

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

BIBLIOSCOPIC DIALOGUE: *Various Works of Literature*

On the lines below (or on a separate sheet), write an **interpretive question** about how the works you have discussed (**this semester, this year, throughout high school**) contribute to a discussion of the idea of **memory**, and summarize three (3) possible paragraph length answers based on the details of the works themselves. An interpretive question is an open-ended discussion question *to which there are several possible answers that can be supported by the texts*.

Interpretive Question:

How do Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Shakespeare, and C.S. Lewis speak to the function and significance of memory in the stories we read this year?

Answer #1:

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens suggests that **memory is the repository of duty**. Arthur Clennam seeks to uncover the secret behind his father's dying words, "Do Not Forget," so that he might expunge the debits on his family's account and secure his future. Though his mother hides the past from him, she cannot prevent its consequences from finding her out. Similarly, in *King Lear* Shakespeare intimates that memory records debts. Lear refuses to remember his past behavior as a father because it incriminates him. He prefers to consider himself a victim of his daughters' malicious abuses, claiming they have forgotten their filial duties. C.S. Lewis, however, in his *'Til We Have Faces*, considers the nature of misremembering. His Orual writes over her own memories in order to validate her complaint against the gods and vindicate her blamelessness. She subjugates her memory to a modified narrative that justifies her anger. In this, she is much like Lear; both become bitter. Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, which meditates upon the nature of law and grace, human depravity and redemption, suggests that memory of the past provides a vision of the present self. Human nature transcends time and place. Thus, the story of the fall of Puritan Hester Prynne and Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale functions as moral fable. His readers find themselves in their sinful likenesses. Hawthorne suggests that freedom lies in remembering. In each novel, freedom, sanity, and healthy relationships depend upon proper remembering.

Answer #2:

In Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, **memory is a source of unhappiness**. Arthur's father is tormented on his deathbed by unnamed memories. Father Dorrit's desperate attempts to preserve his past identity rob him of the ability to master his present realities. Mrs. Clennam's bitter memory of the past isolates her and leads to the downfall of the House of Clennam. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare expands upon memory loss, suggesting that it is precipitated by a desire to preserve face. Lear avoids responsibility by selective memory and goes mad, but Gloucester accepts blame, remembering his sin, and thereby retains his sanity. Although Lear dies in sorrow, Gloucester dies smilingly. Memory, though hard, proves healthful. Hawthorne frames his novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, with chapters that recall his Puritan ancestry. In this way, he appropriates the moral reflections of his narrative – postulations regarding human depravity and deliverance through confession, repentance, and divine grace – to himself and his reader. Memory may impart hard truths, but the truth, according to Hawthorne, sets men free. C. S. Lewis's *'Til We Have Faces* likewise depicts the bitterness of memory. Protagonist Orual remembers the gods' unfair treatment of her; yet she cannot remember her own behaviors and attitudes rightly. Her story follows her progress toward recovering right memory, which leads to proper piety – repentance and faith. In their novels, these authors depict memory as a repository of sorrow and self-incrimination.

Answer #3:

In each of the novels covered this year, the authors suggest that **proper memory functions as a pathway to self-knowledge and salvation**. In *King Lear*, Lear becomes bitter and spurns all responsibility for his circumstances. Instead he blame-shifts and becomes mad. Gloucester, conversely, admits his guilt in the face of memory and retains his sanity. In *'Til We Have Faces*, when Lewis's Orual recalls her own guilt in her diatribe against the gods, she repents and discovers divine love and grace. Likewise, Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale experiences freedom and release when he publicly recalls his adultery in *The Scarlet Letter*. So too Mrs. Clennam finds mercy and grace when she divulges her hidden memories to Amy. The debt that Arthur has tried in vain to satisfy on her part is canceled by her act of forgiveness. In each of these novels, memory functions as a bitter tonic that mediates grace. Mercy satisfies memory.