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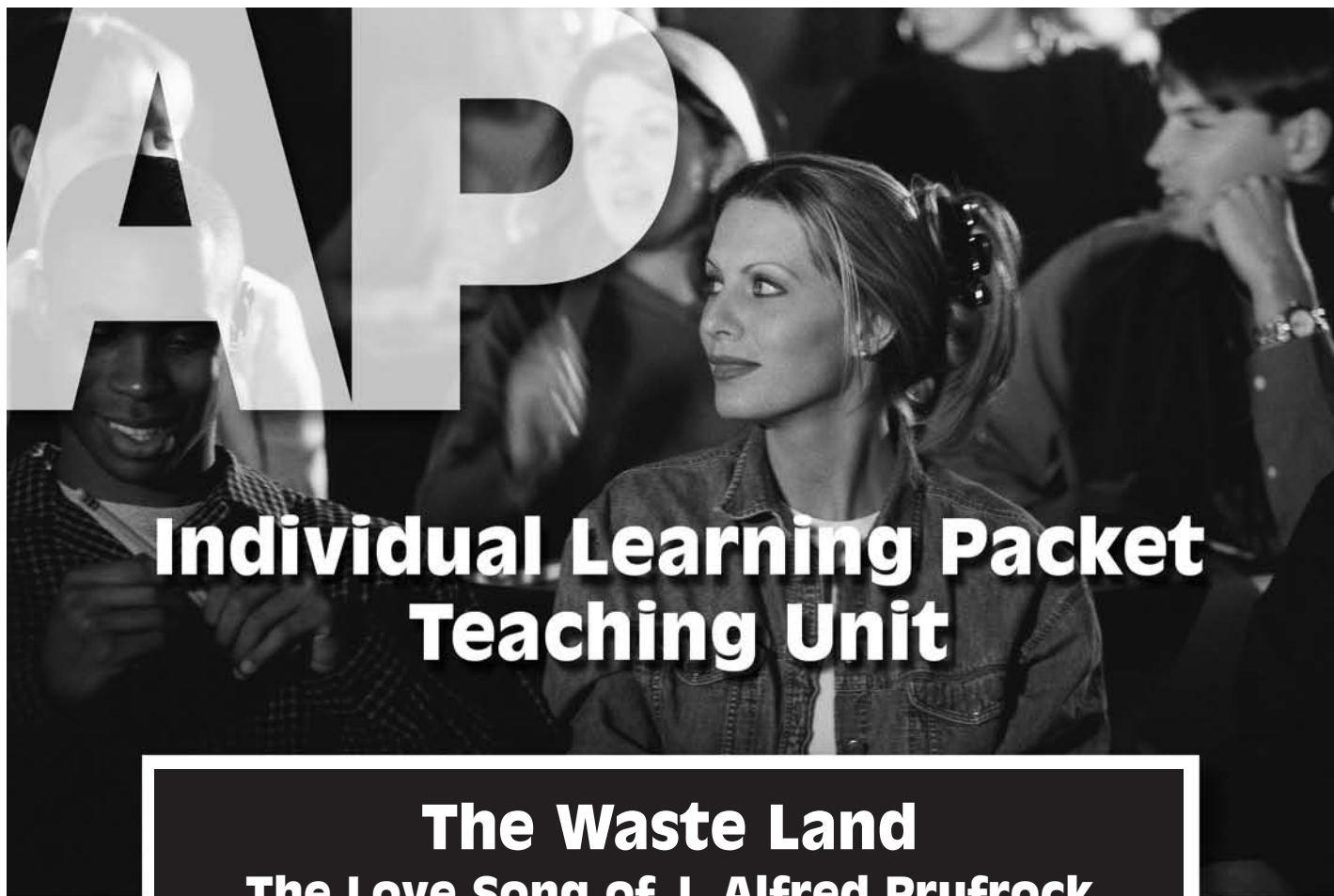
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# **Individual Learning Packet Teaching Unit**

**The Waste Land  
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**

**T.S. Eliot**

**P R E S T W I C K   H O U S E ,   I N C .**



Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet  
Teaching Unit

“The Love Song of  
J. Alfred Prufrock”

and

*The Waste Land*

By: T. S. Eliot

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# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## **Objectives**

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. place T. S. Eliot within the overall context of the history and development of literature in the English language;
2. place the two poems within the context of Eliot's career;
3. develop a logical, meaningful interpretation of both poems and offer evidence from the poems to support that reading;
4. recognize and define the following literary terms:
  - a. dramatic monologue
  - b. stream-of-consciousness
  - c. free verse
  - d. allusion
  - e. motif
  - f. alliteration
  - g. assonance
  - h. consonance
  - i. internal and end rhyme
5. identify elements in both poems that can be characterized as "modern;"
6. develop an understanding of Eliot's philosophy of life, as shown in both poems;
7. list major traits of the main characters in the poems;
8. provide informed speculation as to the original audience for the poems and the effects the poems may have had on that audience;
9. identify and understand the historical context for Eliot and his poetry;

10. locate and understand the major allusions in the poems;
11. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam;
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam;
13. offer a close reading of both poems and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the texts, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the poems.

# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## **Note to the Teacher**

Naturally the concrete meaning of poetry, especially modern poetry, can be elusive; indeed, T. S. Eliot's friend and editor Ezra Pound once said that modern poetry "must be difficult." However, this study guide takes the position that poetry, like other literature, is first a means of communication. If it fails to communicate effectively, then it will not be popular and will not earn a lasting place in the annals of literature, as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* have certainly done. Eliot's poems, while difficult at times and though impossible to nail down firmly, nevertheless communicate with readers, both on a literal and deeply emotional level. One of the main purposes of this guide is to provide students with the knowledge and skills they will need in order to "demystify" these poems and others like them. We have tried to lead readers toward logical interpretations when the meanings may be hazy, and we have tried to explicate the poems as clearly as possible when certain meanings – allusions, for example – are widely accepted.

Modernism as an artistic movement emphasized questions rather than answers, and the focus in poetry tended to be on images and sounds, rather than simplistic messages. To some extent, Eliot went along with the so-called Imagists in their dictum "No ideas but in things" (images should evoke a myriad of meanings; poets should not state ideas). However, he was also a true original: while he borrowed from many styles and agreed with several literary philosophies, he was unafraid when it came to creating his own unique style, which at times does clearly state, or at least show, definite meanings. In fact, to Eliot, his ideas were as important as the images and the feelings in his poems. So while he was unquestionably a "modern" poet, his work pays homage to, and owes a great deal of its effectiveness to, the huge body of traditional literature from which he draws inspiration, certain poetic forms, and a considerable amount of material.

The four "mini-lectures" are provided here as introductions to Eliot and his poems, because a firm grasp of Eliot's life and the era in which the poems were created are both vital to anyone beginning an exploration and reaching for an understanding of these complicated poems. It is recommended that teachers present the first three lectures, with question-and-answer discussions, before the study of "Prufrock," then the fourth one prior to launching into *The Waste Land*. Of course, teachers should familiarize themselves with all the material in the Teaching Unit and the Study Guide before beginning any instruction in the unit.

For further reading, there are many and varied articles and books on both poems. For a straightforward, dependable chronicle of Eliot's life, we recommend *Great Tom* by T. S. Matthews (1974), which also includes some valuable criticism and analysis of the poems.

All references to the texts of the poems come from the Dover Thrift Edition of *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land, Prufrock and Other Poems*, copyright ©1998.

# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## **Lecture**

### I. T. S. Eliot and His Times

Born into a prosperous family on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, Thomas Stearns Eliot was the grandson of a Unitarian minister. As a young man, he studied at Harvard with another poet who was to gain fame: e. e. cummings. But Eliot, who went on to study at Oxford, became more attracted to England than to America, especially after he married an Englishwoman. He then moved to London and later gave up his American citizenship. Thus, Eliot can be classified as both an American and an English poet.

Eliot's first major poem was published in 1915 ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in the well-known Chicago-based magazine *Poetry*), but he was not considered a major poet until the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922. In between those publications, Eliot made his living as a schoolteacher, a banker, and finally as one of the most influential literary critics in England. As of 1919, he was the leading critic at the *Times Literary Supplement* in London, so he spent most of his life creating powerful poetry and writing important commentary on the works of others. He was truly a literary giant.

As both poet and critic, Eliot led the way in popularizing the modernist style of thinking and writing. In fiction, modernism was represented by the stark realism and formal experimentation of such writers as Ernest Hemingway. In poetry, this new sensibility was more strictly defined by the Imagists, including Eliot's close friend Ezra Pound, who believed in their motto, "No ideas but in things" (the image is vital; the meaning is secondary). Generally modernism embraced free verse, with no regular rhyme scheme or meter, and freedom of thought, often questioning accepted ideas and social norms. This form and content had been popularized in the late 1800s by the French Symbolists, who were a strong influence on Eliot and who were criticized for including morbid and grotesque imagery in their works. Although this anti-traditional, anti-romantic trend had thus begun before World War I, the mechanized slaughter and unprecedented loss of life during that horrific war caused many to reexamine their previous, comfortable beliefs in religion and the innate goodness of humankind. The leaders of one radical branch of modernism, known as Dada, claimed that the only legitimate emotion left was disgust.

T. S. Eliot, though, was more levelheaded and had never fully broken free from his strongly Protestant roots. While his poetry shows a definite sadness for what has been lost and a bitterness toward modern sensibilities, it also shows the dignity that people can achieve and maintain in the face of disaster and disintegration (although “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land* are mostly pessimistic, even nihilistic). Eliot believed, however, that one generation bears a great responsibility to pass along to the next generation the best art and the best ideas possible, rising above the easy tendency to embrace only the negative aspects of life. When he grew older, Eliot once again embraced religion, eventually becoming an elder in the Anglican church. Long before then, however, his poetry often focused on religion and occasionally sounded like religious incantations or mantras (words repeated to invoke a religious experience). This is especially true in *The Waste Land*, though the use of religion there is often sardonic or an ironic contrast to modern reality.

Having won several major literary awards, including the Nobel Prize in 1948, Eliot died in London on January 4, 1965, at the age of 76.

Here are some major ideas that informed the modern age and its literature:

1. Determinism was an important tenet of modern thought and is based on the concept that all effects have demonstrable causes. Any mysteries in life are only puzzles that have not been solved. There is no magic.
2. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution had been accepted by most scientists as a factual or at least plausible explanation for the development of living things. Thus, human beings were merely the latest version of a type of animal.
3. Sigmund Freud had published his *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, and psychoanalysis had become a popular and widely accepted method of explaining human thoughts and actions. Freud believed that one’s life was almost a completely predictable pattern set in motion by one’s parents. There was no “ghost in the machine.” The human mind worked according to understandable influences and desires.
4. Because of the acceptance and power of such scientifically based theories, religion was on the decline. Freud spoke of it as an obsession based on the fear of death.
5. The so-called Jazz Age was well underway in the early 1920s, with many people doing a lot of traveling and attending parties on a regular basis, whether in Europe or in Prohibition-era America, where “speak-easies” had replaced the local bars and where liquor still flowed like water.



