

Ishmael Guided Reading Questions 2018

January 29 – February 2

Chapter 1 pp. 3-29

- p. 11: What does the origin of the question “why” for the tiger seem to suggest? When is it that questions begin?
- p. 15: What do you make of Ishmael’s bafflement at the notion that humans are somehow different from him?
- p. 15: How is Ishmael’s identity determined by others? What is the significance of this?
- p. 25: What is your initial reaction to Ishmael’s claim that humanity is destroying the world? What about the assertion that humanity is held captive by its own way of life? Do you think that Ishmael intends to suggest that humanity is physically held captive, mentally held captive, both?
- p. 27: Do you agree that on some level it doesn’t matter if we’re being lied to? Do you consider yourself someone who would rather NOT be aware of bad information that will bum you out, or would you rather know? Do you endorse the “ignorance is bliss” view?

February 5-9

Chapter 2 pp. 33-46

- p. 36: The idea that we absorb information, values, and beliefs without realizing it is a basic way to begin understanding how ideology functions within society and influences our behavior.
- p. 39: According to Ishmael, who are the “takers” and the “leavers”? What does he mean by these terms? What is your reaction to dividing humanity into these two groups?
- p. 41: According to Ishmael, what is a “story” and what is a “culture”?

Chapter 3 pp. 49-63

- p. 55: What does the fictional jellyfish’s understanding of the world possibly reveal about human knowledge?
- p. 57: What assumption do most religious traditions and evolution through means of natural selection have in common?
- p. 61: According to Ishmael, what is the premise of the story being enacted by the Takers? Do you disagree that this is the premise upon which most human civilizations are based? Do you think there is anything wrong or flawed about this premise?

February 12-16

Chapter 4 pp. 67-75

- p. 69: What was the real significance of the Agricultural Revolution?

p. 75: According to Ishmael, what is man's relationship to the natural world?

Chapter 5 pp. 79-91

p. 80: What seems to be the biggest challenge facing humanity?

p. 83: What prevents man from turning the world into a paradise?

p. 84: What is the view of human nature offered by Ishmael? How does it differ from some religious worldviews or secular worldviews?

p. 89: The claim that man "doesn't know how he ought to live" is contradicted by some religious worldviews. Why aren't religious commandments good enough for Ishmael?

February 19-23

Chapter 6 pp. 95-110

p. 97: What is a law?

p. 103: What are the "three dirty tricks" that the gods played on the Takers?

p. 106: What is the possible or intended relevance of the story about flight to human civilization today?

Chapter 7 pp. 113-122

p. 119: What are some of the differences between the Takers and the Leavers?

February 26 – March 2

Chapter 8 pp. 125-148

p. 126: According to Ishmael, what are the four things that the Takers do that are never done in the rest of the community of life?

p. 130: What is the benefit of diversity within the community of life?

p. 143: According to Ishmael, is industrialism compatible with our survival as a species? What are we to make of this argument?

p. 146: How do you react to the claim that "mankind was not needed to bring order to the world"? How does this contradict notions of human progress?

March 5-9

Chapter 9 pp. 151-184

p. 178: Ishmael interprets The Fall as being synonymous with which event?

March 12-16 Spring Break

Chapter 10 pp. 187-207

p. 201: How has humanity's understanding of its history changed?

Chapter 11 pp. 211-229

p. 205: The argument presented here seems to suggest that the knowledge and wisdom humanity has accumulated from religious figures and secular philosophers are mere inventions, as if to suggest that they are somehow not valuable. Is it even possible to agree with this?

p. 206: How should we respond to the universalization of the Taker lifestyle? How does history typically portray it?

March 19-23

Chapters 12 and 13 pp. 233-263

p. 224: What is the Taker story a rebellion against?

p. 229: How does this idea of the Taker's not wanting to be dependent on the gods add to our understanding of humanism?

p. 239: Does the premise that "man belongs to the world" repudiate humanism? Is this possibly a form of post-humanism or anti-humanism?

p. 250: Ishmael claims that his critique of the Takers is not necessarily a promotion of hunting-and-gathering. Do you think the Takers are capable of changing how they live?

p. 253: How should we interpret Ishmael's language about destroying the prison? Is this a call to revolution? Is that practical? Can such a change take place peacefully and gradually?