

APPENDIX A:

The Socratic List

1. Where does this story happen?

- a. In what country or region does the story happen?
- b. Does the story happen in the country or the city?
- c. Does the story happen in one spot, or does the action unfold across a wide area?
- d. What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? What words or phrases or descriptions does the author use to create this atmosphere?
- e. What is the weather like in the story?
- f. Do you long to climb into the pages of the book to live in its world, or does it repel you? Why?
- g. Is the setting a real or imaginary place? If it's imaginary, is it subject to the same physical laws as our world is?
- h. Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why?
- i. Is there anything symbolic or allegorical about the place where the story happens?
- j. Is the setting of the story important because of historical events which may have taken place there? How does this link help you understand the themes of the story?

2. When does this story happen?

- a. On what day does the story happen? What time of day?
- b. How long a period of time does the story cover? A few minutes? A single day? A whole lifetime?
- c. In what season does the story take place?
- d. Does the story happen in a particular year, era, or age of the world? What historical events may have just preceded the period of the story? Do these events help explain the actions of characters, the action of the story, or its mood? (for example, is the story set in the midst of the Industrial Revolution in England like some of Charles Dickens' works, or is it set in the roaring 20's in America when life was gay and times were good?)
- e. In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grownups? Does setting the story in this particular time of the characters' lives make the story better?

f. In what intellectual period is the story set? What ideas were prevalent during the period of the story? Does the author deal with these ideas through his characters? Do the characters respond to social rules and customs that are the result of these ideas? (Jane Austen's books, for example, were set in the early 19th century in England, when women were bound by social laws forbidding them from owning or inheriting property. Consequently, marriage to men of property was their only source of financial security. Without this knowledge, the dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the action of *Emma*, are unintelligible to the modern reader.)

3. **Who is the story about?** (*May be asked of protagonist or any other character*)

- a. Is the character a man or an animal?
- b. How old is the character?
- c. Is the character male or female?
- d. What does the character look like (hair, eyes, height, build, etc.)?
- e. Is the character sane or crazy?
- f. Is the character kind, gentle, stern, emotional, harsh, logical, rational, compassionate or exacting...? Make up a list of adjectives that describe the protagonist. What words or actions on the character's part make you choose the adjectives you do?
- g. Of what nationality is the character? Does he live in his native land, or somewhere else?
- h. What does the character do for a living? Is he a professional, or a blue-collar worker? Is he wealthy or impoverished? Is he content with his lot in life, or does he long to improve himself, like Pip in *Great Expectations*?
- i. Is the character educated? To what degree? How do you know?
- j. What does the character say about himself to other people?
- k. What do other characters think or say about him?
- l. Is the character a member of any particular religious or social group? If so, what do you know about this group? What motivates this group? What do its members feel to be important?
- m. What does the character think is the most important thing in life? How do you know this? Does the character say this out loud, or do his thoughts and actions give him away?
- n. Do the character's priorities change over the course of the story? In what way? What causes this change? Is it a change for the better, or for the worse?
- o. How does the personality of the character reflect the values of the society (or individual) that produced the story?
- p. Is the character a type or archetype? Is he an "Everyman" with whom the reader is meant to identify? Are his struggles symbolic of human life generally in some way?
- q. Is the character a "sympathetic character"? Do you identify with him and hope he will succeed? Do you pity him? Do you scorn or despise his weakness in some way? Why?

4. Who else is the story about?

- a. Is there a single character (or a group of characters) that opposes the protagonist in the story? In other words, is there an *antagonist*?
- b. In what way is he antagonistic? What goal of the protagonist is he opposed to?
- c. What actions does he take to oppose the protagonist?
- d. Is the antagonist out to do physical harm to the protagonist, violence to his reputation, his memory, his work or his family? How do you know?
- e. How does the author's description of the character inform you of his antagonism? Does he have any physical attributes or personality traits that mark him as antagonistic?
- f. Why does he oppose the protagonist? Does he merely belong to a different social group? Does he see the world in slightly different ways? Or is he an evil villain, like Shakespeare's Iago?
- g. Is he reprehensible, so that none would wish to be like him?
- h. How do this character's words and actions affect those around him?
- i. Does his presence corrupt?
- j. Is he strangely attractive? Does he draw others into his wicked sensibilities (i.e. Wormwood, *Screenplay Letters*)? Does he seem somehow rational, justified, even righteous in his actions (i.e. Javert, *Les Miserables*)?
- k. Has the antagonist always opposed the protagonist? If not, what caused his change of direction? Was there a turning point on his road to antagonism?
- l. Does the author believe this character to be responsible for his own sinfulness, or does he believe him a product of a "negative environment"?
- m. Is the antagonist truly evil, by definition, or is he merely antagonistic to the protagonist by virtue of his vocation or duty?
- n. What are the antagonist's surroundings (does he live next door to the dump like Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*)? Are they related to his character? Did the author put him there on purpose?

