

Anthem Lesson Plans and Study Guide

By Lindsay Joseph

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Detailed Chapter Questions

Chapter I

- In a well-organized paragraph, describe the society in which *Anthem* is set. Some areas to consider are the political structure, degree of technology, social relationships, quality of life, and education.
 - Would you want to live in this society? Explain why or why not.
- In this chapter Equality 7-2521 states that it is very unusual for men to reach the age of 45. Offer several possible explanations as to why life expectancy is so short in his society.
- Copy and complete the following chart, and continue to add to your entries as you read each chapter. (The first entry is partially completed, as an example.)

Term and Definition	Examples from <i>Anthem</i> (Try to find several examples per term)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Why is this character or act condemned in <i>Anthem</i>?Should it be condemned? Explain why or why not.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Transgression: the breaking of a law or oathSin:Curse:CrimeEvilDamned	Transgression of Preference: Equality chooses International 4-8818 as his friend (pg. 27).	<ol style="list-style-type: none">They are taught that the individual is nothing, mankind is everything, and that everyone must be treated with absolute equality. To choose a friend is to single out, and elevate, one man from the group. Also, choosing a friend requires individual thought, personal choices, and value judgments, all of which are forbidden. They are expected to be mindless, and thus selfless.Personal response required.

- Clearly, Ayn Rand intended Equality to stand out from his “brothers.” Explain how she accomplishes this by contrasting Equality’s physical qualities and character traits to those of his fellow men.

5. Why does the Council of Vocations assign Equality the job of street sweeper? Is it due to error, incompetence, or a more sinister motivation? Explain.
6. When does this novel take place—in the past, the present, or the future? How do you know?
7. (a) How would your teachers react if you had Equality’s “curse”?
- (b) Why do Equality’s teachers disapprove of his quick mind?
8. At this point in the novel, does Equality accept the moral teachings of his society? If so, why doesn’t he feel shame or remorse when he knows that he’s committing a crime? Find textual evidence to support your answer.
9. Would you want to be friends with someone like Equality? Why or why not?

Chapter II

1. Reread the account of Liberty 5-3000 on page 38. What character traits are revealed in this brief description?
2. Find several examples of the ways in which this society tries to obliterate each individual’s mind (and self) by quashing personal choices, desires, and values.
3. Contrast Equality with the rest of the men living in this society (pg. 46).
4. Of the whole range of feelings possible to man (joy, excitement, anger, embarrassment, etc.), why is fear the prevalent emotion in this society?
5. Start a personal glossary in which you explain the following terms: the Great Truth, the Unmentionable Times, the Uncharted Forest, the Evil Ones, the Great Rebirth.
6. (a) What word is Equality struggling to recapture on page 49?
- (b) In your opinion, why is mentioning this word the only crime punishable by death in this society? How does this word contradict the ideals of this society? What could its rediscovery possibly lead to?

Chapter III

1. (a) What does Equality discover in this chapter?
- (b) How important is this discovery? Describe four or five ways in which it would help society, and make life easier or more enjoyable.
2. Outline some of the Council of Scholars’ beliefs, and Equality’s refutation of those beliefs.

Chapter IV

1. Discuss the appropriateness of Equality’s new name, “Unconquered.”

Chapter V

1. Equality understands that his invention will benefit mankind greatly; however, this was not his main motivation in conducting his experiments, and it is not the primary source of the great joy he experiences. Discuss.
2. In your opinion, why is Equality so interested in seeing his own image at this point in the novel? What emotion is he feeling?

Chapter VI

1. The old locks and lack of guards in the Palace of Corrective Detention indicate that prisoners never tried to escape. Why not?

Chapter VII

1. Outline four of the Council's reasons for rejecting Equality's invention.
2. What are the real reasons behind the Council's rejection and fear of the gift?
3. What does Equality mean, at the beginning of the chapter, when he says, "We are old now, but we were young this morning" (pg. 68)?

Chapter VIII

1. What is Equality experiencing for the first time in this chapter, and what does he feel as a result?
2. Explain why Equality laughs when he remembers that he is "the Damned."
3. What does the Uncharted Forest symbolize in *Anthem*?