6. One of the leaders and mentors of modern writers was Gertrude Stein, who reportedly said, “You are all a lost generation,” thus characterizing Eliot, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and their peers as a group without bearings, a group trying to find new ways to live and write. [Actually Stein was just reporting what a garage worker had said to her and her friend Alice B. Toklas when they were motoring around France one day and stopped to ask for directions. Stein was amused by the comment, but admitted that she did find it fitting.]
7. World War I, or as it was called at the time, “the Great War,” had taken the lives of one quarter of a generation of young Englishmen and millions of other lives, yet hardly anyone could grasp the reasons behind the war. It included the first widespread use of new technology developed expressly for killing, such as machine guns, tanks, and chemical weapons. The carnage was massive and horrifying. “Man’s inhumanity to man” was brutally displayed.
8. Along with the uncertainty and questioning brought on by philosophical, political, and scientific changes came a loser morality, an almost desperate need to live for the moment, the future being hazy and incomprehensible. Sex outside of marriage became more and more acceptable and popular, as marriage and life itself were seen less and less as sacred or deeply meaningful.

## II. Literary Devices and Conventions

In writing the two poems under study here, Eliot both utilized and went against the traditional devices and conventions of the past. His work is characterized by his masterful understanding of how poetry works, and by his ability to write finely crafted traditional verse as well as wildly experimental free verse. His special blending of the two makes his poetry uniquely powerful and effective. This blending is also “organic,” in that the form perfectly reflects the content. Especially in his early poetry, he is writing about a time when traditional forms and values coexisted uneasily with emergent art and ideas. Thus, the poetry itself rightfully and masterfully includes both. Readers can usually spot and “feel” traditional literary forms, such as iambic pentameter, when the lines are roughly the same length and have five stressed syllables in each line. Free verse is also easy to identify because of its jagged appearance on the page, some of the lines being much longer or shorter than others.

Below are the main poetic devices used in the works under study:

1. Dramatic Monologue: A lengthy speech, shorter versions of which are often called soliloquies, in which a character reveals his or her thoughts and feelings; Eliot’s monologues tend to be internal rather than spoken. “Prufrock,” for example is entirely an internal monologue.

2. Stream-of-Consciousness: Writing that mimics the natural flow of thought, often without rationality, punctuation, or normal capitalization, as in this passage from *The Waste Land*: “He who was living is now dead/We who were living are now dying / With a little patience” (ll. 328-330).
3. Free Verse: Poetry that does not adhere to traditional rules of rhyme and meter but can include both, as in this snippet of dialogue from *The Waste Land*: “Do/You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember/Nothing?” (ll. 121-123).
4. Internal Rhyme: Sounds that are echoed within a line or lines as opposed to being placed at the ends of lines: “Marie, hold on tight. And down we went./In the mountains, there you feel free. / I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter” (*The Waste Land*, ll. 16-18).
5. End Rhyme: Traditional rhyming, where the echoed sounds occur at the ends of lines, as in “Beneath the music from a farther room./So how should I presume?” (from “Prufrock”).
6. Allusion: A reference to something outside the poem, usually to another work of literature, a religious book, or a well-known character or event. For example, when Prufrock refers to seeing his “head . . . brought in upon a platter,” he is alluding to the horrible death of John the Baptist.
7. Alliteration: Literally, the repetition of sounds, but alliteration has come to be specified as the repetition of sounds at the beginnings of back-to-back words, as in “insidious intent” or “formulated phrase” (from “Prufrock”).
8. Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds, as in this passage from *The Waste Land*: “And crawled head downward down a blackened wall/And upside down in air were towers” (ll. 382-383).
9. Consonance: The repetition of consonants, as in this passage from *The Waste Land*: “red sullen faces sneer and snarl” (l. 344).
10. Motif: An image or idea that is repeated throughout a poem, like a certain color that runs throughout a tapestry. For example, drowning appears several times in *The Waste Land*, as does dryness, so these motifs create an automatic tension that becomes a part of the poem’s tone.

### III. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

When Pound recommended Eliot's first important poem to *Poetry* magazine, he said it was "the best poem I have yet had or seen from an American." Certainly it is unusual and would have stood out from the rest; it was soon well known in literary circles everywhere. The success of "Prufrock" paved the way for the 1919 New York publication of *Poems by T. S. Eliot*, his first major collection.

"Prufrock" is an interior monologue based on the traditional dramatic monologue, a solo speech that often puts into words the speaker's inner turmoil, as in Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Prufrock often alludes to Shakespeare's most famous play, but admits, "I am not Prince Hamlet." He has no such grand illusions. His thoughts and feelings, while interesting and made sometimes classically poetic by Eliot, tend to be humble and full of self-doubt. He worries not about "outrageous fortune," as Hamlet does, but about growing old and being rejected by a woman with whom he shares – or imagines – some sort of romantic relationship.

The epigraph (introductory quotation) from Dante's *Inferno* is a miniature soliloquy, spoken by a resident of hell who talks about a story that he would never reveal if he thought his words would ever be heard by the living. Eliot's choice of this passage probably says more about his audience than it does about Prufrock, although Prufrock would not likely reveal his most personal thoughts to another living person either. The effect of the epigraph might have been as chilling to Eliot's audience as it must have been to Dante's visitor to the underworld, because the implied message is that there is no hope, that the listener is as doomed as the speaker.

The fragmentation of "Prufrock" reflects the fragmented, disjointed modern world, where salvation often seemed as distant and unreachable as the stars. Religion was in question and science was on the rise, leaving people to wonder about their origins, their egos, and their final destinations. This uncertainty is shown in Prufrock's inability to make forceful decisions or speak meaningful words, and he notices the superficiality of those around him, too: "the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." The juxtaposition of such chattering socialites with the great, deeply religious painter seems an appropriate metaphor for the shaky, ephemeral quality of the modern world as opposed to the comfortable, solid certainty of the Old World.

When Prufrock thinks he might have been better off as a crab under the ocean, Eliot is pointing to the Darwinian concept of life originating in the sea, then evolving on the land. Prufrock is so dejected that he wishes humans had never evolved. At the end of the poem, he seems to fear being "awakened" by human voices and "drowning" in his social ineptitude and lack of self-esteem. It may be better to live in an isolated dream world, he seems to say, than to face ridicule and rejection in real life. Prufrock is a shaky, self-centered speaker for a shaky, self-centered time in history. Unless he takes a chance and tries to make a commitment to another human being, he may as well be as dead as the residents of Dante's frightening underworld.

#### IV. *The Waste Land*

Eliot's modern, unromantic stance is broadened and deepened in his masterpiece, the long poem called *The Waste Land*, published in 1922 – fittingly the same year in which James Joyce published the ultimate in stream-of-consciousness literature, his novel *Ulysses*. Both works explore the interior of the mind in new ways, and both feature characters who nearly scream in their desperation for meaning in the midst of a meaningless existence. Sometimes the words themselves seem to act as life rafts. As Eliot writes near the end of his poem, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins.”

The dark tone of *The Waste Land* can be partially attributed to the fact that Eliot wrote it during a three-month “rest cure” that his doctor prescribed after Eliot had a nervous breakdown in November 1921. (Eliot was also worried about the mental and physical health of his wife, Vivienne, who was almost always under a doctor's care.) The original version of the poem is twice as long and tends to ramble. Pound pared it down to the modernist classic now known the world over; he acted as a sort of diamond cutter in carefully but severely editing and reshaping the poem.

James Dickey, who wrote the novel *Deliverance* and was also an accomplished poet, called *The Waste Land* “the most important poem of the twentieth century,” and, indeed, it set the mark for others to aim for in writing modern, stream-of-consciousness poetry. However, no one has yet written a long poem that so perfectly portrays an era and the feeling of living in that era. *The Waste Land* is a natural extension, a sequel in a way, to “Prufrock,” Eliot's earlier expression of the alienation and uncertainty that seemed to define the modern world.

If readers feel lost and uncertain about the meaning of *The Waste Land* and its various parts, then Eliot has accomplished part of his purpose: he has made the reader feel what he and his peers felt during that transitional space in time. Nonetheless, poetry is not meant to be charted, analyzed, and quantified in solid, scientific terms. Poetry is an art of experience, so one should read it first as if one is going on a special kind of roller-coaster ride. Feel the bumps, the twists and turns, and resist the impulse to apply logical analysis to each word, phrase, and sentence. As biographer T. S. Matthews says, “*The Waste Land* is like a cave to whose dim light our eyes gradually accustom themselves . . .” (59).

From the French Symbolists, led by Charles Baudelaire, Eliot had learned that the construction of meaning in poetry was secondary to suggestion and emotion, that a stark, striking image could be an adequate symbol for many things, and that everything was, in a sense, symbolic. Therefore, he was well prepared to write “vers libre” or free verse. In many ways, the meaning or message of the poem resides much more within the reader than it does in the poem itself. Free verse requires interaction and an open mind. That being said, though, there are several agreed-upon interpretations for much of *The Waste Land*, and Eliot provided extensive notes, especially about the many allusions. Thus, the reader is not alone in a quest to understand, appreciate, and enjoy this complex, intense poem, one of the major landmarks in literary history.

# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## **Free Response (Essay) Items**

### Practice Free-Response Question #1:

The opening stanza of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” appears below. Examine Eliot’s use of adjectives, and, in a well-organized essay, explain how they help to establish the narrator’s character. How does the remainder of the poem further develop or contradict this early impression? Avoid a mere character description.

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question. . . .  
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”  
Let us go and make our visit.

### Practice Free-Response Question #2:

In a well-organized essay, explain how the refrain “In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo” contributes to the reader’s understanding of Prufrock and his social peers. Include a discussion of how this motif advances the theme of the poem.

### Practice Free-Response Question #3:

Authors often give their characters names that suggest their personalities or situations. In a well-organized essay, analyze the connotations of the name, J. Alfred Prufrock. Include in your discussion an examination of how such a character fits into the overall body of Eliot’s work and modernist poetry. Avoid plot summary or mere character identification.

### Practice Free-Response Question #4:

Part of the craft of the poet is to manipulate language use to create an impression or effect that precedes or even replaces intellectual understanding. In a well-organized essay, explain how Eliot’s mixture of traditional and free verse make “Prufrock” a more effective poem and seem to blend with its themes of uncertainty, despair, and fragmentation. Be certain to support all of your assertions with direct references to the poem. Avoid plot summary or mere character identification.

### Practice Free-Response Question #5:

T.S. Eliot often alludes to classical mythology, the Bible, and Renaissance art and poetry to intensify his themes. In a well-written essay, discuss Eliot's use of allusion in *The Waste Land* and how it contributes to the overall meaning and impact of the work. Do not simply offer a list of allusions and works alluded to.

### Practice Free-Response Question #6:

Eliot was heavily influenced by the studies of anthropology, philosophy, romance, and the roots of modern religion in ancient myths. In a well-organized essay, discuss how these poems reflect Eliot's interest in these fields.

