness swallowed us. There was nothing left us, save night and a thin thread of flame in it, as a crack in the wall of a prison" (64).
  - B. "But International 4-8818 are different, they are a tall, strong youth and their eyes are like fireflies..." (26).
  - C. "[Liberty's] body was straight and thin as a blade of iron... Their hair was golden as the sun; their hair flew in the wind, shining and wild, as if it defied men to restrain it. They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to fling a scornful gift, and the earth was a beggar under their feet" (38).
  - D. "The shoulders of our Brothers are hunched, and their muscles are drawn, as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight" (47).
4. Re-read the account of Liberty 5-3000 on page 38. Which character traits are revealed in this brief description?
5. How does the mood of the story change from the beginning to the end?