

# THEMES AND IDEAS FORUM

Ayn Rand's  
Anthem



# Forum fo Discussion

- ▣ 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.

# How will this work?

You will begin with a question I've provided and the group will have 10 minutes to discuss before moving on to next question.

Take notes, LISTEN and PARTICIPATE.

# Question #1

- ▣ As fires ravaged the cities of the world at the close of the Unmentionable Times, what crucial values did men lose?

# Question 2

- ▣ 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?

# Question #3

- ▣ 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.
  - Which of our laws today is collectivist?
  - Is the world of *Anthem* more like the United States of 1776 or the United States today?

# Question #4

- ▣ 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.
  - **How is free will manifested in *Anthem*?**
  - **In what ways does this society try to obliterate each individual's mind (and self) by quashing personal choices, desires and values?**

# Free-Discussion

What questions do you have?

What comments do you have about what can be learned from the book?

What qualifies this as “science fiction”?



**What is your opinion of Rand's beliefs?**