Chapter IX

1. On pages 93–94, Liberty contrasts Equality to his fellow men. Paraphrase this passage.
2. In this chapter, Equality questions the morality of his former society. Contrast what he was previously taught about solitude, good, evil, and joy to what he now believes.

Chapter X

1. Describe the house and its contents in your own words, and explain why Liberty and Equality find it so strange and unique.

Chapter XI

1. What great discovery does Equality make in this chapter?
2. Explain the following quotes in your own words, and discuss how they can be applied to your life:
 - (a) “Whatever road I take, the guiding star is within me.”
 - (b) “For the word ‘We’ must never be spoken, save by one’s choice and as a second thought.”
3. What does Equality now realize is the proper goal and purpose of his life?
4. In what ways is “I” like a God?
5. Reread the incident with the Saint of the Pyre (pg. 50). What was he trying to communicate to Equality?

Chapter XII

1. Why do the main characters take the names Prometheus and Gaea? Why weren’t they allowed to choose their names in their old society?
2. What does Prometheus plan to do in the future?
3. Prometheus reaches the important realization that “To be free, a man must be free of his brothers” (pg. 118). Cite several examples from *Anthem* that illustrate the truth of this statement.

Creative Writing Activities—*Anthem*

1. *Anthem* illustrates the importance of thinking and judging independently and of acting according to our rational principles—even when “our brothers” oppose us. In light of the fact that smoking, drugs, shoplifting, and gang violence often involve peer pressure, write a letter to a teen magazine explaining *Anthem*’s benefits for teenage readers. (Send your letter to a national teen magazine or your local paper—it might get published!)
2. You are applying for a job to direct the movie version of *Anthem*. Write a letter to the producer in which you try to convince him to hire you. Your letter must indicate
 - (a) which actors you would cast as Prometheus and Gaea, and why. Think about physical characteristics and personality traits;
 - (b) a detailed description of the setting;
 - (c) an explanation of the theme of this novel, and why it is particularly relevant and valuable to modern viewers;
 - (d) musical suggestions for certain scenes, costumes, a description of the opening shot, etc.
3. Write a brief letter to Ayn Rand about *Anthem*. You can state your reaction to the text (What did you find particularly surprising? Exciting? Moving?), ask about aspects of the novel that puzzled you, and relate the novel to personal experiences, etc.

4. Write the “missing scene” from chapter 1 in which the Council of Vocations is deliberating Equality’s future profession. Are any of the Council members sympathetic to Equality? If so, would he dare to voice his opinion? Ensure that you reveal the Council’s true motives in assigning Equality the job of street sweeper.
5. Write a factual newspaper article about Prometheus’s escape from jail, his surprise appearance at the World Council of Scholars, and his flight into the Uncharted Forest. Then, write an opinionated editorial about the same events, written by one of his “brothers.”
6. Rewrite the meeting between Equality and Liberty from her perspective.
7. Rewrite the scene about the Saint at the Pyre from the Saint’s perspective. What did he want to communicate to Equality?
8. Write a new ending for *Anthem* in which Prometheus is captured while attempting to rescue his friends. Include a court scene of Prometheus’s trial before the Council for his “sins.” How will Prometheus use his new understanding of morality to defend himself and his actions? (As a possible extension, act out this scene in class, and invite another class to judge.)
9. At the end of the story, Prometheus confidently declares that he is not afraid of his brothers. He knows that his new home is invulnerable to them, “For they have nothing to fight me with, save the brute force of their numbers. I have my mind” (pg. 116). Write a short story in which the main character’s intelligence, resourcefulness, and ingenuity (i.e., his mind) triumph over his opponents’ brute force or sheer numbers.

Further Questions for Discussion or Written Response

1. (a) *Before reading the novel:*
The transition from adolescence to adulthood involves developing a personal identity, a sense of self. Write a paragraph that describes you, and explains what makes you uniquely you. Consider your future goals and dreams; what you value in a friend; favorite pets; preferred sports and hobbies; best-loved music, literature, movies, etc.

Note to the teacher:

Discuss with the students how and why they chose these values. Focus on the role of the individual mind in developing values. You want students to understand that—without a mind to think, to judge, to choose—there can be no personal values and ambitions.

- (b) *After reading the novel:*
Review your pre-reading activity. Which of your personal values, goals, and loves would be allowed in the society portrayed in *Anthem*? Why would any of them be forbidden?

