Great Books Discussion Guides are now available for selected texts from sixteen titles in Perfection Learning's groundbreaking Literature & Thought series. The guides, together with Great Books professional learning, help teachers and students delve more deeply into these thought-provoking texts. The Literature & Thought student anthologies are grouped by themes, genres, and historical eras, so teachers can create their own literature program, supplement any basal program, or integrate literature with history, social studies, or science.

LITERARY THEMES
- And Justice for All
- Family Matters
- To Be a Hero

LITERARY GENRES
- Echoes from Mt. Olympus
- What on Earth? An Ecology Reader

HISTORY
- Dark Days: America's Great Depression
- Free at Last: The Struggle for Civil Rights
- From There to Here: The Immigrant Experience
- The Harlem Renaissance
- A House Divided: America's Civil War
- Individual Rights: The Blessings of Liberty
- The Three Branches of Government
- Times of Change: Vietnam and the 60s
- Voices of the Holocaust
- We the People: Foundations of American Government
- Wide Open Spaces: American Frontiers

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Discussion Guides for Teachers

Perfection Learning

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About Perfection Learning

Founded by two educators, Perfection Learning is a family-owned company that has provided innovative, effective reading, literature, and language arts materials to K–12 classroom teachers for more than eighty-five years. Through the design of its literature programs and its partnership with the Great Books Foundation, the company offers two flagship literature programs, Many Voices and Literature & Thought, each of which focus using engaging, thought-provoking literature selections to teach middle and high school students to be critical readers and thinkers. Each anthology is structured to help students explore essential questions and develop the skills necessary to be successful in the 21st century.

About the Great Books Foundation

The Great Books Foundation is an independent, nonprofit educational organization whose mission is to empower readers of all ages to become more reflective and responsible thinkers. To accomplish this, the Foundation teaches the art of civil discourse through Shared Inquiry™ and publishes enduring works of literature across the disciplines.

The Great Books Foundation was established in 1947 to promote liberal education for the general public. In 1962, the Foundation extended its mission to children with the introduction of Junior Great Books®. Since its inception, the Foundation has helped thousands of people throughout the United States and in other countries begin their own discussion groups in schools, libraries, and community centers. Today, Foundation instructors conduct hundreds of professional learning courses for teachers and parents each year, and Great Books programs help more than one million students learn to read, discuss, and appreciate some of the world’s most enduring literature. Great Books programs combine classroom materials and the Shared Inquiry method of learning to provide the essential elements that students need to meet and surpass the goals of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.
Introduction

This booklet contains four representative sample units, with corresponding student texts from the Great Books discussion guides for the Perfection Learning anthologies To Be a Hero; What on Earth? An Ecology Reader; Voices of the Holocaust; and A House Divided: America’s Civil War. Each discussion guide focuses on four to six selections that the Great Books Foundation recommends for close reading and discussion using the Foundation’s Shared Inquiry™ method—a collaborative, inquiry-based approach that complements the critical thinking encouraged by Perfection Learning’s Literature & Thought series.

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What Is Shared Inquiry?

Shared Inquiry™ is a method of learning in which the leader uses open-ended questioning to help participants reach their own conclusions about challenging literature. The leader guides the discussion by asking questions about specific ideas and problems of meaning in the text, but does not seek to impose his or her own interpretation on the group. Using Shared Inquiry, students develop the intellectual flexibility to analyze ideas and see a question from many angles. The focus on interpretation and discussion allows students at different reading levels to participate confidently and improve their critical thinking abilities.
The Benefits of Shared Inquiry

The Shared Inquiry approach develops students’ reading comprehension, critical thinking, and communication skills in the context of thinking about genuine problems of meaning raised by a rich work of literature. In Shared Inquiry discussion, students learn to cite evidence, respect divergent thinking, and develop well-reasoned interpretations of thought-provoking readings.