5. What does the protagonist want? (May also be asked of other characters)

- a. Fill in the blank: This story is about the protagonist trying to _____.
- b. Does he attempt to overcome something -- a physical impediment, or an emotional handicap?
- c. Does he strive to overcome a physical obstacle outside of himself (An ocean, for example, like Christopher Columbus, or nature generally, like a Jack London character)?

- d. Does the protagonist try to capture an object (The Silver Chalice)?
 - i. Or a person (Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot)?
 - ii. Or a beast (St. George and the Dragon)?
 - iii. Or a perfect world (Thomas More's *Utopia*)?
 - iv. Or a mate (*Pride and Prejudice*)?
 - v. Or freedom (Harriet Tubman)?
 - vi. Or success (*Goodbye, Mr. Chips*)?
 - vii. Or justice (Jean Valjean of *Les Miserables*)?
 - viii. Or inner peace (*The Brothers Karamazov*)?
 - ix. Or contentment (does he even know what he's looking for)?
- e. Is the conflict an external one, having to do with circumstances in the protagonist's physical world, or is it an internal conflict, taking place in his mind and emotions?
- f. Do his objectives or goals change throughout the story? How? Why?

6. Why can't he have it?

- a. Do physical or geographical impediments stand in the character's way?
- b. Does the character lack strength, mental acumen or some other necessary ability?
- c. Does he lack self-confidence, good health, or social connections?
- d. Does the character's age, economic class, race, or sex stand in his way?
- e. Is the character racing against time?
- f. Are there people other than the main antagonist who represent an obstacle to the character's pursuit of his goal?
- g. Is the conflict a man v. man struggle?
- h. Is the conflict a man v. nature struggle?
- i. Is the conflict a man v. God struggle?
- j. Is the conflict a man v. society struggle?
- k. Is the conflict a man v. himself struggle?
- l. Does God himself (or Providence, or Fate) oppose the character? How do you know?

7. What other problems are there in the story?

- a. Are there other things in the story (people, responsibilities, etc.) that distract the characters from their main goals?
- b. Do characters' actions provoke further conflict or unrest in the story?

- c. Is the protagonist involved in more than one important conflict in the story (Scout vs. Boo Radley and Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example)?
- d. Are there other characters in the story who don't understand the protagonist's motives and ambitions?
- e. Is there a conflict within the conflict (As when, for example the murderer turns out to be the detective's wife)?
- f. Are there larger issues, (a larger context or frame) in which conflict exists and forms a background for the story (A war setting, for example)?

8. What happens in the story?

- a. What major events take place in the story as a result of the conflict?
- b. How do the *protagonist* and the *antagonist* respond to the conflict at first? Do these actions provoke further conflict?
- c. How do the interactions of the characters heighten the tension of the conflict that exists?
- d. What external impulses heighten the conflict – weather, war, summer break, separation, sickness, etc?

9. How is the main problem solved?

- a. Does the protagonist get what he's after?
- b. How are the protagonist's obstacles finally overcome?
- c. Is the situation pleasantly resolved, or is it resolved in a terrible way?
- d. What events form the highest point or climax of the story's tension? Are they circumstantial events, or emotional ones? Is the climax a spiritual or physical one?
- e. Does the protagonist solve his own dilemma? Is it solved by some external source or 3rd party? Is he helpless in the end to achieve his goal (like Frodo in *Lord of the Rings*), or does he triumph by virtue of his own efforts (*Odysseus* in *The Odyssey*)?
- f. Does the big conflict develop into a larger battle?

10. How does the story end?

- a. After the climax of the story, did you wonder how it would end? How does it end? How are the "loose ends" tied up? Were all of your questions answered?
- b. Were you satisfied with the resolution? If not, why not?
- c. Do you believe the characters' responses to the cataclysmic events, or are they anti-climactic in some regard?
- d. How does the solution of the conflict affect each individual character?

- e. Does the ending or resolution of the story make any kind of judgments?
- f. Does the resolution offer any particular perspective or understanding of the story's themes?

11. What does the protagonist learn?

- a. Is the protagonist changed in his mind or heart by the events of the story?
- b. Does he begin to act differently? In what way?
- c. Is he ennobled?
- d. Is he sacrificed in some way? (was this a part of the climax or resolution?)
- e. Does the main character explain to the reader his perspective on the events that have transpired?
- f. Does he draw upon any motifs or symbols to deepen his explanation of these events?

12. What do the other characters learn?

- a. Are other people in the story ennobled, changed, saved, improved or otherwise affected by the story's events?
- b. Do they look at themselves differently at the end of the story?
- c. Do they look at the protagonist differently?
- d. Do they look at their surroundings or situations differently?
- e. Do they re-examine their values and ideas?

13. What is the main idea of the story?

- a. Does the story seem to deal with a universal theme like the ones listed in this syllabus?
- b. Does the story offer an answer to a particular problem associated with one of those themes?
- c. Does the story merely call the reader's attention to a theme without trying to solve anything?
- d. What answer does the story seem to suggest for the question, "What is a good life?"
- e. What aspect of the human condition is brought to light and wondered at in this story?

14. Does the author use the sounds of our language to create interest in his story?

Onomatopoeia –

- a. Does the author use sound words to tell his story?