

SHORT READINGS
for
DEMONSTRATION DISCUSSIONS
and FIRST MEETINGS

(May be copied)

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THE LOVE OF READING

Virginia Woolf

At this late hour of the world's history, books are to be found in every room of the house—in the nursery, in the drawing room, in the dining room, in the kitchen. And in some houses they have collected so that they have to be accommodated with a room of their own. Novels, poems, histories, memoirs, valuable books in leather, cheap books in paper—one stops sometimes before them and asks in a transient amazement what is the pleasure I get, or the good I create, from passing my eyes up and down these innumerable lines of print?

Reading is a very complex art—the hastiest examination of our sensations as a reader will show us that much. And our duties as readers are many and various. But perhaps it may be said that our first duty to a book is that one should read it for the first time as if one were writing it. One should begin by sitting in the dock with the criminal, not by mounting the bench to sit among the Judges. One should be an accomplice with the writer in his act, whether good or bad, of creation. For each of these books, however it may differ in kind and quality, is an attempt to make something. And our first duty as readers is to try and understand what the writer is making from the first word with which he builds his first sentence to the last with which he ends his book. We must not impose our design upon him; we must not try to make him conform his will to ours. We must allow Defoe to be Defoe and Jane Austen to be Jane Austen as freely as we allow the tiger to have his fur and the tortoise to have his shell. And this is very difficult. For it is one of the qualities of greatness that it brings Heaven and earth and human nature into conformity with its own vision.

The great writers thus often require us to make heroic efforts in order to read them

rightly. They bend us and break us. To go from Defoe to Jane Austen, from Hardy to Peacock, from Trollope to Meredith, from Richardson to Rudyard Kipling is to be wrenched and distorted, to be thrown violently this way and that. And so, too, with the lesser writers. Each is singular; each has a view, a temperament, an experience of his own which may conflict with ours. But must be allowed to express itself fully *If* we are to do him justice. And the writers who have most to give us often do most violence to our prejudices, particularly if they are our own contemporaries, so that we have need of all our imagination and understanding if we are to get the utmost that they can give us.

But reading, as we have suggested, is a complex art. It does not merely consist in sympathizing and understanding. It consists, too, in criticizing and in judging. The reader must leave the dock and mount the bench. He must cease to be the friend; he must become the judge. And this second process, which we may call the process of afterreading, for it is often done without, the book before us, yields an even more solid pleasure than that which we receive when we are actually turning the pages. During the actual reading new impressions are always canceling or completing the old. Delight, anger, boredom, laughter succeed each other incessantly as we read. Judgment is suspended, for we cannot know what may come next. But now the book is completed. It has taken a definite shape. And the book as a whole is different from the book received currently in several different parts. It has a shape, it has a being. And this shape, this being, can be held in the mind and compared with the shapes of other books and given its own size and smallness by comparison with theirs.

But if this process of judging and deciding is full of pleasure it is also full of difficulty. Not much help can be looked for from outside. Critics and criticism abound, but it does not help us greatly to read the views of another mind when our own is still hot from a book that we have just read. It is after one has made up one's own opinion that the opinions of others are most illuminating. It is when we can defend our own judgement that we get most from the judgement of the great critics-the Johnsons, the Drydens, and the Arnolds. To make up our own minds we can best help ourselves first by realizing the impression that the book has left as fully and sharply as possible, and then by comparing this impression with the impressions that we have formulated in the past. There they hang in the wardrobe of the mind-the shapes of the books we have read, like clothes that we have taken off and hung up to wait their season. Thus, if we have just read say *Clarissa Harlowe* for the first time we take it and let it show itself against the shape that remains in our minds after reading *Anna Karenina*. We place them side by side and at once the outlines of the two books are cut out against each other as the angle of a house (to change the figure) is cut out against the fullness of the harvest moon. We contrast Richardson's prominent qualities with Tolstoy's. We contrast his indirectness and verbosity with Tolstoy's brevity and directness. We ask ourselves why it is that each writer has chosen so different an angle of approach. We compare the emotion that we felt at different crises of their books. We speculate as to the difference between the eighteenth century in England and the nineteenth century in Russia-but there is no end to the questions that at once suggest themselves as we place the books together.