### Practice Free-Response Question #7:

Part of the impact of Eliot's work comes from his ability to juxtapose discordant elements: images, styles of language, moods. In a well-written essay, examine how such juxtapositions contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the work. Avoid a mere list of discordant elements.

### Practice Free-Response Question #8:

Read the following passage from *The Waste Land* (section II, stanza 1, lines 120-124):

Nothing again nothing.  
 “Do  
 “You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember  
 “Nothing?”

In a well-organized essay, analyze the language of this passage and explain how it contributes to the overall tone and meaning of the poem. Cite other evidence from the poem to support your ideas. Avoid plot summary.

### Practice Free-Response Question #9:

Section III of *The Waste Land* is called “The Fire Sermon.” Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss whether Eliot’s use of the word “sermon” in the title is ironic. Explain what Eliot may have intended by using this title for this section of the poem, and how it contributes to the overall impact of the work. Avoid plot summary.

Practice Free-Response Question #10:

In a well-organized essay, examine how part IV, “Death by Water,” echoes some elements from earlier sections, especially the concepts and images of drowning and of death. Explain how these motifs contribute to the overall theme of the poem. Avoid plot summary.

Practice Free-Response Question #11:

Many critics have argued that *The Waste Land* is mostly about death and regeneration (or the impossibility of regeneration). After reading the final section, with its allusions to the sacred Hindu Upanishads, and its final line meaning “The Peace which passeth understanding,” write a well-organized essay in which you explain where and how Eliot expects humanity to find any possibility of rejuvenation. Be certain to use evidence from the poem, especially the final section, to support your assertions.

# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## Discussion Topics/Questions

1. Why was the openly, sometimes radically, intellectual Eliot more comfortable and his brash, groundbreaking poetry more readily accepted in England than in the U.S.? Discuss some differences between the two cultures that could account for these facts.
2. How is Prufrock a realistic representative of modern man – or at least of a modern intellectual? What traits did he share with many readers of the early twentieth century?
3. Is the epigraph from Dante's *Inferno* appropriate as a kind of introduction to “Prufrock”? Why or why not? Use details from the poem to back up your opinion.
4. Yellow has long been associated with cowardice and caution. What could also be symbolized by the yellow fog and yellow smoke that curls around Prufrock’s house? Why do you think Eliot describes the fog as a cat? Does Prufrock have any catlike characteristics?
5. What does it say about Prufrock's character that he is overly concerned about his appearance, especially the fact that he is middle aged and beginning to show signs of aging? Do you think he is superficial? Why or why not?
6. Why does Eliot use so many allusions to other works of literature? What does this practice say about the writer and his intended audience?
7. If *The Waste Land* were published today, how do you think it would be received and reviewed? Would it become as popular and well known throughout the world as it was in the 1920s? Why or why not?
8. Despite the anti-religious tendencies in much modern literature, *The Waste Land* includes many religious references, especially to ancient religions such as Hinduism. What do you think Eliot is trying to say with such references? Moreover, does religion belong in modern poetry? If so, why? If not, why not?
9. Many critics have noticed that *The Waste Land* is structured in a five-part form resembling a symphony. What other characteristics does the poem share with the music of serious composers, such as Beethoven and Bach?
10. The epigraph to *The Waste Land* features the Sybil, a mythical prophetess, who expresses a death wish. How does this feeling fit into the style and substance of the poem itself? It soon becomes a motif. Cite some instances of this death fixation in the poem. What is the overall effect?



# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## Multiple-Choice Questions

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 1-10:

Read the following passage from “Prufrock” carefully before you choose your answers:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use, 5  
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –  
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old. . . . 10  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me. 15

1. Prufrock’s reference to Shakespeare’s most well-known hero is mostly:  
(A) egotistical.  
(B) intellectual.  
(C) literary.  
(D) ironic.  
(E) tragic.
2. With line 2, Eliot switches to iambic pentameter, Shakespeare’s normal meter. Why?  
(A) To mimic Shakespeare.  
(B) To be more poetic.  
(C) To fit the form to the content.  
(D) To satirize Shakespeare.  
(E) To offer variety to the reader.

3. How many rhymed couplets does the entire passage include?  
(A) Two.  
(B) Three.  
(C) Four.  
(D) Five.  
(E) Six.
4. As often seen in the rest of the poem, this passage includes both traditional and free verse. Why does Eliot mix the two?  
(A) To reflect the economic hardship of the time.  
(B) To show his poetic range.  
(C) To demonstrate Prufrock's literary knowledge.  
(D) To indicate the chaos of modern times.  
(E) To make the poem accessible to the masses.
5. In line 3, "To swell a progress" means  
(A) to contribute to the progress of the kingdom.  
(B) to make a parade a little larger.  
(C) to cause the kingdom's progress to become infected.  
(D) to stick out his chest with pride.  
(E) to illustrate economic and political growth.
6. "Politic" in line 6 refers to  
(A) being politically aware.  
(B) getting out the vote.  
(C) being one of the people.  
(D) advising the prince on political issues.  
(E) pledging to vote for the prince.
7. The "Fool" was another character in a medieval court, the joker. How is Prufrock "at times" like a joker?  
(A) He cracks a few jokes.  
(B) He likes to make people laugh.  
(C) He feels left out and on stage.  
(D) He feels like a card in a deck of cards.  
(E) He tends to goof around.
8. Eliot repeats the word "old" twice in line 10, then re-emphasizes it by rhyming it with "rolled" at the end of line 11. What does this indicate about Prufrock?  
(A) That he is obsessed with aging.  
(B) That he is an old man.  
(C) That he is scared of death.  
(D) That he is middle aged.  
(E) That he is foolish.



12. Extending the metaphor, why does Eliot say the “tent is broken”?
- (A) The “ropes” disappear in the dark.
  - (B) The modern world has ruined the landscape.
  - (C) The edges of the river are blurred by the darkness.
  - (D) The river has flooded over its banks.
  - (E) Some trees have fallen into it.
13. In this passage, Eliot – unlike most writers – describes what cannot be seen: specific bits of debris in the darkened river (“testimony of summer nights”). All of the following are reasons this technique is effective EXCEPT:
- (A) It is surprising.
  - (B) He uses several, varied details.
  - (C) The reader can easily visualize such a polluted river.
  - (D) It adds to the darkness of tone.
  - (E) The language presupposes the imagery.
14. Although he is apparently talking about prostitutes who work near the river, Eliot describes them as “nymphs,” who “are departed,” and the same description is repeated later in the passage for extra emphasis. How do these “nymphs” compare to the mermaids mentioned by Prufrock?
- (A) They are figments of the speakers’ imaginations.
  - (B) They are normally considered mystical, mythical creatures.
  - (C) They are unreachable.
  - (D) They are singing.
  - (E) They allude to Odysseus’ adventures.
15. What do the words “Sermon,” “tent,” and “testimony” have in common?
- (A) They are concrete nouns.
  - (B) They are abstract nouns.
  - (C) They can be associated with jurisprudence.
  - (D) They are all relative concepts.
  - (E) They all have Anglo-Saxon linguistic roots.
16. Leman is another name for Lake Geneva, which is on the border between France and Switzerland, and Eliot wrote the poem while resting in Switzerland. Why do you think he introduces the idea of the lake into this passage about a river that resembles a “dull canal”?
- (A) He was simply thinking of it while he wrote the poem.
  - (B) They are both bodies of water.
  - (C) They are both polluted.
  - (D) The beauty of the lake is an ironic contrast to the ugliness of the river.
  - (E) Both can kill a person.

17. What is the effect of juxtaposing romantic, songlike lyrics with jarring, graphic images, such as that of the rat creeping “softly through the vegetation”?
- (A) The reader can see that both are parts of reality.
  - (B) The reader is shocked into an awareness of ugliness.
  - (C) The reader is involved by means of visualization.
  - (D) The reader may be moved to clean up the river banks.
  - (E) Romantics will be upset and driven away.
18. In the context of the passage, what is the logical meaning of the phrase “chuckle spread from ear to ear” in line 14?
- (A) The speaker is laughing.
  - (B) The image conjures up the grin of a skeleton.
  - (C) The modern world has become a joke.
  - (D) The “rattle of the bones” causes a nervous laugh.
  - (E) The speaker is smiling silently.
19. Gashouses were factories where fuel for heating and lighting was produced; the speaker is fishing in the dark gloominess behind a gashouse. What can you infer about the speaker from these facts?
- (A) He is isolated from the modern world.
  - (B) He is poor and hungry.
  - (C) He is a Christ figure.
  - (D) He is an employee of the gas works.
  - (E) He prefers darkness to light.
20. The original “Fire Sermon” was a part of Buddha’s teaching in which he asks followers to turn away from material things and embrace their spirituality. How does this passage reflect that?
- (A) The things detailed are ugly, unlike the spirit.
  - (B) There is a lot of garbage in the river.
  - (C) The speaker is in need of salvation.
  - (D) Fishing is a metaphor for saving souls.
  - (E) The speaker is sitting in a yoga position.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 21-25:

Read this passage from *The Waste Land* carefully before you choose your answers:

Then spoke the thunder  
DA  
*Datta*: what have we given?  
My friend, blood shaking my heart  
The awful daring of a moment's surrender                      405  
Which an age of prudence can never retract  
By this, and this only, we have existed  
Which is not to be found in our obituaries  
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider  
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor                      410  
In our empty rooms

21. "What the Thunder Said," the title of the last section of *The Waste Land*, is also the title of a riddle from the Upanishads, the answer to which is, "Give, Sympathize, Control." Based on the passage above, in Eliot's opinion, what is his generation giving to the world?
- (A) Sexual freedom.
  - (B) A new understanding of the need to surrender to passion.
  - (C) Nothing important, because they are obsessed with physicality.
  - (D) A great new form of literature.
  - (E) A new religion based on freedom.
22. How could the early 1920s be thought of as "an age of prudence"?
- (A) Experiments with art had little to do with morality.
  - (B) Only intellectuals had sexual freedom.
  - (C) Only the elite were in touch with the realities of change.
  - (D) Most people were still old-fashioned.
  - (E) The American prohibition of alcohol increased moral integrity.
23. This passage is almost purely stream-of-consciousness, with hardly any punctuation or traditional sentence structure. How does the form fit the content?
- (A) It doesn't; the content is too confusing because of the form.
  - (B) The content focuses on unthinking passion.
  - (C) The content is not logical.
  - (D) The speaker seems distracted by passion.
  - (E) The content is completely modern.

24. In line 9, the spider's web is "beneficent" because it
- (A) covers memories that are not all beautiful.
  - (B) drapes mementos to keep them out of the sun.
  - (C) furnishes the spider with food.
  - (D) makes everything look beautiful.
  - (E) makes people forget details.
25. In line 11, the word "empty" is used
- (A) literally.
  - (B) figuratively.
  - (C) concretely.
  - (D) vacuously.
  - (E) candidly.

