

Chrysalids Reading Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1:

1. The city David dreams about contains images with which he is not familiar. Name at least three.
2. What is David's eldest sister's name?
3. From where does David's sister say his dreams may come?
4. How does David feel about the city he sees in his dream?
5. What two words does David use to describe what he and Rosalind have in common?
6. Since this book is set in the future after a nuclear holocaust, what then is "the bank, coming round in a wide curve, and then running straight as an arrow towards the distant hills"? (
7. What happens to Sophie while playing with David?
8. What important information is revealed about Sophie's foot?
9. What is the image of God as decreed by Waknuk society? Quote directly
10. David gives an indication of special abilities in reference to Mrs. Wender. What are these abilities?
11. What secret must David keep?
12. Why are Sophie's toes of such concern?

Chapter 2:

1. How old is David's house?
2. Who built this house?
3. Describe the materials from which this house is built.
4. Explain the words: "My grandfather appeared to have been a man of somewhat tediously unrelieved virtue. It was only later that I pieced together a portrait that was more credible, if not more creditable" (tediously - tiresome, annoying; credible - believable; creditable - good)
5. How did Ellas's wife react to her marriage?
6. What are two of Joseph's occupations?
7. Quote two of the axioms hanging in Joseph's house.
8. What is an Offence?
9. How is the problem of an Offence solved?
10. What are human deviations called?
11. How does Joseph Storm react to deviations?
12. What is the Wild Country?
13. What are the Fringes?
14. What are the Badlands?
15. Give a description of Uncle Axel. Give at least three details.

Chapter 3:

1. Describe David's schooling.

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2. What is significant about the steam engine?
3. Who are the Old People?
4. Why does John Wender regard David with suspicion?

Chapter 4:

1. What Information does Uncle Axel discover about David?
2. David becomes aware of something during his conversation with Uncle Axel. What is it?
3. What does David notice about one of the captured Fringe leaders?
4. Choose a quotation from page 34 that describes Joseph's reaction to this man.
5. Why does Angus want the Great Horses?
6. Describe the size of the horses.
7. Where is Waknuk located?
8. What is the author and title of the book that survived Tribulation?
9. What other book survived from the time of the Old People? (
10. What are Ethics?

Chapter 5:

1. Who sees the different footprint on the rock?
2. Why does Sophie hit Alan?
3. What do the Wenders decide to do?
4. How does Mrs. Wender feel about David?
5. What does Mrs. Wender do that is unfamiliar to David?
6. What does Mr. Wender ask David to do?
7. How does the inspector attempt to help David?
8. How does Joseph persuade David to tell where Sophie is?

Chapter 6:

1. Of what does David attempt to convince the other telepaths?
2. What does the inspector bring with him? Why?
3. How are the Wenders found? (
4. What are Uncle Axel's views about running away?
5. According to Uncle Axel, why do people become angry at new Ideas?
6. What do sailors say about sailing to the East?
7. Describe some of the strange things sailors have seen.
8. Describe the area where nothing grows.
9. What probably has caused the damage the sailors have seen there?

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10. In real life, what sea are the sailors referring to?
- 11 .What does Uncle Axel say about the "true image"?
12. What does Uncle Axel learn from David?

Chapter 7:

1. Why is no mention made of Petra's birth?
2. What cause is there for concern with regards Petra's inspection?
3. What is the punishment for having three babies who do not pass inspection?
4. Why does Aunt Harriet visit David's mother at this time?
5. How does David's mother respond to Harriet's request?
6. What does Harriet do as a result?

Chapter 8:

- 1 .About what does David begin to worry as he converses with Uncle Axel?
2. Quote the lines that contain Uncle Axel's advice to David.
3. Wyndham is presenting his own views through the lecture Uncle Axel gives to David. What are Wyndham's views here?
- 4 .What does Uncle Axel say makes a man?
5. Who are the other members of David's special group?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of education according to David?

Chapter 9:

- 1.What is the first hint that Petra is not ordinary? Quote the lines from the text.
2. How are Petra's communications different from everyone else's?
3. About what does David dream this time?
4. What does Old Jacob advise doing with any deviation?
5. Why does Old Jacob believe that deviations are increasing in number?