Thus by degrees, by asking questions and answering them, we find that we have decided that the book we have just read is of this kind or that, has this degree of merit

or that, takes its station at this point or at that in the literature as a whole. And if we are good readers we thus judge not only the classics and the masterpieces of the dead, but we pay the living writers the compliment of comparing them as they should be compared with the pattern of the great books of the past.

Thus, then, when the moralists ask us what good we do by running our eyes over these many printed pages, we can reply that we are doing our part as readers to help masterpieces into the world. We are fulfilling our share of the creative task-we are stimulating, encouraging, rejecting, making our approval and disapproval felt; and are thus acting as a check and a spur upon the writer. That is one reason for reading books-we are helping to bring good books into the world and to make bad books impossible. But it is not the true reason. The true reason remains the inscrutable one-we get pleasure from reading. It is a complex pleasure and a difficult pleasure; it varies from age to age and from book to book. But that pleasure is enough. Indeed that pleasure is so great that one cannot doubt that without it the world would be a far different and a far inferior place from what it is. Reading has changed the world and continues to change it. When the day of judgement comes therefore and all secrets are laid bare, we shall not be surprised to learn that the reason why we have grown from apes to men, and left our caves and dropped our bows and arrows and sat round the fire and talked and given to the poor and helped the sick-the reason why we have made shelter and society out of the wastes of the desert and the tangle of the jungle is simply this-we have loved reading.

Interpretive Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Woolf call reading a "complex art"?
2. Why does Woolf think that reading is pleasurable, if she thinks it does "violence" to our prejudices?
3. Why does Woolf say that readers have many "duties" to books?
4. Why does Woolf say that when we read we are doing our part to bring good books into the world?
5. Why does Woolf think it is "inscrutable" that the true reason we read is that we get pleasure from it?
6. Why does Woolf believe that it is a love of reading that has made us grow from apes to human beings?

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THE TWO BROTHERS

Leo Tolstoy

Two brothers set out on a journey together. At noon they lay down in a forest to rest. When they woke up they saw a stone lying next to them. There was something written on the stone, and they tried to make out what it was.

"Whoever finds this stone," they read, "let him go straight into the forest at sunrise. In the forest a river will appear; let him swim across the river to the other side. There he will find a she-bear and her cubs. Let him take the cubs from her and run up the mountain with them, without once looking back. On top of the mountain he will see a house, and in that house he will find happiness."

When they had read what was written on the stone, the younger brother said:

"Let us go together. We can swim across the river, carry off the bear cubs, take them to the house on the mountain, and together find happiness."

"I am not going into the forest after bear cubs," said the elder brother, "and I advise you not to go. In the first place, no one can know whether what is written on this stone is the truth-perhaps it was written in jest. It is even possible that we have not read it correctly. In the second place, even if what is written here is the truth-suppose we go into the forest and night comes, and we cannot find the river. We shall be lost. And if we do find the river, how are we going to swim across it? It may be broad and swift. In the third place, even if we swim across the river, do you think it is an easy thing to take her cubs away from a shebear? She will seize us, and instead of finding happiness, we shall perish, and all for nothing. In the

fourth place, even if we succeeded in carrying off the bear cubs, we could not run up a mountain without stopping to rest. And, most important of all, the stone does not tell us what kind of happiness we should find in that house. It may be that happiness awaiting us, there is not at all the sort of happiness we would want."

"In my opinion," said the younger brother, "you are wrong. What is written on the stone could not have been put there without reason. And it is all perfectly clear. In the first place, no harm will come to us if we try. In the second place, if we do not go, someone else will read the inscription on the stone and find happiness, and we shall have lost it all. In the third place, if you do not make an effort and try hard, nothing in the world will succeed. In the fourth place, I should not want it thought that I was afraid of anything."