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS  
With Explanations

1. Prufrock's reference to Shakespeare's most well-known hero is mostly:  
(A) egotistical. The monologue is interior, so he is not impressing anyone.  
(B) intellectual. This answer is too vague.  
(C) literary. It is not "mostly" literary; it is literary on its surface.  
**(D) ironic. This is the main reason for the allusion, as an ironic contrast between Prufrock and Hamlet, one being puny, the other heroic.**  
(E) tragic. There is nothing about the reference that is tragic.
2. With line 2, Eliot switches to iambic pentameter, Shakespeare's normal meter. Why?  
(A) To mimic Shakespeare. There's no evidence for this, no need to mimic.  
(B) To be more poetic. One meter is not "more poetic" than another.  
**(C) To fit the form to the content. This is what Eliot was aiming for, a kind of organic blend between form and content, as happens in many other places in his poetry. "Prufrock" as a whole represents this technique.**  
(D) To satirize Shakespeare. The passage is not satirical, nor was meant to be.  
(E) To offer variety to the reader.
3. How many rhymed couplets does the entire passage include?  
**(A) Two. This is correct: "do/two" (2-3) and "old/rolled" (10-11). The "peach/beach" rhyme (12-13) is a part of a tercet, not a couplet.**  
(B) Three. Other rhyming in the passage is not in the form of couplets.  
(C) Four.  
(D) Five.  
(E) Six.
4. As often seen in the rest of the poem, this passage includes both traditional and free verse. Why does Eliot mix the two?  
(A) To reflect the economic hardship of the time.  
(B) To show his poetic range.  
(C) To demonstrate Prufrock's literary knowledge.  
**(D) To indicate the chaos of modern times. The early twentieth century was a time of chaos and change, with the old order passing gradually and the new order establishing itself, in art and in other areas of the culture.**  
(E) To make the poem accessible to the masses.



5. In line 3, “To swell a progress” means
  - (A) to contribute to the progress of the kingdom.
  - (B) to make a parade a little larger This is the only logical answer.**
  - (C) to cause the kingdom’s progress to become infected.
  - (D) to stick out his chest with pride.
  - (E) to illustrate economic and political growth.
  
6. “Politic” in line 6 refers to
  - (A) being politically aware. This is the only logical answer.**
  - (B) getting out the vote. There was no vote.
  - (C) being one of the people. This is not the meaning of the word in context.
  - (D) advising the prince on political issues. In line 6, Prufrock is imagining his qualities, not his actions.
  - (E) pledging to vote for the prince. One did not vote for princes.
  
7. The “Fool” was another character in a medieval court, the joker. How is Prufrock “at times” like a joker?
  - (A) He cracks a few jokes. This would be out of character.
  - (B) He likes to make people laugh. There is no evidence of this.
  - (C) He feels left out and on stage. Prufrock seems isolated and self-conscious.**
  - (D) He feels like a card in a deck of cards. There is no evidence for this.
  - (E) He tends to goof around. No, he does not; he is overly serious.
  
8. Eliot repeats the word “old” twice in line 10, then re-emphasizes it by rhyming it with “rolled” at the end of line 11. What does this indicate about Prufrock?
  - (A) That he is obsessed with aging. This couplet is one of several indications of his obsession with growing old and its effects on his appearance.**
  - (B) That he is an old man. He is only middle aged.
  - (C) That he is afraid of death. Although, in an earlier passage, he does admit being afraid of death (“the eternal Footman”), lines 10 and 11 alone would not be enough evidence to support this answer.
  - (D) That he is middle aged. This is not a logical answer based on the lines.
  - (E) That he is foolish. Being obsessed with aging does not equate to being foolish.
  
9. What do “the mermaids” in line 14 represent?
  - (A) Sexually attractive women. Mermaids are not technically “women.”
  - (B) Mystical, magical creatures. In mythology, this is exactly what they are.**
  - (C) Parts of the seascape. They are much more than that, yet they do not actually exist like the waves and the sand; they are figments of the imagination.
  - (D) Religious ecstasy. They have never represented this.
  - (E) Music. Though they sing, they have never been symbolic of music.

10. Prufrock does “not think that they will sing to” him, because he is  
 (A) ugly. His appearance would have nothing to do with this.  
 (B) old. His age is also irrelevant.  
 (C) not a sailor. His occupation is not relevant here.  
**(D) unable to surrender to mysticism. This is the best answer, because Prufrock is overly rational and intellectual, not at all mystical. The idea that he hears and sees mermaids is not an indication of mysticism, but rather a sign that he retains some romanticism and imagination alongside his realism and rationality.**  
 (E) spoken for. There is no evidence or logic to support this answer.
11. Line 1 presents a metaphor: “The river’s tent is broken. . . .” In what way does a river at sunset resemble a tent?  
 (A) It is rounded. True, but not like a pup tent.  
**(B) If one looks up the river, it appears triangular. This appears to be the image that Eliot is trying to evoke in the mind of the reader.**  
 (C) It seems tightened down. No, it does not.  
 (D) It is brown. Not all tents are brown, and the river may or may not be.  
 (E) The waves look like ropes. Maybe, but they would not likely resemble the ropes of a tent.
12. Extending the metaphor, why does Eliot say the “tent is broken”?  
 (A) The “ropes” disappear in the dark. Ripples would still reflect light.  
 (B) The modern world has ruined the landscape. No, it has not.  
**(C) The edges of the river are blurred by the darkness. This answer fits with the logic of the metaphor, just as the leaves appear to fade into the banks.**  
 (D) The river has flooded over its banks. There is no evidence of this.  
 (E) Some trees have fallen into it. There is no solid evidence for this answer.
13. In this passage, Eliot – unlike most writers – describes what cannot be seen: specific bits of debris in the darkened river (“testimony of summer nights”). All of the following are reasons this technique is effective EXCEPT:  
 (A) It is surprising.  
 (B) He uses several, varied details.  
 (C) The reader can easily visualize such a polluted river.  
 (D) It adds to the darkness of tone.  
**(E) The language presupposes the imagery. This means essentially nothing.**

14. Although he is apparently talking about prostitutes who work near the river, Eliot describes them as “nymphs,” who “are departed,” and the same description is repeated later in the passage for extra emphasis. How do these “nymphs” compare to the mermaids mentioned by Prufrock?
- (A) They are figments of the speakers’ imaginations.
  - (B) They are normally considered mystical, mythical creatures. Nymphs and mermaids represent romantic, mythological creatures.**
  - (C) They are unreachable.
  - (D) They are singing.
  - (E) They allude to Odysseus’ adventures.
15. What do the words “Sermon,” “tent,” and “testimony” have in common?
- (A) They are concrete nouns.**
  - (B) They are abstract nouns.
  - (C) They can be associated with jurisprudence.
  - (D) They are all relative concepts.
  - (E) They all have Anglo-Saxon linguistic roots.
16. Lemane is another name for Lake Geneva, which is on the border between France and Switzerland, and Eliot wrote the poem while resting in Switzerland. Why do you think he introduces the idea of the lake into this passage about a river that resembles a “dull canal”?
- (A) He was simply thinking of it while he wrote the poem. Eliot was a much more careful and artistic writer than this answer would imply.
  - (B) They are both bodies of water. Again, this is not an artistic reason.
  - (C) They are both polluted. There is no evidence here that the lake is polluted.
  - (D) The beauty of the lake is an ironic contrast to the ugliness of the river. Eliot often used ironic contrasts in his poetry, and nowhere are they more effective than in *The Waste Land*. Lake Geneva is known for its beauty and more than likely helped to calm the nerves of Eliot.**
  - (E) Both can kill a person. True, but this passage is not focused on drowning.
17. What is the effect of juxtaposing romantic, songlike lyrics with jarring, graphic images, such as that of the rat creeping “softly through the vegetation”?
- (A) The reader can see that both are parts of reality. A large part of the modern sensibility was to present bare reality, rats and all, while lyrical passages can act as a balance, can add ironic contrast, or do both.**
  - (B) The reader is shocked into an awareness of ugliness. Most readers are already well aware of ugliness, so there is no need to “shock” them into awareness.
  - (C) The reader is involved by means of visualization. True, but this involvement could be accomplished with the graphic images alone.
  - (D) The reader may be moved to clean up the river banks. Eliot was not an environmentalist, and his poetic aims were not so immediately utilitarian.
  - (E) Romantics will be upset and driven away. There was no need to drive anyone away, so this answer is not logical.

18. In the context of the passage, what is the logical meaning of the phrase “chuckle spread from ear to ear” in line 14?
- (A) The speaker is laughing. There is no evidence for this idea.
  - (B) The image conjures up the grin of a skeleton. This is another figurative reference to the recent war and its casualties, which is on the speaker’s mind and “at [his] back,” in the sense it is history. He imagines the “rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear,” as in a grotesque picture of a skeleton, the word “chuckle” matching “rattle” in its horrible auditory imagery.**
  - (C) The modern world has become a joke. No, it has not.
  - (D) The “rattle of the bones” causes a nervous laugh. There is no evidence of this.
  - (E) The speaker is smiling silently. There is no logic or evidence for this answer.
19. Gashouses were factories where fuel for heating and lighting was produced; the speaker is fishing in the dark gloominess behind a gashouse. What can you infer about the speaker from these facts?
- (A) He is isolated from the modern world. On the contrary, he is participating in it by contemplating it and commenting on it.
  - (B) He is poor and hungry. There is no evidence for this.
  - (C) He is a Christ figure. There is little or nothing to point to this concept.
  - (D) He is an employee of the gas works. There is no evidence for this.
  - (E) He prefers darkness to light. Clearly he has chosen this position for his fishing, perhaps because he wants time to think, which is usually easier when one is alone in the darkness. The scene also adds to the dark tone.**
20. The original “Fire Sermon” was a part of Buddha’s teaching in which he asks followers to turn away from material things and embrace their spirituality. How does this passage reflect that?
- (A) The things detailed are ugly, unlike the spirit. This is the best answer because Eliot seems to be calling attention to the striking difference between what is (garbage and prostitutes) and what could be (beauty and mysticism, symbolized by the lake and the nymphs).**
  - (B) There is a lot of garbage in the river. One would naturally turn away from garbage, so this is not all the “material” that Eliot is concerned with.
  - (C) The speaker is in need of salvation. Perhaps, but nothing here indicates that he has renounced material things to pursue it.
  - (D) Fishing is a metaphor for saving souls. True, but not in the Buddhist belief system.
  - (E) The speaker is sitting in a yoga position. There is no evidence of this.

