

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Anthem

by Ayn Rand

written by Pete Boysen

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Background/Pre-reading

1. Ayn Rand was born in 1905, which was the same year of the first Russian Revolution, which overthrew the rule of the monarchy. When she was twelve, the second revolution came to Russia and brought Communist rule under the Bolshevik Party. Because the Bolsheviks did not permit private enterprise, her family lost its business and fell into abject poverty.

Imagine yourself in Rand's place, a year or so after her family had lost its business. Write a diary entry from her perspective detailing the tumult that followed the revolution.

2. The British edition of *Anthem* was significantly longer and more descriptive than the American edition. When Rand edited *Anthem* for her American publisher, one of her main goals was to eliminate flowery language, particularly what she called "purple" adjectives, which, in her opinion, added unnecessary emotion.

Write a story about a criminal entering and robbing a convenience store. For every page in your story, you may use only three adjectives.

3. *Anthem* is one of the more famous dystopian novels, in which the author creates a nightmarish society to point out the flaws of his or her own culture. Other examples of this literary form include *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Animal Farm*. There have also been dystopian films, such as *Escape from L.A.*, *Demolition Man*, and *Logan's Run*, among others.

Dystopian literature is a relatively new phenomenon, appearing mostly since 1900. Why do you think that pessimism infiltrated literature during this time period? What technological and social changes do you think made the literature more pessimistic? Do you think this is a reflection of society at large, and if so, why?

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4. *Anthem* was written to criticize the Soviet regime that was ruled by Josef Stalin. One of Stalin's key strategies for maintaining power was to order periodic purges, or brutal murders and assassinations of all of his opponents, particularly intellectuals. One of the key elements of collectivist governments has traditionally been a tight control on the media and public speech.

One of the basic ideals of American society has long been the importance of a free press. In other words, the government is forbidden to control what is published and broadcast as news. The only standards in place for news have to do with reliability, honesty, and appropriateness of content.

Do you think it is important that a democracy have a free press? Why or why not? Write a page expressing your opinion.

5. A blurb is a paragraph that briefly describes a book. The blurb for *Anthem* informs potential readers that the story is about a courageous individual who dared to fight against the malaise being forced upon all thinkers by the collectivist government, and warns of the coming "dark age of the great 'We.'"

A blurb should interest the reader without spoiling the plot by giving too much away. Write a blurb for the dust jacket that would accompany the story of your own life. To what novels or plays could your life be compared? Write the blurb from the third person, from the perspective of the editor of your autobiography.

6. In Rand's foreword, she says

"The greatest guilt today is that of people who seek protection from the security of taking a stand..."

Explain what that means to you and how it affects the society in which we live.

Chapter I

7. Equality 7-2521 finds an abandoned railroad tunnel, where he sits and writes in his journal. His friend, International 4-8818, fearing that the tunnel is forbidden, stays outside. However, Equality disregards the rules and enjoys the solitude he finds there.

Consider a secret place that you have cherished in your own life, particularly one that may or may not have been forbidden. What did you do there? What are your most vivid memories of that place? Describe the place in a short paragraph, and spend the rest of a page telling about your experiences.

8. Equality 7-2521 has been conditioned to believe that solitude is evil, and that even having private thoughts that defy accepted doctrine is evil. While this sort of thinking reflects the more extreme tenets of collectivist thinking, the vast majority of people would see flaws in this philosophy.

Describe a message that has been promoted in contemporary society that you believe to be flawed. This could be a message put out by the government, advertisements, television programs, or movies.

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Identify the message that you believe to be flawed, the ways in which this message is communicated, and the flaws that you believe the message contains.

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9. When Equality 7-2521 writes about his desire to be alone, he acknowledges that this desire is evil. However, he does not feel any shame or remorse for having this desire, even though he has been taught to consider it evil.

Think of something you were taught was wrong that you have since found acceptable.

Write a dialogue between these two parts of your own mind: the part that has learned that the action you have in mind is wrong, and the part that has found it acceptable. Express both sides of the argument.

10. As a youth, Equality 7-2521 was chastised for being too tall. This may seem comical, because height is an attribute beyond one's control, but the media in our own time puts out images that reflect what the ideal person, male or female, "should" look like.

Find one of these images in a magazine, newspaper, or Internet advertisement. Make a list of the attributes of this "ideal" person. Next to each item, write in one sentence how realistic it would be for the average person to acquire these attributes.

11. In many respects, Equality 7-2521 plays the role of a prophet; he is alone in bringing an unwelcome message of change to a society. He is intellectually and physically superior to most of his peers, and for this he is punished by being assigned the role of Street Sweeper.

If you were making a film version of *Anthem*, who would you cast in the role of Equality 7-2521? Select and name five finalists, and then narrow your choice down to the final actor. Why would you choose this actor? Consider physical attributes as well as the ability to reflect Equality's emotional and intellectual depth.

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12. *Anthem* is clearly based on life in the Soviet Union after Josef Stalin has achieved power and has begun his program to eliminate all opposition. However, Rand places the action in a neutral setting to make her warning clear to people everywhere.

Write a poem that might appear in Equality 7-2521's journal, during one of his nights in the tunnel, while all the other Street Sweepers are at the theater. The poem should be at least eight lines in length and should evoke the emotional turmoil going on within him as he struggles not only against the collectivist order, but also against his own desire to be righteous. Your poem should convey Rand's warning message using Equality's voice.

13. In many stories, the characters who are supposed to be heroic are described as light-featured and in excellent physical condition, while the villains are often stronger in appearance than the heroes, with darker features that reflect their moral darkness. However, in *Anthem*, the villains have nondescript features and appear to be soft, while the descriptions of Equality 7-2521 are sharper, darker and more vibrant.

Draw an illustration of one of the scenes described from Equality's time either in the Home of Infants or the Home of the Students, making sure to be consistent with Rand's descriptions of the people involved.