The elder brother answered him by saying: "The proverb says: 'In seeking great happiness small pleasures may be lost.' And also: 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' "

The younger brother replied: "I have heard: 'He who is afraid of the leaves must not go into the forest.' And also: 'Beneath a stone no water flows.' "

Then the younger brother set off, and the elder remained behind.

No sooner had the younger brother gone into the forest than he found the river, swam across it, and there on the other side was the she-bear, fast asleep. He took her cubs, and ran up the mountain without looking back. When he reached the top of the mountain the people came out to meet him with a carriage

to take him into the city, where they made him their king.

He ruled for five years. In the sixth year, another king, who was stronger than he, waged war against him. The city was conquered, and he was driven out.

Again the younger brother became a wanderer, and he arrived one day at the house of the elder brother. The elder brother was living in a village and had grown neither rich nor poor. The two brothers rejoiced at seeing each other and at once began telling of all that had happened to them.

"You see," said the elder brother, "I was right. Here I have lived quietly and well, while you, though you may have been a king, have seen a great deal of trouble."

"I do not regret having gone into the forest and up the mountain," replied the younger brother. "I may have nothing now, but I shall always have something to remember, while you have no memories at all."

Interpretive Questions for Discussion

1. Why is each brother happy with his own life?
2. Why does the younger brother believe the message on the stone, and the elder brother mistrust it?
3. Does the writing on the stone tell the truth?
4. According to the story, must we be willing to take risks in order to achieve happiness?
5. Does the author want us to believe that the younger brother made the better choice?

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ROBINSON CRUSOE

Daniel Defoe

I now began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstance I was reduced to and I drew up the state of my affairs in writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me (for I was like to have but few heirs), as to deliver my thoughts from daily poring upon them, and afflicting my mind: and as my reason began now to master my despondency, I began to comfort myself as well as I could, and to set the go against the evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse; and I stated very impartially like debtor and creditor, the comforts I enjoyed against the miseries I suffered, thus:

Evil

I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island, void of all hope of recovery.

I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world, to be miserable.

I am divided from mankind, a solitaire; one banished from human society.

I have no clothes to cover me.

I am without any defense, or means to resist any violence of man or beast.

I have no soul to speak to, or relieve me.

Good

But I am alive; and not drowned, as all my ship's company were.

But I am singled out too from all the ship's crew, to be spared from death; and He that miraculously saved me from death, can deliver me from this condition.

But I am not starved, and perishing in a barren place, affording no sustenance.

But I am in a hot climate, where, if I had clothes, I could hardly wear them.

But I am cast on an island where I see no wild beasts to hurt me, as I saw on the coast of Africa: and what if I had been shipwrecked there?

But God wonderfully sent the ship in near enough to the shore, that I have got out so many necessary things, as will either supply my wants, or enable me to supply myself, even as long as I live.

Interpretive Questions for Discussion

1. Did Robinson Crusoe think his situation was hopeless?
2. Why did Robinson Crusoe list each item in the "evil" column first?
3. How are the second, third, and sixth "evil" items different?
4. Does Robinson Crusoe hold God responsible for the items he lists in the "evil" column?
5. Why does each "good" reply begin with the word "but"?

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SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Abraham Lincoln

March 4, 1865

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil-war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war-seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this

interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!" If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood

drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to the

finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Interpretive Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Lincoln take up the attitude of "judge not that we be not judged," even though he believes slavery to have been an offense to God?
2. Why doesn't Lincoln feel triumphant regarding the successful course of the war? Why does he avoid calling for vengeance?
3. According to Lincoln, did the North "accept" war because of its wish to preserve the Union, or because of its abhorrence of slavery?
4. Does Lincoln blame the South for causing the war? Why does Lincoln point out that "the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement" of slavery?
5. According to Lincoln, why were people who had so much in common – even praying to the same God – unable to avoid such a terrible conflict?
6. Why does Lincoln suggest that both the North and the South are responsible for this "mighty scourge," this "terrible war"?

