

Theme Questions

Isolation

1. Do you think the Lady of Shalott escapes her isolation by the end of the poem?
2. Does the magic mirror make her seem more isolated or less? Does that little bit of contact with the world make things worse or better?
3. Is it better to die or to live the rest of your life alone? Do you think the Lady faces up to that choice? Does she basically commit suicide?
4. Do you think the fact that the lady spends her days working alone is a metaphor for the place of women in English society?

Man and the Nature World

1. What if you took all the stuff about flowers and islands and rivers out of this poem? Could you still tell this story?
2. Do you think the Lady misses contact with other people or with the natural world? Is it a little bit of both?
3. Is there a natural image from this poem that really sticks in your head? If so, what do you think makes it do that?
4. Is the Lady more a part of the human or the natural world?

Art and Culture

1. Does it make sense to call the Lady an artist? Do you have to be free in order to make art? What other terms might you use for her?
2. Some people think this poem is about the lonely life of the artist, shut away from the world. Does that make sense to you, or does it seem like making something out of nothing?
3. Both the Lady and Lancelot are singers. Does the poem treat their songs differently? Do we learn anything about them through their songs?
4. Is Lancelot, with all his shiny armor, jewels and painted shield, a kind of living work of art? How about the Lady with her name written on her boat, on display for the people of Camelot?

The Supernatural

1. Why don't we learn more about the curse? Would the poem be better if it had more back-story, like a wicked queen who casts a spell or something like that?
2. Is the magic web meant to seem evil and scary, or is it a symbol of the Lady's power and skill?
3. Does all this stuff with magic spells and King Arthur seem a little nerdy to you? Do you kind of love it? Shmoop welcomes all poetry dorks. We understand, trust us.
4. The reapers call her the "fairy Lady of Shalott." Do you think she herself has magic powers, or is she just trapped by them?

Love

1. Why doesn't the poem directly mention the Lady's love for Lancelot?
2. Do you think Lancelot falls in love with the Lady at the end? What does his final speech mean to you?
3. Would you call this a love story? What other names could you use for it? Basically, is love the most important theme here?
4. Did you ever risk anything major for love? Do you sympathize with the Lady's decision?