

Questions for “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”

Note: These are just to guide your reading. You might want to jot down some thoughts to relate during discussion, but I won't collect them.

1. This is a strange story in several ways, but the first one you might notice is that there isn't really a **plot**. This is about what *happens* (the status quo), not what *happened* (an incident). If you were to begin a story proper (an incident) where Le Guin leaves off, what might you write about? What plot lines does this description of a society open up?
2. Another odd thing about this piece is the **narrative voice**. At some points the voice seems omniscient (as when it tells us how the horses feel about the festival), but at other points it admits uncertainty, hazards opinions, and speculates about the attitude of the reader. Note places where the voice draws attention to itself in these ways. What is the effect of these shifts? How do you feel about this voice? Judged, challenged, understood? Do the assumptions the narrator makes about its audience's likely attitudes--toward the festival, toward the townspeople, toward the notion of human happiness--seem apt for our times?
3. Consider the **setting**, another important element in the story that is somewhat shifting. The opening description sounds vaguely pre-industrial, with horses instead of cars, though the indecisive narrator concedes that subways and washing machines might be allowable. Then she offers some other alternatives for those who might find the first scene too “goody-goody”: drugs and orgies. Are these concessions to individual tastes enough, or do you think the whole project—imagining utopia—is doomed for some (most?) people?
4. To get a grasp of the **theme** in this story, you need to examine the conflict. What is it? (Hint: It's a *moral* conflict, an apparent dilemma, a paradox.) How do you think you would handle the conflict? What do you think the narrator wants us to see as the right decision? Why? Do you think this simply an intellectual exercise to define our contemporary idea of utopia, or an indictment of society, an indictment of human nature, or what?