

Sputnik Sweetheart – Haruki Murakami

A Sputnik (Russian for satellite/companion) was a type of satellite developed during the Cold War (1945-1991). The novel focuses on loneliness - peoples' inability to really connect with one another, and to return romantic love. This is seen in *Sputnik Sweetheart* through various characters. The narrator's name (K.) pays homage to one of the early writers who discussed these problems and who influenced Murakami's own style: Franz Kafka in his novel *The Trial*.

1. Who is K. in love with?
2. Who does K. turn to in reaction to the fact that she has no romantic feelings towards him?
3. Do you think this reaction is appropriate? What could the effects of this indiscretion be on K.?
4. Who does Sumire fall in love with? Draw a quick diagram to show the complicated relationships of Miu, Sumire and K.
5. Because this woman is unable to respond romantically to Sumire, what does she do?
6. What do you think Sumire and the title of the novel have in common?
7. One of the genres this novel belongs to is Magic Realism. This is when a novel may start out fairly straightforward, only to be slowly "invaded" by otherworldly events. When does this happen for the first time in *Sputnik*?
8. What do Sumire's tapes reveal about Miu? What are her two parts? Which part do you think is on "this side" (our side)?
9. What do you think is the reason for Sumire's disappearance (hint: it concerns Miu)?
10. Where do you think she has gone?
11. Why do you think K. refuses to follow Sumire?
12. Do you think Sumire actually phones K. or was it a dream?
13. Did Sumire did go to "the other side"? If so, what does it mean that she calls K. at the end? What does this say about her journey? (There is no definite answer – just take a shot)

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To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee

The primary issues of the novel are racial prejudice, law and its interpretation. It also addresses issues of class and is a study of “the outsider”.

1. The novel takes place during the Great _____? In the 1930s.
2. Who do you think is leaving the children gifts in the whole of the tree?
3. When the mob gathers outside Tom Robinson’s jail and, Atticus himself is in danger. Why is this and how are the men made to turn away? What does Scout do unwittingly?
4. Where do the children watch Tom Robinson’s trial? What is the significance of this?
5. What is the truth of what happened the day Tom Robinson is accused of attacking Mayella?
6. Do you feel sorry for Mayella? Why? Why not?
7. Who rescues the children from Bob Ewell when they are making their way home from the pageant?
8. Do you think Jem or Boo should be held responsible for Bob Ewell’s death? Why does Atticus finally allow the law to be twisted in favour of these two characters?
9. How does Scout struggle with the gender roles expected of her?
10. Who is the outsider in the novel? Why is this character an outsider?
11. What is the significance of the title? Which character is the mockingbird? Is there more than one? Explain your answer.

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Animal Farm – George Orwell

Although this novel is an allegory about events in Russia leading up to and during the Stalin Era, during which as many as 60 million people were killed, this allegorical novel also addresses, in a general way, the consequences of greed and corruption among leaders of society, as well as the effects of myopia (short sightedness) in state (government) administration.

1. Match the characters to their historical equivalent:

Pigs:

- Old Major
- Napoleon
- Snowball
- Squealer

Historical Figures:

- Karl Marx:** Founder of communism. Draws up principles of revolution. Body is embalmed and put on display.
- Vladimir Lenin:** Wins trust through good harvest, but driven out. Envisions egalitarian (equal) society. Propaganda is used to turn animals against him.
- Molotov:** Minister of propaganda Manipulates language to empower Napoleon. Uses statistics to prove pigs' lives are improving under new administration.
- Joseph Stalin:** Uses "secret police" to maintain power. Purges the farm of potential "dissenters".

2. Why does Old Major compare the humans to "parasites"?

3. The following are the seven commandments for the farm:

1. *Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.*
2. *Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.*
3. *No animal shall wear clothes.*
4. *No animal shall sleep in a bed.*
5. *No animal shall drink alcohol.*
6. *No animal shall kill any other animal.*
7. *All animals are equal.*

- What are the commandments designed to stop?
- Which is the most important commandment?
- What happens to these commandments?

4. Who initially designs and advocates the windmill? What benefits will it have? Who opposes the windmill?
5. Snowball is banished and the animals stop having meetings, instead the farm will be run by a committee. Which political regime is this a step away from, and which is it a step closer to?
6. Snowball becomes a scape_____. Napoleon then begins to purge the farm in a manner reminiscent of Stalin's own purges. Who does he target and why?
7. How is the animals' illiteracy used against them?
8. Napoleon and the other pigs begin to act like humans, until the farm animals are no longer able to be differentiated the pigs from the real humans. What is the meaning of this?
9. How is the phrase "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others" used by Napoleon and his pigs?
10. If this commandment is applied to us humans, do you agree or disagree with it? Why/why not?

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Letters from the Inside – John Marsden

This novel addresses ideas including adolescence, upbringing, choices and consequences, friendship, and violence.

1. Why do the two girls begin writing letters to each other?
2. Mandy initially appears to be lost in the world, whereas Tracey seems to “have it all”. How does the reader’s view of these girls change?
3. Why does Tracey try to ignore it when Mandy talks about her violent brother?
4. Why doesn’t Tracey want Mandy to know she is in a juvenile detention center?
5. Does this revelation improve or worsen the girls’ relationship?
6. Why doesn’t Tracey like being called nice?
7. Tracey writes an essay about one of her relatives. Who does she write about?
8. What does this essay show us about Tracey and the effect of her relationship of Mandy.
9. Tracey eventually calls Mandy “Manna”. This word is used in the Bible when the Jews are escaping slavery in Egypt. The Bible says God provided them with manna, a type of food, to help them survive. How is this applicable to Mandy?
10. Mandy does not reply to Tracey’s letter in which she tells her about her past and how she ended up in juvenile detention. Do you think this is because the truth put Mandy off Tracey, or do you think something more sinister happened? Explain your answer with reference to the text.
11. Anita Silvey of *Horn Book Magazine* in her review of *Letters from the Inside* wrote: "John Marsden writes another riveting story of young women with much to say and much to escape from." – Discuss this comment. How is this true for both girls?

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