Shared Inquiry discussion:

- Helps students become more aware of their reactions as they read, develop a sensitivity to language, and value their own curiosity about a text
- Encourages students to present arguments clearly and persuasively, to offer reasons for their opinions and inferences, and to support their ideas with evidence from the text
- Gives students the confidence to shape and express their own opinions about what they read
- Helps students learn to weigh the merits of opposing arguments to modify their initial opinions
- Helps students analyze character motivation and development, as well as cause and effect
- Helps students analyze the author’s purpose, writing style, and meaning, as well as use of literary techniques
- Prepares students to write persuasively and support their interpretations with textual evidence
- Gives students practice in active listening and cooperative learning
By reading and discussing great works of the intellect and imagination, students lay the groundwork for a lifetime of independent and enthusiastic learning. Ultimately, Shared Inquiry forms the basis of a practical discipline focused on forming reasoned judgments, building common ground, and encouraging civil discourse.

**Great Books Professional Development**

To be an effective Shared Inquiry discussion leader, professional development from the Great Books Foundation is strongly recommended. The Great Books Foundation offers a range of professional development courses, including online options. In these courses, teachers learn how to frame questions that genuinely engage students, how to use follow-up questions to explore students’ ideas more thoughtfully, and how to involve students of all abilities in focused, lively discussions. Participants practice leading Shared Inquiry discussion and see experienced leaders model the range of interpretive activities introduced in these sample units. Instructors from the Foundation are also available for follow-up consultation days, which include on-site classroom demonstrations and coaching and can be customized for use with the *Literature & Thought* anthologies. To learn more, visit www.greatbooks.org or call 800-222-5870.

Free resources, including downloadable materials, videos of classroom discussions, and research studies are available at www.greatbooks.org/resources. Anyone who has taken the core Great Books professional development courses can visit the Teacher Leaders Club at www.greatbooks.org/tlc for assessment tools, advice from Foundation instructors, and special offers on classroom materials.
How to Use the Great Books Discussion Guides

Each Great Books discussion guide includes general information about leading Shared Inquiry discussion and activities for four to six selections from one Literature & Thought anthology. Activities for each Great Books discussion unit consist of:

- **Prereading, first reading, and sharing questions:** setting a context for reading, reading the selection aloud if possible, and identifying questions worth exploring

- **Second reading:** rereading the selection, making notes using a specific prompt, and comparing those notes with other students

- **Shared Inquiry discussion:** the central Great Books activity, in which questions about the meaning of the text are explored in depth

- **Writing after discussion:** helping students consolidate or extend their ideas about a text and connect what they read to their own experiences and opinions

The guides include questions and prompts for each activity, while the sequence of activities—reading and asking questions, rereading and making notes, and exploring possible interpretations in discussion—mirrors the process that effective readers use with complex texts.

Following are two sample weekly schedules. Longer selections may require more in-class sessions, and some activities can be assigned as homework, depending on your students’ needs and the time available.
Option A: Three In-class Sessions

Session 1
- Text Opener (optional)
- First reading of the selection
- Sharing Questions

Session 2
- Second reading with Directed Notes
- Comparing and discussing notes

Session 3
- Shared Inquiry Discussion

Homework: Writing After Discussion (optional)

Option B: Two In-class Sessions

Session 1
- First reading of the selection
- Sharing Questions

Homework: Second reading with Directed Notes

Session 2
- Comparing and discussing notes
- Shared Inquiry Discussion

Homework: Writing After Discussion (optional)
Wreckage from Air Florida Flight 90 pulled from the Potomac River, 1982.
The Man in the Water

ROGER ROSENBLATT

On January 13, 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 plowed into the 14th Street Bridge in Washington, D.C., and plunged into the frigid waters of the Potomac River. The plane hit seven vehicles, killing four motorists and 74 passengers. Only six people survived. This is one passenger’s story.