21. “What the Thunder Said,” the title of the last section of *The Waste Land*, is also the title of a riddle from the Upanishads, the answer to which is, “Give, Sympathize, Control.” Based on the passage above, in Eliot’s opinion, what is his generation giving to the world?
- (A) Sexual freedom. There is no real indication of this concept. Moreover, he is belittling the sex act, not valorizing it.
  - (B) A new understanding of the need to surrender to passion. Just the opposite would seem to be what Eliot is showing: that passion by itself is insignificant.
  - (C) Nothing important, because they are obsessed with physicality. Exactly, and this is one of the main themes of the entire poem; several passages show the essential emptiness of purely physical contact.**
  - (D) A great new form of literature. While this may be true, the passage does not point to this idea.
  - (E) A new religion based on freedom. Freedom is not significant in and of itself.
22. How could the early 1920s be thought of as “an age of prudence”?
- (A) Experiments with art had little to do with morality. Actually many of them had a great deal to do with morality, but few of them focused on prudence.
  - (B) Only intellectuals had sexual freedom. This is balderdash.
  - (C) Only the elite were in touch with the realities of change. Again, nonsense.
  - (D) Most people were still old-fashioned. While high-profile artists such as Eliot did make some waves, the majority of people still held on to their old beliefs. As anthropologist and social critic Marshall McLuhan once wrote, “We march backwards into the future.”**
  - (E) The American prohibition of alcohol increased moral integrity.
23. This passage is almost purely stream-of-consciousness, with hardly any punctuation or traditional sentence structure. How does the form fit the content?
- (A) It doesn’t; the content is too confusing because of the form. On the contrary, this passage is one of the easiest to understand.
  - (B) The content focuses on unthinking passion. Because of the content, the form is highly appropriate; punctuation would get in the way of the free flow of passion, which is the main focus here, along with its consequences.**
  - (C) The content is not logical. Actually the content is mercilessly logical.
  - (D) The speaker seems distracted by passion. Not really; the commentary is clear.
  - (E) The content is completely modern. This answer is too vague.

24. In line 9, the spider's web is "beneficent" because it
- (A) covers memories that are not all beautiful. True: the "draping" of one's memories with a uniform cover that only partially obscures them would seem to be beneficial in the sense that the jagged edges would be blurred.
  - (B) drapes mementos to keep them out of the sun. This is nonsense.
  - (C) furnishes the spider with food. While this is true, the focus is not on the spider but on the memories.
  - (D) makes everything look beautiful. Spider webs are rarely thought of that way.
  - (E) makes people forget details. This is another answer that makes no sense.
25. In line 11, the word "empty" is used
- (A) literally.
  - (B) figuratively.
  - (C) concretely.
  - (D) vacuously.
  - (E) candidly.

# *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

## ADVANCED PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

### STUDY GUIDE TEACHER'S COPY

#### **Prufrock: Epigraph**

1. In Dante's *Inferno*, a character called Count Guido da Montefeltro, who is in the eighth (next-to-lowest) circle of hell, thinks that Dante is one of the dead. The count says to him, "If I thought my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy." What does this epigraph mean in terms of Prufrock himself?

*He may believe that others are as spiritually and emotionally "dead" as he is, so rather than engage in a significant dialogue, he focuses on his internal monologue, closed within himself, just as shut off from the world as those in hell. Indeed, he lives in a kind of self-imposed hell.*

2. What could the epigraph mean in terms of Eliot's opinion of his audience?

*For Eliot, the modern world was fragmented and superficial, compared to the solidity of the Old World, where beliefs tended to be constant, where art was more substantial, and where human relationships were based on firm emotional ground. The epigraph may point to his concern that his generation, and the modern world in general, was no longer capable of engaging in deep spiritual and emotional commitments. In a way, then, he is insulting the readers by insinuating that they are essentially "dead" inside.*

#### **Prufrock: First Section (down to the first line of dots)**

1. Since this poem is an interior monologue, who is the "you" in "you and I"?

*Although there is evidence later on that Prufrock is interacting with a female companion, here he is probably referring to his alter ego, or other self, the "audience" for his words.*

2. What do you think the “overwhelming question” is?

*During Prufrock’s meeting with his lady friend, it could well be a marriage proposal, but here, before the woman is introduced, it most likely a bigger one: the meaning of life. (In a larger sense, the word “visit” two lines later could be a metaphor for earthly existence or a “visit” to reality from Prufrock’s normal existence in a kind of dream world. At the end of the poem, he mentions “human voices” waking him and causing him to “drown.”)*

3. What is the significance of the Michelangelo refrain to the overall poem?

*The couplet points to the superficiality of the modern world and to the ironic contrast between the gad-fly socialites and the great, devoted artist about whom they are chatting.*

4. In the stanza about “yellow fog,” Eliot makes the setting fairly clear. Where and when does the “action” of the poem probably occur?

*When one thinks of a large, foggy city where tea, toast, and marmalade are served (as later mentioned) and where Shakespeare is often discussed, one thinks of London, which is where Eliot settled down shortly after the poem was published in 1915. Another clue is that the English spelling for “etherised” has been used. Clearly the time of year is the fall, because Prufrock specifically says it is “a soft October night.”*

5. In the stanza where Prufrock worries about what others will say about him, what do their imagined questions point up?

*The hair, arms, and legs tend to grow “thin” as one moves from middle age into old age, so the questions emphasize his concern with growing old and his self-consciousness in general.*

6. In the next-to-last stanza of this section, to what is Prufrock comparing himself when he imagines himself pinned to the wall?

*In collections of insects, such as butterflies, they used to be pinned to a board for display.*

7. How does the repetition of questions – such as “how should I presume?” – add to our understanding of the speaker’s character?

*Prufrock is hesitant, self-questioning; he is not self-confident. His self-esteem is low.*



## Prufrock: Second Section

1. What is the significance of Prufrock's mentioning lonely men?

*He seems to be considering asking his lady friend to marry him by beginning with an explanation of how he has noticed other men who are lonely like him.*

2. Why does Prufrock wish he had been a crab under the ocean?

*This sudden expression of despair and self-loathing comes from his apparent belief in the ultimate failure of his quest and his disgust with his lack of courage. Essentially he is wishing he were a lower life form, literally the "lowest" kind of scavenger.*

## Prufrock: Third Section

1. One of the charms of the poem is that it includes comic relief, even though the humor is as dark as the overall tone. For example, the following line includes some humor as well as an allusion: "Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter. . . ." To what famous biblical character is Prufrock referring and how does the allusion deepen the tone of the poem?

*John the Baptist was beheaded and his head was presented on a platter. Just as Eliot has done with Michelangelo and as he does later with Hamlet, he is providing a heavily ironic contrast between the inconsequential, hesitant Prufrock and the important, deeply committed martyr. Such irony darkens the tone because it helps us see the huge gap between the sometimes-glorious past and the seemingly devolving modern age, where men and women in Prufrock's social circle come and go without much being fully considered, except superficial appearances.*

2. Who is "the eternal Footman"?

*Obviously Death. As Emily Dickinson had written in the previous century, "Because I could not stop for Death, he kindly stopped for me." At least Prufrock is being honest with himself when he admits he is afraid of dying.*

3. In the next stanza, there is another biblical reference, this time to Lazarus. In what sense would Prufrock be coming "from the dead" if he had the courage to ask an "overwhelming question"?

*If he declared his love and his desire to marry the woman he is talking about, he would no longer be "dead" in the sense of being emotionally numb and noncommittal. Of course, he would be taking the enormous risk of hearing her say, "That is not what I meant at all. . . ."*

4. There are actually two Lazaruses in the New Testament. The Gospel of Luke, chapter 16 includes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus who both die. The rich man goes to hell, Lazarus to Heaven. When the rich man asks for Lazarus to bring him a drink, Father Abraham refuses. When the rich man asks to send Lazarus back to life to warn other rich people of their fates, Father Abraham replies that the rich have already been warned.

The Gospel of John, chapter 11 relates the episode of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead.

To which Lazarus is Eliot probably alluding?

*Oddly, it doesn't seem to matter. The line reads, "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come to tell you all, I shall tell you all." The Lazarus in Luke does indeed have something to tell, but is not allowed to return from the dead to tell it. John's Lazarus does indeed return from the dead, but apparently has nothing to tell. In either case, the attempt or desire to relate something of importance is thwarted.*

5. To what is Prufrock referring when he mentions "a magic lantern"?

*Early slide and motion-picture projectors were referred to this way, but rather than an entertaining film, Prufrock self-consciously imagines his "nerves in patterns on a screen." This is a striking visual image of his nervousness and indecision.*

#### **Prufrock: Fourth (Final) Section:**

1. Although the allusion to Hamlet is meant as an ironic contrast, what traits does Prufrock actually share with the Danish prince?

*Most importantly he is indecisive; he allows circumstances to decide things for him. Another characteristic he shares with Hamlet is his sense of loneliness and isolation. Furthermore, when Prufrock hits the depth of his despair, saying that he should have been a crab rather than a man, he is echoing Hamlet's despair when Shakespeare's hero is considering suicide ("To be or not to be").*

2. What does "Full of high sentence" mean?

*Prufrock is able to be superficially, ostensibly intellectual, using long words and puffed-up sentences, though he admits he is "a bit obtuse."*

3. Eliot ends the poem with a brilliant flash of colorful imagery, as he describes Prufrock's dreaming of the mermaids. In the final stanza, to whom does "we" refer?

*Again, as in the opening stanza, Prufrock is referring to himself and his alter ego. Thus, the poem ends as it began, with the main character alone with his thoughts.*

4. In what sense would he "drown" when "human voices" awaken him from his dream?

*Someone as self-conscious and socially impaired as Prufrock would probably find any lengthy attention from others suffocating, as it would force him to interact, actually doing and saying things, which could be dangerous for his fragile ego.*

5. What effect do the internal and external rhymes have in the last two stanzas?

*These are the most lyrical, musical stanzas in the poem because of the expert use of rhyme as well as alliteration. When read aloud, they are almost hypnotic, and they perfectly reflect the dreamy quality of the content.*

### **The Waste Land: Epigraph**

1. From *Satyricon* by Petronius, the epigraph is translated as follows: "For with my own eyes I saw the Sibyl hanging in a jar at Cumae, and when the boys said to her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she replied, 'I want to die.'" The Sibyl was a mythical fortune-teller who was immortal but still grew older. How does her desire to end her suffering set the tone for the poem?

*The speakers are all either dead or in pain. The Waste Land focuses on the emptiness and despair of people living what many of them saw as a meaningless existence in a world where spirituality had all but disappeared, sinking beneath the weight of scientific facts and theories. This is a frightening, transitional place where the past still beckons with fond memories, but the present is emotionally painful, and the future is uncertain. According to poet Matthew Arnold (in "Dover Beach"), the modern world was like "a darkling plain." Eliot echoes this feeling throughout The Waste Land.*

## The Waste Land: Section I

1. Throughout the poem, Eliot presents different speakers with diverse origins and unique points of view. American poet Edgar Lee Masters had done this more traditionally in 1915 in *Spoon River Anthology*, a collection of short “speeches” from those buried in the local cemetery (published the same year as “Prufrock”), and Dante had used a similar narrative style in his *Inferno*. What are the effects of such a multiple-voice technique in *The Waste Land*?