Note to the teacher:

This exercise can help students to concretize and relate to the completely selfless society in *Anthem*. Students can see how living in this society would affect them directly. They will more fully understand the link between the obliteration of the mind and the destruction of all personal judgments, hopes, dreams, and values.

2. In many real and fictionalized totalitarian societies, children live apart from their families. Why would dictatorial leaders enforce this living arrangement?
3. What does Equality finally understand about his society when the Council threatens to destroy his invention?
4. Contrast Equality’s view of morality at the end of the novel to that of his society.

5. At first glance, most characters in *Anthem* appear to be near-automatons, blindly conforming to the rest of society. Upon closer study, however, we see that all of the characters in *Anthem*—Equality, International, Liberty, the Council members, everyone—make choices and decisions that affect their lives and their futures, for better or for worse. In short, they all possess the choice to think or not, and that choice determines everything else. Discuss.
6. Many people blame their hardships, poverty, or unhappiness on external conditions. “It’s not my fault,” they cry, “it’s because of the family, class, race, society, or culture into which I was born!” They believe that outside factors control and determine their lives. Use Equality as an example to refute this deterministic view of man.
7. *Anthem* is a heroic and inspiring story about the triumph of the individual’s independent spirit. Even though, at the end of the novel, Equality is greatly outnumbered, and modern society lies in ruins, it is a story of liberation and hope—not of despair. Discuss.
8. Aside from very rare exceptions (Equality, the Saint at the Pyre) there is literally no opposition to the leaders in this society. Why is this? What ideas must these men have accepted to live a life of obedience, drudgery, and fear?
9. *Anthem*’s theme is, in Ayn Rand’s own words, “the meaning of man’s ego.” Explain the ways in which the characters and plot in *Anthem* illustrate this theme.
10. To fully control a man, dictators must not only enslave his body, but also destroy his mind. Discuss how the leaders in *Anthem* seek to accomplish this tyrannical end.

Advanced Research Topics

1. In *Anthem* Equality observes that “At forty, [men] are worn out . . . [and] are sent to the Home of the Useless, where the Old Ones live . . . The Old Ones know that they are soon to die. When a miracle happens and some live to be forty-five, they are the Ancient Ones, and children stare at them when passing by . . .” (pg. 25). According to the World Health Organization’s ranking of 191 countries, (www.who.int) there is a huge discrepancy in the average life expectancy of various nations; it ranges from a high of 74.5 years in Japan to a low of 25.9 years in Sierra Leone. Why does life expectancy vary so greatly around the world? What are the main factors that determine life expectancy in a given country?

Select several countries with high, medium, and low average life expectancy, and briefly research their political systems. Consider the following questions:

- How are their leaders chosen?
- Do citizens enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of mobility, and of religion? Do they have the right to life, liberty, and ownership of private property?
- To what extent does the government control and regulate the economy?
- Is the primacy of rule of law acknowledged?

Write a paper on your findings concerning the causal impact that a country’s political system has on the life expectancy of its citizens.

2. In *Anthem* Prometheus discovers the meaning of the word freedom. He states that “To be free, a man must be free of his brothers. That is freedom. That and nothing else” (118). In fact, Ayn Rand defined freedom, in a political context, as “the absence of physical coercion” (*Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*). This definition

of freedom, however, stands in direct contrast to the one held by many modern thinkers, writers, and politicians. Today, modern liberals often assert “Freedom must [entail] . . . an increased power on the part of the individual to share in the goods which society has produced and an enlarged ability to contribute to the common good” (George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*).

Write an essay contrasting Ayn Rand’s definition of freedom to that of modern liberals, and consider the form of government each would necessitate.

3. Is *Anthem* a realistic portrayal of life in a totalitarian society? Compare the fictionalized society in *Anthem* to a real dictatorship, past or present. Some options are Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Cuba, China, Cambodia, etc.
4. While recounting man’s struggle for freedom throughout history, Equality laments that “At first, man was enslaved by gods . . . then by kings . . . then by his birth, his kin, his race. But he broke their chains. He declared to all his brothers that a man has rights which [no men] can take away from him. And he stood on the threshold of freedom . . . But then he gave up all that he had won, and fell lower than his savage beginning” (pg. 119).