As disasters go, this one was terrible but not unique, certainly not among the worst on the roster of U.S. air crashes. There was the unusual element of the bridge, of course, and the fact that the plane clipped it at a moment of high traffic, one routine thus intersecting another and disrupting both. Then, too, there was the location of the event. Washington, the city of form and regulations, turned chaotic, deregulated, by a blast of real winter and a single slap of metal on metal. The jets from Washington National Airport that normally swoop around the presidential monuments like famished gulls are, for the moment, emblazoned by the one that fell; so there is that detail. And there was the aesthetic clash as well—blue-and-green Air Florida, the name a flying garden, sunk down among gray chunks in a black river. All that was worth noticing, to be sure. Still, there was nothing very special in any of it, except death, which, while always special, does not necessarily bring millions to tears or to attention. Why, then, the shock here?
Perhaps because the nation saw in this disaster something more than a mechanical failure. Perhaps because people saw in it no failure at all, but rather something successful about their makeup. Here, after all, were two forms of nature in collision: the elements and human character. Last Wednesday, the elements, indifferent as ever, brought down Flight 90. And on that same afternoon, human nature—groping and flailing in mysteries of its own—rose to the occasion.

Of the four acknowledged heroes of the event, three are able to account for their behavior. Donald Usher and Eugene Windsor, a park police helicopter team, risked their lives every time they dipped the skids into the water to pick off survivors. On television, side by side in bright blue jumpsuits, they described their courage as all in the line of duty. Lenny Skutnik, a 28-year-old employee of the Congressional Budget Office, said: “It’s something I never thought I would do”—referring to his jumping into the water to drag an injured woman to shore. Skutnik added that “somebody had to go in the water,” delivering every hero’s line that is no less admirable for its repetitions. In fact, nobody had to go into the water. That somebody actually did so is part of the reason this particular tragedy sticks in the mind.

But the person most responsible for the emotional impact of the disaster is the one known at first simply as “the man in the water.” (Balding, probably in his 50s, an extravagant mustache.) He was seen clinging with five other survivors to the tail section of the airplane. This man was described by Usher and Windsor as appearing alert and in control. Every time they lowered a lifeline and floating ring to him, he passed it on to another of the passengers. “In a mass casualty, you’ll find people like him,” said Windsor, “But I’ve never seen one with that commitment.” When the helicopter came back for him the man had gone under. His selflessness was one reason the story held national attention; his anonymity another. The fact that he went unidentified invested him with a universal character. For a while he was Everyman, and thus proof (as if one needed it) that no man is ordinary.

Still, he could never have imagined such a capacity in himself. Only minutes before his character was tested, he was sitting in the ordinary plane among the ordinary passengers, dutifully listening to the stewardess telling him to fasten his seat belt and saying something about the “no smoking sign.” So our man relaxed with the others, some of whom would owe their lives to him. Perhaps he started to
read, or to doze, or to regret some harsh remark made in the office that morning. Then suddenly he knew that the trip would not be ordinary. Like every other person on that flight, he was desperate to live, which makes his final act so stunning.

For at some moment in the water he must have realized that he would not live if he continued to hand over the rope and ring to others. He had to know it, no matter how gradual the effect of the cold. In his judgment he had no choice. When the helicopter took off with what was to be the last survivor, he watched everything in the world move away from him, and he deliberately let it happen.

Yet there was something else about the man that kept our thoughts on him and which keeps our thoughts on him still. He was there, in the essential, classic circumstance. Man in nature. The man in the water. For its part, nature cared nothing about the five passengers. Our man, on the other hand, cared totally. So the timeless battle commenced in the Potomac. For as long as that man could last, they went at each other, nature and man: the one making no distinctions of good and evil, acting on no principles, offering no lifelines; the other acting wholly on distinctions, principles and, one supposes, on faith.

Since it was he who lost the fight, we ought to come again to the conclusion that people are powerless in the world. In reality, we believe the reverse, and it takes the act of the man in the water to remind us of our true feelings in this matter. It is not to say that everyone would have acted as he did or as Usher, Windsor and Skutnik. Yet whatever moved these men to challenge death on behalf of their fellows is not peculiar to them. Everyone feels the possibility in himself. That is the abiding wonder of the story. That is why we would not let go of it. If the man in the water gave a lifeline to the people gasping for survival, he was likewise giving a lifeline to those who observed him.

The odd thing is that we do not even really believe that the man in the water lost his fight. “Everything in Nature contains all the powers of Nature,” said Emerson. Exactly. So the man in the water had his own natural powers. He could not make ice storms or freeze the water until it froze the blood. But he could hand life over to a stranger, and that is a power of nature too. The man in the water pitted himself against an implacable, impersonal enemy; he fought it with charity; and he held it to a standoff. He was the best we can do. ✽
Discussion Unit 1

The Man in the Water

ROGER ROSENBLATT

Text Opener
Why are some people willing to risk their lives to save the life of a stranger?