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THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

In Congress, July 4, 1776

*The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen
United States of America*

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it

is their right, it is *their* duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative *bodies* at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of *their* public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the State remaining

in the meantime exposed to all the danger of invasion from without and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws of naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses:

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring Province, establishing

therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable

jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

WE, THEREFORE, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and

by authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be FREE and INDEPENDENT States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Interpretive Questions for Discussion

1. Why do the colonists feel a need to proclaim to the world their reasons for declaring independence?
2. Why do the signers of the Declaration think it is their duty, as well as their right, to change their system of government?
3. Why do the signers of the Declaration proclaim that the equality of all people is "self-evident" and their rights "unalienable"? Why do they maintain that democracy is ordained by the Laws of Nature?
4. Are the signers of the Declaration motivated by a sense of moral outrage, or by their own self-interest?
5. Why are the inhabitants of the thirteen colonies able to think of themselves as "one people"?
6. According to the signers, where does the right and duty to throw off a despotic government come from?
7. Do the writers of the Declaration intend to alter their government or abolish it?

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BEFORE THE LAW

Franz Kafka

Before the Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. 'It is possible,' answers the doorkeeper, 'but not at this moment.' Since the door leading into the Law stands
5 open as usual and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man bends down to peer through the entrance. When the doorkeeper sees that, he laughs and says: 'If you are so strongly tempted, try to get in without my permission. But note that I am powerful. And I am only the lowest doorkeeper. From hall to hall, keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other. And the sight of the third man is already more than even I can stand.' These are difficulties which
10 the man from the country has not expected to meet, the Law, he thinks, should be accessible to every man and at all times, but when he looks more closely at the doorkeeper in his furred robe, with his huge, pointed nose and long, thin, Tartar beard, he decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits waiting for days and years. He makes many attempts to be allowed in and
15 wearies the doorkeeper with his importunity. The doorkeeper often engages him in brief conversation, asking him about his home and about other matters, but the questions are put quite impersonally, as great men put questions, and always conclude with the statement that the man cannot be allowed to enter yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the doorkeeper. The
20 doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he takes each gift: 'I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone.' During all these long years the man watches the doorkeeper almost incessantly. He forgets about the other doorkeepers, and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the Law. In the first years he curses his evil fate aloud; later, as he grows old, he only mutters to himself. He grows childish, and since in his prolonged
25 study of the doorkeeper' he has learned to know even the fleas in his fur collar, he begs the very fleas to help him and to persuade the doorkeeper to change his mind. Finally his eyes grow dim and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams

30 inextinguishably from the door of the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies, all
that he has experienced during the whole time of his sojourn condenses in his mind into one
question, which he has never yet put to the doorkeeper. He beckons the doorkeeper, since he can
no longer raise his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend far down to hear him, for the
difference in size between them has increased very much to the man's disadvantage. 'What do
35 you want to know now?' asks the doorkeeper; 'you are insatiable.' 'Everyone strives to attain the
Law,' answers the man, 'how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come
seeking admittance but me?' The doorkeeper perceives that the man is nearing his end and his
hearing is failing so he bellows in his ear: 'No one but you could gain admittance through this
door, since this door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it.'

Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

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Interpretive Questions for "Before the Law"

Basic Question: Why does the story have the man never get through the gate or gain access to the law?

1. According to the story, what is the law?
2. Is the Doorkeeper's statement "just try to go in" meant to be a threat, an invitation, or a challenge?
3. What is the radiance that the man sees? Why can the man only see the radiance after he begins to go blind?
4. What is meant by the Doorkeeper's statement, "this gate was made only for you?"
5. Are we meant to believe that there are other Doorkeepers?
6. Why does the man wait before the gate to the law?
7. Why does the story place a Doorkeeper before the gate?

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