Find a specific example from history for each of these five stages in mankind’s political history, including an example from the twentieth century for the final stage. What, according to this novel, must man understand to enable him to pass through the threshold of freedom that, in the past, he so nearly reached?

5. How does our society treat independent thinkers, daring innovators, and successful entrepreneurs (like Equality)? Are they applauded or criticized? Write an essay on this topic, offering specific case studies to support your argument.

Additional Questions on Plot, Figurative Language, and Point of View:

1. Create a plot diagram of the novel, including the five major components (initial situation, trigger incident, rising action, climax, denouement).
2.
 - (a) Ayn Rand wrote *Anthem* in a deliberately simple, austere style. Explain why this style is appropriate, given the novel’s setting and characters.
 - (b) Figurative language is employed effectively, if sparingly, in this novel. Often, a well-chosen simile captures the essence of a character, or the significance of an event. Discuss the meaning and significance of the following similes in *Anthem*.
 - “We blew out the candle. Darkness swallowed us. There was nothing left around us, save night and a thin thread of flame in it, as a crack in the wall of a prison” (pg. 64).
 - “But International 4-8818 are different. They are a tall, strong youth and their eyes are like fireflies . . .” (pg. 26).
 - “[Liberty’s] body was straight and thin as a blade of iron . . . Their hair was golden as the sun; their hair flew in the wind, shining and wild, as if it defied men to restrain it. They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to fling a scornful gift, and the earth was a beggar under their feet” (pg. 38).
 - “The shoulders of our Brothers are hunched, and their muscles are drawn, as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight” (pg. 47).

3. Ayn Rand wrote *Anthem* in diary form, using first-person-major point of view. Discuss the merits of this form and point of view for this particular novel. Consider: Why is the diary form crucial to plot and character development in *Anthem*? How does it help to reveal the setting and establish the nature of this society? How does it contribute to the mystery surrounding the Unspeakable Word? How would using first person minor or third person omniscient point of view weaken the novel?

It might be necessary to review some common methods of narration with students:

First Person Major: Main character simply tells his own story. (*Anthem* or *Huckleberry Finn*)

First Person Minor: A minor character, who “happens to be there,” tells the story. (Dr. Watson in Conan Doyle’s stories, or Nick in *The Great Gatsby*)

Third Person Omniscient: Narrator recounts the story, and knows the thoughts of all the characters in the story.

Third Person Limited: Narrator recounts the story, but tells the reader only what he perceives; he does not know the thoughts of the characters.

Third Person Central Character: Narrator recounts the story, and knows the thoughts of only the central character.

Teaching Relevant Philosophical Concepts

Note to the Teacher:

In order for students to fully comprehend *Anthem*, they need to be taught the precise meaning of relevant political, moral, and philosophical concepts. Thus, selected terms, definitions, and textual illustrations are included below. This information can be used in a variety of ways:

- Socratic Method: Begin by asking basic questions about the novel. For example, “In the society portrayed in *Anthem*, what is considered to be good, or virtuous?” Elicit several students’ examples from the text, and then explain that they illustrate the moral code of Altruism. Supply a precise definition for students to learn. Then, discuss the opposite code of Egoism. Repeat for each concept.
- Alternately, supply terms and definitions to the class. Ask students to find examples of each term from the novel, and from real life. They can consider personal experiences, current laws, newspaper articles, etc.
- After teaching, ask students to match terms and definitions on a quiz, or to supply examples for each term.