Chapter 10:

1. Give two reasons why Anne's marriage is frightening to the group.
2. How do the members of the group feel about marriage to a norm? Quote a line from the text that supports your claim.
3. Why is Uncle Axel worried about Anne being in love with a norm?
4. How does Uncle Axel suggest they deal with Anne?
- 5 . Why can David and Rosalind not see each other openly?
6. What happens to Alan? What happens to Anne?
7. What fortunate accident regarding Anne's letter prevents the group from being exposed?

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Chapter 11:

1. What two forbidden things does Petra do?
2. Why is the strength of Petra's call dangerous to the group?
3. What causes Petra to call for help?
4. How does David greet the stranger?
5. What is the stranger's name?
6. What makes the man suspicious of the group?
7. What does the group decide that they cannot do?
8. How does David determine that Petra can receive thought-shapes?
9. What new information does Petra give the group?
10. Who is Joe Darley? Why is he asking questions?
11. What did Anne do before she died that endangered the group?
12. What did Uncle Axel do as a result? Outline the situation.
13. What other information is provided about banishment to the Fringes?
14. What do David and the group decide to do to Petra if necessary?

Chapter 12:

1. What causes the group's flight?
2. Who is best planned for the escape?
3. What has Rosalind brought with her? How is this symbolically appropriate?
4. Who assists Rosalind in her escape? What are David's thoughts about this news?
5. With whom are Rosalind, David and Petra communicating for information?
6. What do we know about the guns used in Waknuk?
7. What does Rosalind do that she finds to be traumatic?
8. What is happening to Sally and Katherine?
9. About what are the authorities most upset regarding the group?
10. What advantage do the telepaths have over normal people?
11. What does Petra mention for the second time?
12. From where are the thought pictures coming?
13. Why does David know about this land?
14. What technique does Wyndham use to end his chapters?

Chapter 13:

1. What area have the three travellers reached?
2. Who or what is most important right now? Why is this the case?
3. What had happened to Sally and Katherine?
4. David explains to Petra why people hurt other people. Quote the lines.
5. What does Petra tell David about Sealand?

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6. What happens to David at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 14:

1. Explain the difference between the external Rosalind and the "real" one.
2. Who has captured the group?
3. Where do the Fringe people think the Devil dwells?
4. After listening to the Fringes man, David observes that all people think they know God's truth. What does the man mean by saying "life is change"?
5. What does the Fringes man mean by "they try to strangle the life out of Life"?
6. Who are the New People?
7. Why do the Sealanders believe they are superior to the Old People?
8. How does the spider-man introduce himself to David?
9. What does the spider-man intend to do with Rosalind?

Chapter 15:

1. Why did David say Sophie's clothes were "almost indecent"?
2. What is the relationship between Gordon and Sophie?
3. Describe Sophie's cave.
4. Who is the last of the original group still communicating with the refugees?
5. What two groups are soon to converge on the Fringes area where David and friends are?
6. What did Sophie mean when she says to David, "This is the Fringes"?
7. How did Sophie free the girls?

Chapter 16.

1. Why did Sophie become angry with Rosalind?
2. Who comforted Sophie?
3. Where is Michael?
4. Where is Rachel?
5. What is a "behind think"?
6. Who - does Petra ask Michael - is pursuing David and Petra?
7. Quote the lines that express David's conflicted feelings about his father.
8. What does the Sealander woman say about the future of Waknuk and others like it?
9. What idea does she express that repeats the ones of the Fringes man in chapter 14?
10. For whom was the spider-man looking? For what reason?
11. How were you to escape the power of the strands coming from the ship?

Note: The Sealanders' arrival and rescue of David and company is an example of a "deus ex machina" ending, or literally, "god out of a machine". This theatrical device, often used in Greek tragedy, involved a god appearing to solve the problems of the main characters. The god arrives

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from the sky and externally solves the problems of the play. Often the god takes the protagonist into his machine and the two return to the heavens together. The protagonist is then granted immortality.