Directed Notes
Mark places that seem to be statements of fact with F, and places that seem to be statements of opinion with O.

Interpretive Questions for Discussion
Is Rosenblatt suggesting that we should be surprised by the actions of “the man in the water”?

1. Why does Rosenblatt disagree with Skutnik that “somebody had to go in the water”?

2. Why does Rosenblatt call handing life over to a stranger a “power of nature”?

3. Why does Rosenblatt say that the man in the water gave a lifeline “to those who observed him”?

4. Why does Rosenblatt feel that the “shock” in this disaster is that human nature “rose to the occasion”?

5. Why is Rosenblatt so certain that the man in the water could not have imagined his capacity for selflessness prior to the crash?
6. Does Rosenblatt want us to think that the man in the water was a hero because he was aware of his impending death or because he “cared totally”?

7. What does Rosenblatt mean when he says that “it takes the act of the man in the water to remind us of our true feelings”?

8. Why does Rosenblatt consider the man in the water a hero?

**Writing After Discussion**

1. Do all people have the same capacity for selflessness? What determines whether people will act selflessly?

2. In a life or death situation, what does it mean to be a hero? Can choosing to live, rather than risking one’s life, be seen as heroic?

3. Imagine that you are one of the survivors who was helped by the man in the water. What would your feelings be after the incident? Write a letter to the family of the man in the water to express your feelings.
The Face of a Spider

David Quammen

One evening a few years ago I walked back into my office after dinner and found roughly a hundred black widow spiders frolicking on my desk. I am not speaking metaphorically and I am not making this up: a hundred black widows. It was a vision of ghastly, breathtaking beauty, and it brought on me a wave of nausea. It also brought on a small moral crisis—one that I dealt with briskly, maybe rashly, in the dizziness of the moment, and that I’ve been turning back over in my mind ever since. I won’t say I’m haunted by those hundred black widows, but I do remember them vividly. To me, they stand for something. They stand, in their small synedochical1 way, for a large and important question.

The question is, How should a human behave toward the members of other living species?

A hundred black widows probably sounds like a lot. It is—even for Tucson, Arizona, where I was living then, a habitat in which black widows breed like rabbits and prosper like cockroaches, the females of the species growing plump as huckleberries and stringing their ragged webs in every free corner of every old shed and basement window. In Tucson, during the height of the season, a person can always on short notice round up eight or ten big, robust black widows, if that’s what a person wants to do. But a hundred in one room? So all right, yes, there was a catch: These in my office were newborn babies.

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1 *synecdochical*: symbolic. Synechdochy means the part that represents the whole.
A hundred scuttering bambinos, each one no bigger than a poppyseed. Too small still for red hourglasses, too small even for red egg timers. They had the aesthetic virtue of being so tiny that even a person of good eyesight and patient disposition could not make out their hideous little faces.

Their mother had sneaked in when the rains began and set up a web in the corner beside my desk. I knew she was there—I got a reminder every time I dropped a pencil and went groping for it, jerking my hand back at the first touch of that distinctive, dry, high-strength web. But I hadn’t made the necessary decision about dealing with her. I knew she would have to be either murdered or else captured adroitly in a pickle jar for relocation to the wild, and I didn’t especially want to do either. (I had already squashed scores of black widows during those Tucson years but by this time, I guess, I was going soft.) In the meantime, she had gotten pregnant. She had laid her eggs into a silken egg sac the size of a Milk Dud and then protected that sac vigilantly, keeping it warm, fending off any threats, as black widow mothers do. While she was waiting for the eggs to come to term, she would have been particularly edgy, particularly unforgiving, and my hand would have been in particular danger each time I reached for a fallen pencil. Then the great day arrived. The spiderlings hatched from their individual eggs, chewed their way out of the sac, and started crawling, brothers and sisters together up toward the orange tensor lamp that was giving off heat and light on the desk of the nitwit who was their landlord.