*One of the reasons the poem has remained a popular, modern classic is that it speaks to so many people on so many levels. It was the first truly international poem, in that it presents a cosmopolitan collection of characters, includes several languages, and was soon made available to readers all over the world in a wide variety of translations. Eliot’s use of several speakers also adds to the depth of the poem: unlike “Prufrock,” The Waste Land has higher ambitions and a much broader scope. Another effect is that readers may feel bombarded by the random thoughts and feelings of strangers in a strange land, so that readers may become as disoriented as some of the characters. Thus, readers may become emotionally similar to the characters and more personally involved in the poem.*

2. What are some ways in which “April is the cruellest month”?

*For the speaker, it mixes “memory and desire,” reminding her of a rejuvenating passion she is probably no longer capable of feeling. Springtime also melts the “forgetful snow,” which, like the web of “the beneficent spider” near the end of the poem, tends to cover or at least smooth the sharp edges of painful memories.*

3. In line 12, the speaker, Marie, says in German, “I’m not Russian; I come from Lithuania, a true German,” and she has mentioned the Starnbergersee, a lake close to Munich, and the Hofgarten, which is a park in that city. How would you describe her personality?

*She seems nostalgic, lonely, and isolated, spending much of her time reading alone or remembering happier times.*

4. The German lines in this stanza (31-34 and 42) are from Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, and both refer to the sea and sailing. After the first burst of German here, the speaker seems to change personalities and become romantic and nostalgic. Perhaps the section includes two different speakers. What is Eliot trying to do with such a confusing presentation?

*The modern world itself was confusing and often disheartening to those making the transition from Old World values, so the form fits the content. Eliot seems to be deliberately disorienting the reader with differing speakers and sudden shifts to different languages. "Welcome to a wildly diverse world where nothing is solid or comforting," he seems to say, "a world where salvation is like a teasing mirage, and where fear and pain are almost constant, no matter where you live." The last line in the stanza translates as follows: "Empty and waste is the sea." This is not going to be an easy, happy journey for the readers, but it will likely be a worthwhile, enriching one.*

5. In the stanza that introduces Madame Sosostris, there is a mixture of abstract and concrete language, as in lines 49-50: "the Lady of the Rocks, / The lady of situations." How does such a mixture of the figurative and the literal reflect a tarot card reading or a horoscope?

*Both of these methods of fortune telling involve linking specific, "real" images or things (stars) with life and "situations" that are supposedly in the future. They both rely on the common human desire to intermingle magic with reality so that reality will not be so harsh. Again, Eliot's use of language causes confusion, yet has a seductive effect, too.*

6. In the same stanza, we see the use of foreshadowing. As Eliot's note tells us, "The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the 'crowds of people', and Death by Water. . . ." How does foreshadowing involve the reader and thus deepen the emotional effect of literature?

*Readers have certain expectations, and one of these is that there will usually be some kind of meaningful repetition included in what they're reading or viewing. (Repetition is a means of emphasizing and identifying symbols, for example.) Foreshadowing plants an idea or character in the mind; then later when the recurrence happens, there is an echo in the synapses, the closing of a mental circle, causing an emotional-psychological bond between the reader and the work.*

7. The speaker in the stanza beginning “Unreal City” is most definitely dead: his reference to being “in the ships at Mylae” indicates that he fought in the Punic Wars (260 B.C.). Do you think the other speakers in this first section of the poem are also dead? Why or why not?

*Well, the section is entitled “The Burial of the Dead,” so in a sense Eliot is burying them, giving them a final, eternal resting place in his poem. There are several other clues. For example, Madame Sosostris sees “crowds of people, walking round in a ring,” which is an obvious allusion to Dante’s Inferno, and all of the speakers at some point sound like those in Masters’s Spoon River Anthology, especially in the passage about “the hyacinth girl.”*

## **The Waste Land: Section II**

1. How does a game of chess resemble a romantic relationship? In what way does this comparison further the theme of the poem? Try to state the theme in a sentence.

*All relationships, according to psychologist Alfred Adler and others, are based on power struggles, and there is always one partner who has the upper hand, at least for a while. There are certain strategies and “moves” that people make to establish, continue, and conclude relationships. However, this is rather a cold, cynical way to look at love, the modern version of which Eliot does indeed present as cold, cynical, and either too cerebral or overly physical, neither variety offering the sanctuary and salvation that romance promises. The theme of the poem might be: “Because of the uncertainty, fear, and emotional-spiritual emptiness of the modern world, people have become numb or ‘dead,’ and their focus has shifted from genuine emotion and spirituality to superficiality, games, and other secular amusements.”*

2. In line 82, what “Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra”? What literary device is being used here? How is it extended in line 84?

*In line 78, “the glass” is mentioned. This is a very elaborate mirror framed by artistic metalwork that includes cupid-like figures and “fruited vines.” The metaphor implies that the room is brightened (the light “doubled”) by the reflection of tapers in large candelabra. The metaphor is extended by other light imagery: “The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it” (“it” being the reflection on the table of the candles’ reflection in the mirror).*

3. How does the setting help develop the character of the woman in the scene?

*She is presented as rich and regal, as are her surroundings, yet her perfumes are “strange” and “synthetic.” They cause her partner’s sense of smell to be “troubled, confused / And drowned. . . .” (Note the continuing motif of drowning.) Ultimately the woman herself seems “strange” and “synthetic.” Later, in lines 108-110, we see that she has red, “fiery” hair that presents a threatening image, especially when it is “savagely still.”*

4. In what way does the characters’ conversation (or her silent imagination of their conversation) delineate their relationship?

*The woman is demanding: “Speak. . . . Think. . . . You know nothing?” The man seems dejected and sardonic, even sarcastic: “I think we are in rats’ alley. . . . Nothing again nothing.” Apparently their relationship is one in which they barely tolerate each other.*

5. To what do you think Eliot is referring with the metaphorical line “Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door” (138)?

*Although the characters are trying to escape reality by means of socializing and playing games, they cannot “close their eyes”; they are painfully aware. The “knock upon the door” probably symbolizes Death waiting relentlessly, “savagely still,” like the woman’s fire-colored hair, awaiting his time to call on them.*

6. After reading the stanza beginning with line 139, what do you think “demobbed” means in context?

*It is British slang for “demobilized.” In other words, Albert has been discharged from the army following World War I, and he is coming home to his wife, Lil.*

7. “HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME” is what they say in British pubs when closing time is near. How does this fully capitalized, unpunctuated phrase add to the impact and meaning of the stanza?

*There is a sense of urgency and impersonality about this routine, repeated warning, which adds tension to a scene that is already tense, and on a literal level, it tells the reader that the scene is set in a pub. On a figurative level, Eliot is reinforcing the idea that he has indicated at the end of the previous stanza: everyone’s time on earth is limited and finite.*

8. Interpret the following passage: “It’s them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. / (She’s had five already, and nearly died of young George.) / The chemist said it would be alright, but I’ve never been the same.”

*Lil is saying that she took some chemicals from the druggist to cause a miscarriage or induce an abortion because she did not want a sixth child, and that the drugs caused her to appear older than she is.*

9. Compare and contrast the two main female characters in section II (the redhead and Lil).

*The first is rich, aggressive, neurotic, and paranoid; her attitude discourages sex and deep romantic involvement. The second is lower-class, realistic, and doing her best to get along in a world dominated by the rules and desires of men; like the rich woman, she seems to want to avoid the emotional and sexual complications of her relationship with a man. But unlike the first woman, the second has physical reasons, and she is firmly committed to her marriage and to her love for her husband. However, both seem trapped in their individual, threatening situations, one because of nervous problems, the other because of physical limitations.*

### **The Waste Land: Section III**

1. Based on Buddha’s sermon that urges a forsaking of earthly passions and possessions, how does this section thematically connect to the previous two?

*Section I shows the emptiness and “deadness” of modern life. Section II shows the impossibility of rejuvenation by means of romance or sex – an overemphasis on intellectuality and possessions killing all hope in the first stanza, then a vulgar focus on the physical aspects of love killing romance in the second stanza. Section III goes even further to show that the fleshly pleasures of earth do nothing to calm or heal the pain and anxiety that have become integral parts of modern life. Moreover, we see such pleasures conversely adding to such discomfort rather than easing it. Romance has died alongside religion, leaving humankind in a stifling desert where “burning,” the last word in this section, seems the only real possibility. Again one sees Eliot’s implied allusion to Dante’s Inferno.*



2. What is the irony in Eliot's use of the refrain from Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion*, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century poem in celebration of marriage ("Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song")?

*In the Old World, marriage represented a sacred spiritual and emotional refuge, a safe haven from the rigors of harsh reality. Such quaint notions, like vine-covered cottages, seem alien when placed among the ugly, urban refuse and philosophical wrangling of the modern world. Eliot's chief literary device throughout the poem is ironic contrast, placing the harshness and stress of the present alongside the beauty and peace of the past (and possibly the future, depending on how people react to the changes wrought by the modern age). However, *The Waste Land* is much more pessimistic than optimistic.*

3. Rats are often featured in *The Waste Land*, and Prufrock wishes he had been a crab. What do these creatures have in common, and what characteristics do they share with Eliot as a writer?

*Rats and crabs are scavengers, living on whatever is available, and neither creature is ever portrayed as beautiful or romantic. Eliot often uses bits and pieces from other literature to create his poetry, which may be "beautiful" in a modern sense but which includes images (such as garbage) and events (such as illicit sex) that would previously have been thought of as "unpoetic." His poetry is anti-romantic and brutally realistic.*

4. How do Actaeon and Diana (in Eliot's note for line 197) compare to Sweeney and Mrs. Porter? What is the purpose of this implicit comparison?

*Again there is an ironic contrast, this time between mythical creatures having a romantic encounter and British commoners who are characters in a vulgar ballad.*

5. The last line of the first stanza is a quote from French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine: "And O those children's voices singing in the dome." This resembles the ending of section I (line 76), where Eliot quotes another Symbolist poet, Charles Baudelaire. In addition to paying tribute to these poets, whom Eliot admired, what is the significance of Symbolist poetry to *The Waste Land*?

*The Symbolist movement of the late nineteenth century had popularized "vers libre" or free verse as a poetic form, but their content was criticized because of its ugliness and harsh images. Thus, Eliot is writing in the Symbolist tradition, as he embraces decadence, morbidity, and the imagination as integral parts of modern reality and as acceptable material for poetry.*

6. Line 206 consists of “Tereu.” What does this refer to? (See Eliot’s notes for lines 99-100.) How does it contribute to the tone of the section?

*It is a truncation of Tereus, the name of the king who “raped Philomela, his wife’s sister, and cut out her tongue” in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, referred to in Eliot’s note for lines 99-100. The truncation is a device that seems to indicate that the speaker cannot bear to say the full name of such a monster. Section III is primarily concerned with the damaging effect of passion, and its tone is very dark, tinged by overt sensuality, carnality, and vulgarity. Tereus’s deeds fit well with and contribute significantly to this tone.*

7. In his note for line 218, Eliot claims that Tiresias “is . . . the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest.” How does Tiresias do that? In what way is he an appropriate symbol for the modern age?