Chapter 17:

- 1 . How did the Sealand lady get rid of the deadly filaments?
2. Describe the Sealand woman.
- 3 . What "holy" imagery is associated with the Sealand woman?
4. What bad news does the Sealand woman give?
5. How many of the fighters are alive?
6. The Sealand woman speaks about the Fringes people being condemned to a life of "squalor and misery", with "no future for them". The reader then learns that the Sealanders consider themselves to be the current "lords of life". What does she say will eventually happen even to them?
7. What do Michael and Rachel decide to do?
8. Give a few details about the city in Sealand the travellers reach.
9. What is the "buzzing" the travellers hear as they approach the city?
10. Would you describe the ending of this book as hopeful, hopeless or something in between? Explain your answer.
- 11 Explain briefly why John Wyndham chose to title this novel The Chrysalids. See the note below. Note: "The word chrysalid is a biological term which means the state into which the larva of most insects pass before becoming a perfect insect. In this state the larva, wrapped in a hard sheath or case, takes no food and is inactive. In general usage the word can mean a sheltered state or stage of being or growth. Thus, as with all good titles, the reader of The Chrysalids is left to extend this definition so as to apply it in a suitable way to the novel itself " (W.J. Holt, from the 1965 House of Grant edition)

The Chrysalids: Questions for Analysis and Discussion

Part One: Life in Waknuk (Chapters 1- 4)

1. Compared to our society, the one that David lives in seems both familiar and unusual. Compare the similarities and differences in terms of speech, climate and geography, laws and customs (e.g. offenses and blasphemies,) and farming and other occupations.
2. What information can you glean about David's family history? Consider both the mother and the father.
3. How does the incident with Sophie (initially and later) suggest why David might be a person who will question things as they are?
4. According to David, only two books have survived from earlier times: The Bible and Nicolson's repentance's. Read the novel and identify what the major tenants of the two books are. (Refer to pages 12-13 of the novel)
5. How are the two books similar? Consider which account is followed in Waknuk.
6. Indicate the ways in which they differ. Focus on the personality of God, the actual words used, the place of woman in creation, etc. Which account does our society appear to follow?

7. The word “chrysalid” means a state into which the larvae of most insects pass before becoming perfect insects. The chrysalid takes in no food and is inactive. In general, the word can mean a sheltered state of growth. IF we use this definition as a description of life in Waknuk, what are the people sheltering themselves from? What is the “perfect state” they are trying to achieve?

8. In the first few chapters, are the residents of Waknuk getting closer or further away from perfection? There is evidence for both sides, so be sure to have this in your answer.

9. David has two dreams: a happy one of a fabulous city (pg. 7) and a nightmare (pg. 30). What are some of the things he finds appealing in the happy dream?

10. What does he make of this recurrence? With what people does he share his dream? How does he do so?

11. Suggest why Uncle Axel is concerned about David and his friends. Review details of Waknuk society, its fears and beliefs.

12. What does David’s nightmare suggest about his nature and character? What are the dangers he may have to face.

The Chrysalids: Questions for Analysis and Discussion **Part II: Death in Waknuk (Chapters 5-11)**

1. Uncle Axel's Geography lesson and talks with David in chapters 6 and 8 extend our knowledge of the geography of Labrador and well beyond. Although he uses names that are unfamiliar to us, what familiar area does he seem to be describing? Give details. In your opinion, what could have possibly happened to that area?
2. Why do you think that some parts of the world have been affected differently than others? Develop a scale or a system to help you to rate the parts of the world most adversely affected.
3. In what ways does Uncle Axle's lesson help explain the fanatic beliefs of the people of Labrador and Waknuk? Are you more sympathetic to them now?
4. What hints are we given about the origins of the Fringes? Why might Marther's journal be upsetting to Mr. Storm in particular? (Refer to pages 61)
5. Even though Uncle Axel does not believe the religious version of the "Tribulation" held by those in Waknuk, he is still puzzled by what did happen and why. What is he trying to tell David about "the quality of mind" pgs. 80-83, and his (David's) possible role in the evolution of society?
6. In these chapters, we see the results of the beliefs and the laws of Waknuk in stark and human terms. Many things we would consider "rights" such as: personal freedom, the natural love between mother and child, the simple pleasures of peer friendships, and family joys, are cut short by the need for purification and perfection. For each of the following examples, write one point explaining how one or more of these "rights" has been violated:
(See following page)