By the time I stumbled in, fifty or sixty of them had reached the lampshade and rappelled back down on dainty silk lines, leaving a net of gossamer rigging between the lamp and the Darwin book (it happened to be an old edition of *Insectivorous Plants*, with marbled endpapers) that sat on the desk. Some dozen of others had already managed dispersal flights, letting out strands of buoyant silk and ballooning away on the rising air, as spiderlings do—in this case dispersing as far as the bookshelves. It was too late for one man to face one spider with just a pickle jar and an index card and his two shaky hands. By now I was proprietor of a highly successful black widow hatchery.

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2 bambinos: Italian for “children”
3 aesthetic: pleasing to the senses
And the question was, How should a human behave toward the members of other living species?

The Jain religion of India has a strong teaching on that question. The Sanskrit word is *ahimsa*, generally rendered in English as “noninjury” or the imperative “do no harm.” *Ahimsa* is the ethical centerpiece of Jainism, an absolute stricture against the killing of living beings—any living beings—and it led the traditional Jains to some extreme forms of observance. A rigorously devout Jain would burn no candles or lights, for instance, if there was danger a moth might fly into them. The Jain would light no fire for heating or cooking, again because it might cause the death of insects. He would cover his mouth and nose with a cloth mask, so as not to inhale any gnats. He would refrain from cutting his hair, on the grounds that the lice hiding in there might be gruesomely injured by the scissors. He could not plow a field, for fear of mutilating worms. He could not work as a carpenter or a mason, with all that dangerous sawing and crunching, nor could he engage in most types of industrial production. Consequently the traditional Jains formed a distinct socioeconomic class, composed almost entirely of monks and merchants. Their ethical canon was not without what you and I might take to be glaring contradictions (vegetarianism was sanctioned, plants as usual getting dismissive treatment in the matter of rights to life), but at least they took it seriously. They lived by it. They tried their best to do no harm.

And this in a country, remember, where 10,000 humans died every year from snakebite, almost a million more from malaria carried in the bites of mosquitoes. The black widow spider, compared to these fellow creatures, seems a harmless and innocent beast.

But personally I hold no brief for *ahimsa*, because I don’t delude myself that it’s even theoretically (let alone practically) possible. The basic processes of animal life, human or otherwise, do necessarily entail a fair bit of ruthless squashing and gobbling. Plants can sustain themselves on no more than sunlight and beauty and a hydroponic.

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4 Sanskrit: the classical language of India and Hinduism
5 canon: set of rules
6 brief: argument
7 hydroponic: water-based. Hydroponic farming uses nutrient-rich water in the place of soil.
diet—but not we animals. I’ve only mentioned this Jainist ideal to suggest the range of possible viewpoints . . .

. . . I have my own little notion of one measure that might usefully be applied in our relations with other species, and I offer it here seriously despite the fact that it will probably sound godawful stupid.

Eye contact.

Make eye contact with the beast, the Other, before you decide upon action. No kidding, now, I mean get down on your hands and knees right there in the vegetable garden, and look that snail in the face. Lock eyes with that bull snake. Trade stares with the carp. Gaze for a moment into the many-faceted eyes—the windows to its soul—of the house fly, as it licks its way innocently across your kitchen counter. Look for signs of embarrassment or rancor or guilt. Repeat the following formula silently, like a mantra: “This is some mother’s darling, this is some mother’s child.” Then kill if you will, or if it seems you must.

I’ve been experimenting with the eye-contact approach for some time myself. I don’t claim that it has made me gentle or holy or put me in tune with the cosmic hum, but definitely it has been interesting. The hardest cases—and therefore I think the most telling—are the spiders.

The face of a spider is unlike anything else a human will ever see. The word “ugly” doesn’t even begin to serve. “Grotesque” and “menacing” are too mild. The only adequate way of communicating the effect of a spiderly countenance is to warn that it is “very different,” and then offer a photograph. This trick should not be pulled on loved ones just before bedtime or when trying to persuade them to accompany you to the Amazon.