*As Eliot says, the mythical prophet combines both male and female characteristics in a creature who is blind but who can “see,” who understands the suffering of people caught in a meaningless existence with little hope of escape or a cure for their pain, because this also describes his life. He is immortal but is tired of seeing. Like the Sybil at the beginning of the poem, he would prefer death to eternal misery. He is thus a good symbol for those modern people who have shut off their emotions and their souls in favor of a kind of death in life, an existence that centers on ephemeral, empty pleasures, which ironically result in an inability to fully experience pleasure or participate in life.*

8. In the stanza beginning “At the violet hour,” how is the young man characterized?

*He is “carbuncular,” which means he has a bacterial skin infection such as acne; he is a small man, but he is bold; he is passionate but selfish. (During the sex act, “His vanity requires no response. . . .”)*

9. What literary devices does Eliot use in lines 216-217? How do the results fortify the overall theme?

*He metaphorically compares people to engines in line 216, then uses a simile to compare them to waiting taxis in the next line. He is implying that people have become as “dead” as metal machines, like robots.*

10. Beginning with line 292, the speaker is shockingly Queen Elizabeth I, describing a liaison with the Earl of Leicester. How would you describe her point of view?

*She is candid and realistic, to the point of being vulgar. She is certainly not romantic: “He wept. He promised ‘a new start.’ / I made no comment. . . .” She might be considered admirable for thinking of her “humble people.”*

11. Eliot chooses to end this wildly varied section with a simple, meaningful word: “burning,” appropriate for a poetic treatment of “The Fire Sermon.” Find and list other effective examples in this section of his use of the other three basic elements: earth, wind, and water.

*Realism in art is always “grounded,” firmly connected to existence, and Eliot carefully fits his poem into this tradition, as well as that of symbolism. For example, his inclusion of the polluted river, the “unheard” wind, and “the brown land” in the first stanza is a perfect example of his use of basic elements to symbolize abstract ideas. Not only do modern people seem blind to pollution and the ugliness of the wasted land, but they seem deaf to the wind, which could stand for a coming storm or the whisper of death.*

### **The Waste Land: Section IV**

1. What does the sailor’s name, Phlebas, remind you of? Why do you think Eliot chose this name?

*It sounds like Phoebus, another name for Apollo, god of the sun, so it could be another example of ironic contrast (a common sailor permanently under the sea as opposed to an immortal god in the sky or on Mount Olympus). Such a contrast would point again to the pessimistic concept of the impossibility of redemption and rebirth in the modern age. Phlebas could also be based on the Greek prefix “phleb,” having to do with a blood vessel or vein, as in the disease phlebitis, which is the inflammation of a vein. This meaning would also point to the physicality of human life.*

2. Phlebas’s death is foreshadowed in section I, when Madame Sosostris pulls the card featuring “the drowned Phoenician Sailor,” and later says, “Fear death by water.” Why does Eliot choose a Phoenician in both cases?

*Ironically the ancient Phoenicians were known for their expert navigation. He seems to be saying that no matter how expert you are, death still awaits you, and you can still be fooled by circumstances or overpowered by nature. Another reason for his choice may be to point out that the human condition has not changed since ancient times, even though philosophy and science have.*

3. What is the tone of this short section? Of what does it remind you?

*The tone is cautionary. It sounds like a biblical parable or sermon, especially with its old-fashioned language (“a fortnight dead” and “O you who turn the wheel,” for example). Here again Eliot is echoing Spoon River Anthology in his tone and content. It is interesting to note that both Edgar Lee Masters and T. S. Eliot were born and raised in the Midwest in the late nineteenth century. Spoon River Anthology was still quite popular at the time Eliot was writing The Waste Land.*

## The Waste Land: Section V

1. “What the Thunder Said” is a Hindu fable from the Upanishads. Thus, within the space of fifteen lines (going back to line 309), Eliot has referred to four different religions. What are they and why would he include them in a modernist poem?

*Eliot’s notes specifically say that he is alluding to Buddhism and Christianity (St. Augustine); Judaism is mentioned in section IV; and this section’s title comes from Hinduism. Moreover, the beginning of section V reflects the story of Jesus’ suffering, trial, and crucifixion. These and Eliot’s other religious references add to the cosmopolitan feeling of the poem, but more importantly they contrast with the unleavened physicality and secularity of most of the characters, who represent the spiritual emptiness of modern times.*

2. In this section, we have moved deeply into the “territory” of the “Waste Land,” a place where “one can neither stand nor lie nor sit.” What would such a place necessarily have to be?

*Unlivable, uncomfortable, metaphorical, or all of these. The dry, rocky, sterile modern world is represented here by a physical place.*

3. In line 349, what is the “Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit”?

*Apparently it is a cave or jagged hole in the stony mountain; “carius” means decayed, which adds to the darkly uncomfortable tone of this stanza.*

4. From line 331 to 359, Eliot presents a heavily repetitious mantra, or meditation, on the lack of water in this imaginary land. What does water normally symbolize?

*Life and/or salvation, as in the baptismal ritual, and refreshment – so it is appropriately lacking in the desert-like Waste Land.*

5. In both “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*, Eliot employs the internal monologue, seen here, for example, in lines 360-366, where the speaker seems to address his alter ego in asking, “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” The third creature or person is “wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded.” Who could it be?

*In the New Testament (Luke 24), appears the story of two disciples who suddenly discover a third man walking with them from Jerusalem to Emmaus; the man turns out to be Jesus, risen from the dead. However, since the color brown consistently symbolizes death in *The Waste Land*, we can assume that, again, Eliot is referring to the omnipresence of death in the modern world. His echoing of a biblical story is yet another example of ironic contrast. Eliot, strictly raised as a Protestant Christian, was very familiar with the Bible, and later in his life returned to the serenity of the church. At the time of his writing this poem, however, he had rejected religion as simply one more option that falsely offered hope.*

6. What is the significance of the cities listed in the next stanza: Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London?

*They were/are all great centers of civilization, but there are other connotations: Jerusalem brings to mind Judaism and Christianity; Athens points to the Greeks, their culture, and their mythology; in Alexandria a large, important library burned, thus destroying some of the works of Aristotle and other great writers; Vienna was where Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalysis, one of the most influential modern “sciences”; and, of course, London was the birthplace of English-speaking culture and literature. All of them, Eliot is suggesting, are equally subject to ruin, decay, and destruction.*

7. Identify the literary devices and their effects in the following passage (lines 380-384):

And bats with baby faces in the violet light  
Whistled, and beat their wings  
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall  
And upside down in air were towers  
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours. . . .

*Alliteration and assonance are used powerfully here, as are repetition and rhyme. The effects are grotesque and hypnotic at the same time. As in other places in the poem, Eliot brings off a very difficult feat: the hauntingly beautiful and poetic description of horrible, ugly scenes and hellish environments.*

8. Water finally appears in the form of rain in line 395, and the setting suddenly changes to India and the Ganges River (“Ganga”). Himavant is one of the Himalayan Mountains. What is the reason for the change of setting?

*India is the birthplace of Hinduism, which includes the Upanishads as one of its sacred books, and “What the Thunder Said” is a symbolic fable from that book. The suddenness of the change is a part of the disorientation/fragmentation motif.*

9. When the thunder “speaks,” whose voice is heard by Hindus?

*The thunder is the voice of the Creator, and according to Eliot’s note, the commands “Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata” mean “Give, sympathise, control.”*

10. In line 403, to whom does “My friend” refer? What is the effect on the tone and meaning?

*While it is possible that this is another internal monologue and that the words refer to the speaker’s alter ego, “My friend” appears more likely to be directly addressing the reader, the modern peer. This appeal draws the reader in; it makes the tone more open and the poem more accessible. The meaning thus becomes more clear and more of a shared “discovery.” The reader and speaker can be melancholy together.*

11. How would “Thinking of the key . . . [confirm] a prison” (line 415)?

*If one imagines being locked in, then one is essentially locked in. As Freud said, “If you think you’re sick, you’re sick.” Eliot is pointing to the isolation and alienation of modern people within their individual prisons.*

12. Why does Eliot allude to Coriolanus, one of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, who was exiled from Rome, then joined in a battle against Rome?

*Modern man seems exiled within himself, in “a prison” of his own making. Like Coriolanus, he is an alien creature in a familiar world.*

13. What does setting one’s “lands in order” signify?

*It is part of the preparation for death. The speaker is getting ready to face the inevitable.*

14. In lines 428 and 429, Eliot again quotes Dante, but this time from *Purgatorio*: “Then he hid himself in the fire that refines them.” To whom do you think “he” refers, and in what sense is he hiding “himself in the fire”?

*Probably “he” refers to the speaker who is preparing to meet death. In the meantime, he will engage in earthly pleasures, referred to by Buddha as a burning fire.*

15. Line 429 ends with “O swallow swallow,” which is part of an ancient Latin poem (*Pervigilium Veneris*) that refers to the myth of Philomela, as Eliot also does in sections II and III; plus it is another instance of bird imagery. Cite a couple of other examples. Why are birds important to the theme of this poem?

*A rooster is referred to in line 392, dramatically outlined by lightning. In line 357, a hermit-thrush is featured, and Eliot’s note calls attention to the “purity and sweetness” of the bird’s song. A nightingale appears in line 100. Unlike earthbound humans, birds represent freedom and the ability to sing even in the presence of desolation. Birds are also a common symbol for the soul or spirit.*

16. The passage from line 427 to the end of the poem is literally a series of fragments, which the speaker self-reflectively refers to in line 431: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." Moreover, much of the entire poem is composed of fragments, whether taken from literary and religious works or written by Eliot. The poem is a pastiche or collage. How does this form fit the content?

*Eliot's primary focus is the fragmentation of the modern world and the modern mind, a chaotic uncertainty that leads to fear and alienation.*

17. Eliot translates the closing of the poem, a thrice-repeated Hindu word used to close a Upanishad, as "The Peace which passeth understanding." Earlier in the section, he has moved from quoting Dante's *Inferno* to quoting from his *Purgatorio*. In what way could these facts be read as positive or hopeful?

*For one thing, they are not altogether negative and nihilistic, like most of the poem. In his mind, the speaker seems to have moved from hell to purgatory, and he recognizes that there may exist somewhere a peace that is detached from or independent of rational thought.*

18. How does the world described in *The Waste Land* relate to our current world? Compare and contrast them.

*There has been a renewed emphasis on religion, though some have committed and are committing horrendous acts in the name of their religions. The emphasis on intellectual pursuits seems to have given way to an even more exaggerated zeal for the physical, as witnessed in the huge popularity of sports and the ever-increasing mass appeal of sexually based entertainment and advertisements. One could say that today's world is far more religious while at the same time far more debased and vulgar than that of *The Waste Land*. [Students will have a wide array of answers for this closing discussion question, which aims to connect them to their culture and to literature simultaneously.]*

## *Prufrock and The Waste Land*

# ADVANCED PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

STUDY GUIDE  
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## Prufrock: Epigraph

1. In Dante's *Inferno*, a character called Count Guido da Montefeltro, who is in the eighth (next-to-lowest) circle of hell, thinks that Dante is one of the dead. The count says to him, "If I thought my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy." What does this epigraph mean in terms of Prufrock himself?
2. What could the epigraph mean in terms of Eliot's opinion of his audience?