Term and Definition or Explanation	Illustrations in <i>Anthem</i>
<p>Collectivism: “Collectivism means the subjugation of the individual to a group—whether to a race, class or state does not matter. Collectivism holds that man must be chained to a collective action and collective thought for the sake of what is called ‘the common good.’” (<i>The Ayn Rand Lexicon</i>, pg. 74)</p>	<p>“We are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE, One, indivisible and forever.” (pg. 14)</p>
<p>Individualism: “Individualism regards man—every man—as an independent, sovereign entity who possesses an inalienable right to his own life, a right derived from his nature as a rational being. Individualism holds that a civilized society . . . can be achieved only on the basis of the recognition of individual rights—and that a group, as such, has no rights other than the individual rights of its members.” (<i>The Ayn Rand Lexicon</i>, pg. 218)</p>	<p>“I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning. I wished to find a warrant for being. I need no warrant for being, and no word of sanction upon my being. I am the warrant and the sanction.” (pg. 109)</p> <p>“I am not a tool for their use. I am not a servant of their needs. I am not a bandage for their wounds. I am not a sacrifice on their altars. I am a man.” (pg. 110)</p>
<p>Altruism: “The basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue and value . . . which means: the <i>self</i> as a standard of evil, the <i>selfless</i> as a standard of the good.” (<i>The Ayn Rand Lexicon</i>, pg. 4)</p>	<p>“If you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies.” (pg. 18)</p> <p>“Indeed you are happy . . . how else can men be when they live for their brothers?” (pg. 46)</p>
<p>Egoism: “Egoism states that each man’s primary moral obligation is to achieve his own welfare, well-being, or self-interest . . . He should be ‘selfish’ in the sense of being the beneficiary of his own moral actions.” (<i>Glossary of Definitions by Ayn Rand</i>, pg. 12)</p>	<p>“The only things which taught us joy were the power we created in our wires, and the Golden One. And both these joys belong to us alone . . . ” (pg. 97)</p> <p>“My happiness is not the means to any end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose.” (pg. 110)</p>
<p>Conformity: “The act or habit of bringing [oneself] into harmony or agreement with others; of adhering to conventional behavior.” (<i>Webster’s Dictionary</i>, pg. 149)</p>	<p>“It is not good to be different from our brothers . . . ” (pg. 16)</p>
<p>Obedience: “Complying with a command; yielding to those in authority.” (<i>Webster’s Dictionary</i>, pg. 533)</p>	<p>“You shall do that which the Council of Vocations prescribe for you . . . for the Council knows . . . better than you.” (pg. 18)</p>
<p>Independence: “One’s acceptance of the responsibility of forming one’s own judgments and of living by the work of one’s own mind . . . is the virtue of independence.” (<i>Glossary of Definitions by Ayn Rand</i>, pg. 23)</p>	<p>“We forget all men, all laws and all things save our metals and our wires. So much is still to be learned! So long a road lies before us, and what care we if we must travel it alone!” (pg. 56)</p> <p>“We made it. We created it. We brought it forth from the night of the ages. We alone. Our hands. Our mind. Ours alone and only.” (pg. 63)</p>

Glossary = *Glossary of Definitions by Ayn Rand*. Edited by Allison T. Kunze and Jean F. Moroney. (Second Renaissance Books, 1999).

Lexicon = *The Ayn Rand Lexicon*. Edited by Harry Binswanger. (Meridian Books, 1986).

Linking *Anthem* to Literature, Poetry, Myth, Song

1. Conduct a study of literary heroes. Consider, first, what is a literary hero? In addition to referring to the central character, “[This term] includes a moral evaluation and implies courage, honor, great strength or achievement, or some other noble quality . . . the hero is the doer of great deeds” (C. Carter Colwell, *A Student’s Guide to Literature*).

Compare and contrast Equality to a few of your favorite literary heroes. Discuss the qualities that they share and argue which one, in your opinion, is the most heroic. Consider the quality of his soul, the severity of his opposition, and the significance of his battle.

Characters to consider: Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; Cyrano de Bergerac in *Cyrano de Bergerac*; Saint Joan in *Joan of Arc*, Sir Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*; Henry Drummond in *Inherit the Wind*; Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*; Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables*.

2. Write a comparison of *Anthem* to other anti-utopian novels, such as George Orwell’s *1984*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, or Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*.
3. Write a conversation between George Orwell and Ayn Rand, in which she explains why a totalitarian dictatorship would ultimately resemble the primitive stagnation of *Anthem*, rather than the highly technological society of *1984*.
4. Liberty chooses “Unconquered” as a fitting name for Equality. Similarly, William Henley’s most famous poem is titled *Invictus*, which is Latin for “Unconquered.” Write a short essay on the similarities between the main characters in each of these works.
5. Contrast the hero in a Romantic novel such as *Anthem* to the anti-hero in a Naturalistic work, such as *Death of a Salesman*.
6. Research the Greek myths about Gaea and Prometheus, and explain why Ayn Rand chose these names for her characters in *Anthem*.

Invictus

By William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.