The special repugnant power of the spider physiognomy\(^8\) derives, I think, from fangs and eyes. The former are too big and the latter are too many. But the fangs (actually the fangs are only terminal barbs on the *chelicerae*, as the real jaw limbs are called) need to be large, because all spiders are predators yet they have no pincers like a lobster or a scorpion, no talons like an eagle, no social behavior like a pack of

\(^8\) *physiognomy*: outward appearance
wolves. Large clasping fangs armed with poison glands are just their required equipment for earning a living. And what about those eight eyes—big ones and little ones, arranged in two rows, all bugged-out and pointing everywhichway? (My wife the biologist offers a theory here: “They have an eye for each leg, like us—so they don’t step in anything.”) Well, a predator does need good eyesight, binocular focus, peripheral vision. Sensory perception is crucial to any animal that lives by the hunt and, unlike insects, arachnids possess no antennae. Beyond that, I don’t know. I don’t know why a spider has eight eyes.

I only know that, when I make eye contact with one, I feel a deep physical shudder of revulsion, and of fear, and of fascination; and I am reminded that the human style of face is only one accidental pattern among many, some of the others being quite different. I remember that we aren’t alone. I remember that we are the norm of goodness and comeliness only to ourselves. I wonder about how ugly I look to the spider.
The hundred baby black widows on my desk were too tiny for eye contact. They were too numerous, it seemed, to be gathered one by one into a pickle jar and carried to freedom in the backyard. I killed them all with a can of Raid. I confess to that slaughter with more resignation than shame, the jostling struggle for life and space being what it is. I can’t swear I would do differently today. But there is this lingering suspicion that I squandered an opportunity for some sort of moral growth.

I still keep their dead and dried mother, and their vacated egg sac, in a plastic vial on an office shelf. It is supposed to remind me of something or other.

And the question continues to puzzle me: How should a human behave toward the members of other living species?

Last week I tried to make eye contact with a tarantula. This was a huge specimen, all hairy and handsomely colored, with a body as big as a hamster and legs the size of Bic pens. I ogled it through a sheet of plate glass. I smiled and winked. But the animal hid its face in distrust.

This essay has been modified from the original.
Discussion Unit 2

The Face of a Spider

David Quammen

Text Opener

Why are people likely to kill a fly that is annoying them, but unlikely to kill an annoying cat or dog?

Directed Notes

Mark places where you think Quammen is saying that humans can connect with nonhuman species with C, and places where he seems to be saying that no connection can be made with NC.

Interpretive Questions for Discussion

What answer does Quammen give to his question, “How should a human behave toward the members of other living species?”

1. Why did Quammen neither “murder” nor capture the black widow mother when he first noticed that her web was near his desk? Why does he use the word murder instead of kill?

2. Why does Quammen find it important to mention the Jainist practices in order “to suggest the range of possible viewpoints”?

3. What does Quammen mean when he says, “I confess to that slaughter with more resignation than shame”?

4. Why does Quammen keep the dead and dried mother spider and the egg sac to “remind [him] of something or other”?
What is the importance of eye contact with other species, according to Quammen?

1. Why does Quammen call other species “the Other”?

2. When Quammen emphasizes eye contact with other species, why does he also attribute to them characteristics that we usually associate with humans, such as a soul, guilt, and motherliness?

3. What does Quammen realize when he looks into the face of a spider? Why is it important for him to mention “fascination” along with “revulsion” and “fear”?

4. Why does Quammen call face patterns “accidental”?

5. Is Quammen saying that we should make eye contact to keep us from killing other living things or for some other reason?

6. Does Quammen kill the baby black widows only because they were too small for eye contact?

7. Why does Quammen end his essay with the anecdote of the tarantula that he says hid its face from him in “distrust”? 
Writing After Discussion

1. Does an individual become a better person in thinking through the decision to kill or not to kill another living thing?

2. What do you think of the Jainist belief of *ahimsa* (noninjury)?

3. Why do humans rally around and fight for the survival of certain endangered species, such as the spotted owl, when others are practically ignored?