**Prufrock: First Section (down to the first line of dots)**

1. Since this poem is an interior monologue, who is the “you” in “you and I”?
2. What do you think the “overwhelming question” is?
3. What is the significance of the Michelangelo refrain to the overall poem?
4. In the stanza about “yellow fog,” Eliot makes the setting fairly clear. Where and when does the “action” of the poem probably occur?

5. In the stanza where Prufrock worries about what others will say about him, what do their imagined questions point up?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. In the next-to-last stanza of this section, to what is Prufrock comparing himself when he imagines himself pinned to the wall?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How does the repetition of questions – such as “how should I presume?” – add to our understanding of the speaker’s character?

**Prufrock: Second Section**

1. What is the significance of Prufrock’s mentioning lonely men?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why does Prufrock wish he had been a crab under the ocean?

### **Prufrock: Third Section**

1. One of the charms of the poem is that it includes comic relief, even though the humor is as dark as the overall tone. For example, the following line includes some humor as well as an allusion: “Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter. . . .” To what famous biblical character is Prufrock referring and how does the allusion deepen the tone of the poem?
2. Who is “the eternal Footman”?
3. In the next stanza, there is another biblical reference, this time to Lazarus. In what sense would Prufrock be coming “from the dead” if he had the courage to ask an “overwhelming question”?
4. There are actually two Lazaruses in the New Testament. The Gospel of Luke, chapter 16 includes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus who both die. The rich man goes to hell, Lazarus to Heaven. When the rich man asks for Lazarus to bring him a drink, Father Abraham refuses. When the rich man asks to send Lazarus back to life to warn other rich people of their fates, Father Abraham replies that the rich have already been warned.

The Gospel of John, chapter 11 relates the episode of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead.

To which Lazarus is Eliot probably alluding?

5. To what is Prufrock referring when he mentions “a magic lantern”?

**Prufrock: Fourth (Final) Section:**

1. Although the allusion to Hamlet is meant as an ironic contrast, what traits does Prufrock actually share with the Danish prince?
2. What does “Full of high sentence” mean?
3. Eliot ends the poem with a brilliant flash of colorful imagery, as he describes Prufrock’s dreaming of the mermaids. In the final stanza, to whom does “we” refer?
4. In what sense would he “drown” when “human voices” awaken him from his dream?
5. What effect do the internal and external rhymes have in the last two stanzas?

### **The Waste Land: Epigraph**

1. From *Satyricon* by Petronius, the epigraph is translated as follows: “For with my own eyes I saw the Sibyl hanging in a jar at Cumae, and when the boys said to her, ‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she replied, ‘I want to die.’” The Sibyl was a mythical fortune-teller who was immortal but still grew older. How does her desire to end her suffering set the tone for the poem?

## The Waste Land: Section I

1. Throughout the poem, Eliot presents different speakers with diverse origins and unique points of view. American poet Edgar Lee Masters had done this more traditionally in 1915 in *Spoon River Anthology*, a collection of short “speeches” from those buried in the local cemetery (published the same year as “Prufrock”), and Dante had used a similar narrative style in his *Inferno*. What are the effects of such a multiple-voice technique in *The Waste Land*?
2. What are some ways in which “April is the cruellest month”?
3. In line 12, the speaker, Marie, says in German, “I’m not Russian; I come from Lithuania, a true German,” and she has mentioned the Starnbergersee, a lake close to Munich, and the Hofgarten, which is a park in that city. How would you describe her personality?
4. The German lines in this stanza (31-34 and 42) are from Richard Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*, and both refer to the sea and sailing. After the first burst of German here, the speaker seems to change personalities and become romantic and nostalgic. Perhaps the section includes two different speakers. What is Eliot trying to do with such a confusing presentation?

5. In the stanza that introduces Madame Sosostris, there is a mixture of abstract and concrete language, as in lines 49-50: “the Lady of the Rocks, / The lady of situations.” How does such a mixture of the figurative and the literal reflect a tarot card reading or a horoscope?
6. In the same stanza, we see the use of foreshadowing. As Eliot’s note tells us, “The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the ‘crowds of people’, and Death by Water. . . .” How does foreshadowing involve the reader and thus deepen the emotional effect of literature?
7. The speaker in the stanza beginning “Unreal City” is most definitely dead: his reference to being “in the ships at Mylae” indicates that he fought in the Punic Wars (260 B.C.). Do you think the other speakers in this first section of the poem are also dead? Why or why not?

## **The Waste Land: Section II**

1. How does a game of chess resemble a romantic relationship? In what way does this comparison further the theme of the poem? Try to state the theme in a sentence.
2. In line 82, what “Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra”? What literary device is being used here? How is it extended in line 84?
3. How does the setting help develop the character of the woman in the scene?
4. In what way does the characters’ conversation (or her silent imagination of their conversation) delineate their relationship?
5. To what do you think Eliot is referring with the metaphorical line “Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door” (138)?



6. After reading the stanza beginning with line 139, what do you think “demobbed” means in context?
7. “HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME” is what they say in British pubs when closing time is near. How does this fully capitalized, unpunctuated phrase add to the impact and meaning of the stanza?
8. Interpret the following passage: “It’s them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. / (She’s had five already, and nearly died of young George.) / The chemist said it would be alright, but I’ve never been the same.”
9. Compare and contrast the two main female characters in section II (the redhead and Lil).

### The Waste Land: Section III

1. Based on Buddha's sermon that urges a forsaking of earthly passions and possessions, how does this section thematically connect to the previous two?
2. What is the irony in Eliot's use of the refrain from Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion*, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century poem in celebration of marriage ("Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song")?
3. Rats are often featured in *The Waste Land*, and Prufrock wishes he had been a crab. What do these creatures have in common, and what characteristics do they share with Eliot as a writer?
4. How do Actaeon and Diana (in Eliot's note for line 197) compare to Sweeney and Mrs. Porter? What is the purpose of this implicit comparison?
5. The last line of the first stanza is a quote from French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine: "And O those children's voices singing in the dome." This resembles the ending of section I (line 76), where Eliot quotes another Symbolist poet, Charles Baudelaire. In addition to paying tribute to these poets, whom Eliot admired, what is the significance of Symbolist poetry to *The Waste Land*?

6. Line 206 consists of “Tereu.” What does this refer to? (See Eliot’s notes for lines 99-100.) How does it contribute to the tone of the section?
7. In his note for line 218, Eliot claims that Tiresias “is . . . the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest.” How does Tiresias do that? In what way is he an appropriate symbol for the modern age?
8. In the stanza beginning “At the violet hour,” how is the young man characterized?
9. What literary devices does Eliot use in lines 216-217? How do the results fortify the overall theme?
10. Beginning with line 292, the speaker is shockingly Queen Elizabeth I, describing a liaison with the Earl of Leicester. How would you describe her point of view?
11. Eliot chooses to end this wildly varied section with a simple, meaningful word: “burning,” appropriate for a poetic treatment of “The Fire Sermon.” Find and list other effective examples in this section of his use of the other three basic elements: earth, wind, and water.

## The Waste Land: Section IV

1. What does the sailor's name, Phlebas, remind you of? Why do you think Eliot chose this name?
2. Phlebas's death is foreshadowed in section I, when Madame Sososttris pulls the card featuring "the drowned Phoenician Sailor," and later says, "Fear death by water." Why does Eliot choose a Phoenician in both cases?
3. What is the tone of this short section? Of what does it remind you?

## The Waste Land: Section V

1. “What the Thunder Said” is a Hindu fable from the Upanishads. Thus, within the space of fifteen lines (going back to line 309), Eliot has referred to four different religions. What are they and why would he include them in a modernist poem?
2. In this section, we have moved deeply into the “territory” of the “Waste Land,” a place where “one can neither stand nor lie nor sit.” What would such a place necessarily have to be?
3. In line 349, what is the “Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit”?
4. From line 331 to 359, Eliot presents a heavily repetitious mantra, or meditation, on the lack of water in this imaginary land. What does water normally symbolize?

5. In both “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*, Eliot employs the internal monologue, seen here, for example, in lines 360-366, where the speaker seems to address his alter ego in asking, “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” The third creature or person is “wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded.” Who could it be?
6. What is the significance of the cities listed in the next stanza: Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London?
7. Identify the literary devices and their effects in the following passage (lines 380-384):
- And bats with baby faces in the violet light  
Whistled, and beat their wings  
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall  
And upside down in air were towers  
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours. . . .
8. Water finally appears in the form of rain in line 395, and the setting suddenly changes to India and the Ganges River (“Ganga”). Himavant is one of the Himalayan Mountains. What is the reason for the change of setting?

9. When the thunder “speaks,” whose voice is heard by Hindus?
10. In line 403, to whom does “My friend” refer? What is the effect on the tone and meaning?
11. How would “Thinking of the key . . . [confirm] a prison” (line 415)?
12. Why does Eliot allude to Coriolanus, one of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, who was exiled from Rome, then joined in a battle against Rome?

13. What does setting one's "lands in order" signify?
14. In lines 428 and 429, Eliot again quotes Dante, but this time from *Purgatorio*: "Then he hid himself in the fire that refines them." To whom do you think "he" refers, and in what sense is he hiding "himself in the fire"?
15. Line 429 ends with "O swallow swallow," which is part of an ancient Latin poem (*Pervigilium Veneris*) that refers to the myth of Philomela, as Eliot also does in sections II and III; plus it is another instance of bird imagery. Cite a couple of other examples. Why are birds important to the theme of this poem?
16. The passage from line 427 to the end of the poem is literally a series of fragments, which the speaker self-reflectively refers to in line 431: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." Moreover, much of the entire poem is composed of fragments, whether taken from literary and religious works or written by Eliot. The poem is a pastiche or collage. How does this form fit the content?



17. Eliot translates the closing of the poem, a thrice-repeated Hindu word used to close a Upanishad, as “The Peace which passeth understanding.” Earlier in the section, he has moved from quoting Dante’s *Inferno* to quoting from his *Purgatorio*. In what way could these facts be read as positive or hopeful?
18. How does the world described in *The Waste Land* relate to our current world? Compare and contrast them.

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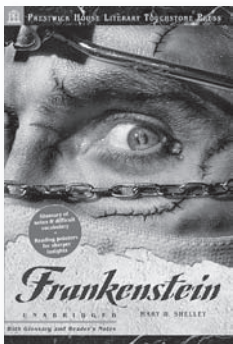
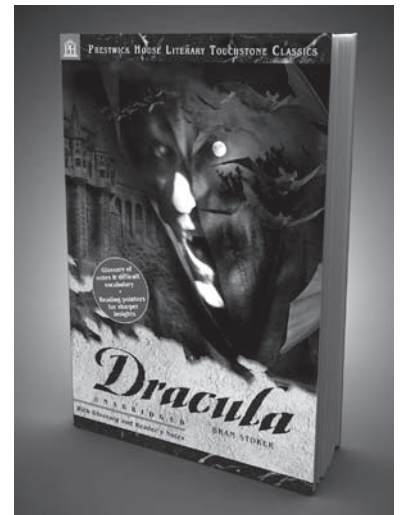
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