- The purging of the Wenders (ch 5)
- Petra's birth and Aunt Harriet's visit (ch 7)
- David's realization of his "mutancy" (pg. 80)
- Petra's accident (pgs. 86-88)
- Old Jacobs opinion (pgs. 90-92)
- Romance- David and Rosalind
- Anne and Alan (ch 10)
- Petra and the Creature (ch 11)
- Uncle Axel's admission (pg. 121)

7. Allowing for the strict laws and their purposes in Waknuk, could any of the injustices or cruelties illustrated above have been avoided? Could they at least have been dealt with more fairly and humanely? Give your views and reasons.

8. How many of the cruelties and injustices are due as much to character of the individuals involved as to the absolute need for purification? Remember as old Jacob said, "Mutants used to be burned." Give examples and explain.

9. Even up to Chapter 11, and despite many tragic events, David and his group are not really active rebels or even dangerous non-conformists. Rather they behave more like normal young people who possess one exceptional gift, that of telepathy. Referring to the events and statements in these chapters, show to what extent you agree with this assessment.

10. Describe carefully the exact nature of the gift- uses, limits, and types. At this point, are you inclined to agree with Uncle Axel's view of its purpose or those of the Waknuk elders? (Before deciding, discuss the possible dangers in any society of such advancement of human development; e.g. what if five of your classmates had the gift and the rest didn't?)

11. At this point (Chapter 11) as the need for decisive action increases, do you feel that David's human qualities will be a positive or negative factor in his taking on a leadership role within the group.

The Chrysalids: Questions for Analysis and Discussion
Part III: To the Fringes and the Brave New World
(Chapters 12-17)

1. At last, we gradually begin to see the real “Fringes” and get hints about the rest of the world out there. Describe the nature and the quality of life among the “Fringe People” as David and the others meet them.
2. In your opinion, what is the most inhumane aspect of the lives the Fringe people have been doomed to by the laws of Labrador? Would they be better off having been burnt as in the old days? Focus on Sophie and Spider Man.
3. To what degree was uncle Axel right in his guesses about what happens to the natural world in the fringes and its possible effect on the future? Do you now see Waknuk’s beliefs in a softer light?
4. Why do you think that the men of Waknuk are pursuing the group so far and so desperately?
5. From the information in chapters 12 to 16, reconstruct what may have happened at Tribulation to various parts of the world. What “good” appears to have come out of destruction and deviation?
6. Despite their fear and the horrors around them, David and his group manage to display many of the humane and natural qualities so obviously lacking in Waknuk: love, loyalty, courage, and individual responsibility. Illustrate, with reference to David, Rosalind and Michael, the qualities of character they display.

7. How much of her former humanity has Sophie left? What do you feel about her actions and motives in the final chapters of the novel?

8. From what you have learned about Sealand, are people like David and Rosalind likely to prosper there? Carefully review the motives for the Sealander's rescue mission; compare their treatment of Petra and Michael.

9. What is the significance of the Sealander's attitudes towards the slain people? Connect your response to their apparent views of humanity's future.

10. From listening to the woman from Sealand, David has concerns about it even before going to this "Brave New World". What are they? Are the Sealanders more or less technologically advanced than the people of Waknuk? Are they as violent? What form do their battles take as opposed to those between the Fringes and Waknuk?

11. Is Sealand or Waknuk more likely to cause another tribulation? Is either of them a perfect society? For example, do they share some of the same faults, beliefs and hopes? Give your considered opinion after reviewing Uncle Axel's notions about humanity's evolution and the discussion between Petra and the woman from Sealand.

12. Reflect on the novel and consider the following and final question. Which society are we most like? Are we the "Old People" that David's group wants to be like? What do you think John Wyndam's novel is telling us about our future? (It was published in 1955, so think of its historical context.)