4. Is there a moral difference between killing an animal and destroying the habitat it depends on for survival?
Crystal Night

LYN LIFSHIN

windows slashed
like skin pulled
tight frozen with a
stone slammed thru
it smashed blue

glass crystal a
whole lake of ice
a plane crashes
into smashed
tea cups bowl of

glass glass
shattering in the
night something like
a mirror walked
into they came beat

people up blue
jars the glass piled
in an alley calf
deep. All night the
sound of ice in

the branches poking
holes in the roof
A warning stained
glass from the
synagogue slashed
plum peach cherry
frosting over in
the chill NOvember
light an arm
torn bleeding

a whole family
in shards and this
just the beginning

Cleaning up after
Kristallnacht
(Crystal Night), 1938.
**DISCUSSION UNIT 3**

**Crystal Night**

**LYN LIFSHIN**

**Text Opener**

Why do we feel personally violated when somebody takes or destroys something that belongs to us?

**Directed Notes**

Mark with an arrow the lines in the poem that have extra spaces between words. How do these spaces change the way you read the poem?

**Interpretive Questions for Discussion**

Why does the speaker avoid using subjects and naming those responsible for the things that happen on Kristallnacht?

1. Why does the speaker compare the “windows slashed” to “skin pulled / tight”?

2. What is “frozen with a / stone” in the first stanza, and why? Why are the broken windows described as “smashed blue”?

3. Why does the speaker couple a plane crashing into a frozen lake with “smashed / tea cups” and a “bowl of / glass”?

4. Why does the speaker describe the broken stained glass as “plum peach cherry / frosting over in / the chill NOvember / light”? Why does the poet capitalize the O in November?
5. Why does the speaker end the poem by noting “an arm / torn bleeding / a whole family / in shards”? How does Kristallnacht leave “a whole family / in shards”?

6. What effect does the poem’s almost total lack of punctuation have on its meaning?

7. Why is the last stanza of the poem, unlike all the other stanzas, only three lines long?

**Writing After Discussion**

1. Why did the Nazis destroy personal property?

2. Why do we feel different about a crime that takes place in our own neighborhood, as opposed to somewhere else?

3. After Kristallnacht and before the outbreak of World War II less than ten months later, virtually every Jew in Germany tried to emigrate. Research and write a paper that explains why Kristallnacht was such a turning point.
These fields can never be simply themselves. Their green seems such a tender green, their contours so significant to the tourists who stare towards the far range of mountains as if they are listening to the page of history tearing or to what they know themselves of warfare between brothers. In this scenery cows and cannons stand side by side and motionless, as if they had grown here. The cannons on their simple wheels resemble farm carts, children climb them. Thus function disappears almost entirely into form, and what is left under the impartial blue of the sky is a landscape where dandelions lie in the tall grass like so many spent cartridges, turning at last to the smoke of puffballs; where the only red visible comes at sunset; where the earth has grown so lovely it seems to forgive us even as we are learning to forgive ourselves.
**Discussion Unit 4**

**At Gettysburg**

LINDA PASTAN

**Text Opener**

What do you think of the saying, “Forgive and forget”?

**Directed Notes**

Circle the words in the poem that describe or invoke a particular color. How does each color make you feel at the moment it appears in the poem?

**Interpretive Questions for Discussion**

**Why does the speaker feel that “the earth . . . seems to forgive us,” but we are still “learning to forgive ourselves”?**

1. Why can the fields “never be / simply themselves”?

2. Of what significance are the tourists? Would the fields be “simply themselves” if the tourists didn’t come?

3. Why does the speaker say that the green of the fields “seems such a tender green”?

4. Why does the speaker compare cannons to growing things, and dandelions to man-made cartridges?

5. What does the speaker mean in saying that “function disappears almost entirely / into form”?

6. Why does the speaker describe the landscape that “is left under / the impartial blue of the sky”? Why is the blue of the sky “impartial”?
Writing After Discussion

1. Why do people visit sites where there has been great destruction or death?

2. When a war has been fought in a country, do future generations have any obligation to remember or forget what has taken place there?

3. Write a poem that describes in detail the place where a conflict has occurred, such as a playing field, a gymnasium, or a street.

4. Write a postcard to a friend as if you were a tourist visiting Gettysburg.

5. Do you agree that the earth is impartial and forgiving?
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