

Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague

by Geraldine Brooks

Incoming Senior Study Guide Summer reading for 2016-17 school year
To be prepared for the opening of the school year you should:

- 1) Have the novel read. Please remember that academic reading means CLOSE reading, not skimming or relying on summaries.
- 2) Be prepared to test on this book. At the discretion of your teacher this test may be given on the first day of class or any other time early in the year.
- 3) Be prepared for any other type of assignment your English teacher may choose to give. This might include essay writing, presentation, discussion, project, etc.
- 4) Be prepared on the first day of school with written (typed) responses to the work/questions below and be prepared to upload your work to TURN-IT-IN.

Be familiar with the novel's Context:

Year of Wonders is a bestselling novel published in 2001. Classified as "historical fiction" it is set in the year 1666, the year of the Bubonic Plague that killed many people in Europe. The story is based on the history of the small [Derbyshire](#) village of [Eyam](#) that, when beset upon by the plague [quarantines](#) itself in order to prevent the disease from spreading further. While the plague in the novel is not identified as The Bubonic Plague it is very similar and stays true to the symptoms and impact of that plague. The action of the story revolves around a small community of people trying to survive in isolation from the rest of the world.

The Bubonic Plague: Bubonic plague circulated mainly in [fleas](#) on small [rodents](#). Without treatment, the bubonic plague kills about two thirds of infected humans within four days. While this form of plague does still exist it is extremely rare. The term *bubonic plague* is derived from a Greek word meaning "groin". Swollen [lymph nodes](#) (buboes) especially occur in the [armpit](#) and [groin](#) in persons suffering from bubonic plague. Other common symptoms of it are high fever, muscle cramping and exhaustion.

Vocabulary: List 25 words from this novel that were new to you; give the definition of each, and provide for each word a sentence in which it is used in the novel.

Characters: Briefly identify the following characters, using at least one significant quotation from the book that describes that character.

Then, consider how you would act/react if you were a member of this community in 1666. Choose one character you most identify with and write a 1-2 paragraph discussion of why you do.

Anna Frith

Elizabeth Bradford

George Viccars

Michael Mompellion

Mem Gowdie

Anys Gowdie

Jane Martin

Aphra

Josiah (Joss) Bont

Sam, Jamie & Tom Frith

Elinor Mompellion

WRITTEN RESPONSES

Your work should be typed and saved to be submitted to Turn-It-In

1. One of the **themes** in this novel is that of “hypocrisy and betrayal.” Define “hypocrisy,” then discuss ways in which hypocrisy and betrayal are found in the novel. Support your answer with direct quotations. Another **theme** in the novel is that of the “redeeming power of human love.” Briefly discuss ways in which Brooks demonstrates how love is redemptive.
2. All of the characters in the novel have their failings and as a result they are all fully human. Are you surprised by the secrets concerning their marriage that Elinor and Michael Mompellion each reveal to Anna? How do those secrets change your feelings about each character? Do they make either seem weaker in any way? Give reasons for your answers.
3. The Bradford family bears the brunt of Mompellion’s rage when they leave town to save themselves. But weren’t the Bradfords only doing what every other noble family was doing in those times -- running because they had the means to run) Setting aside the events near the end of the novel (which make it clear that it’s hard to find any redeeming qualities in any of the Bradfords), can you really blame the Bradfords for escaping? Give reasons for your answer.
4. How much of Mompellion’s push for the quarantine had to do with the secrets he shared with Elinor? Did his own dark side and self-loathing push him to sacrifice the town, or, was he really acting out of everyone’s best interests?
5. Discuss the feminist undertones of the story. How does each female character-- Anna, Elinor, the Gowdies, and even Anna’s stepmother-- exhibit strengths that the male characters do not?
6. Go to the link provided below. Scroll down to the REVIEWS of *Year of Wonders*. First choose any two of them and, in a paragraph each, comment on what you agree or disagree with. (Identify the review by the reviewer’s username).

Then, write your own review. **Be sure it is substantive** and takes a clear Point of View on the book.

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4965.Year_of_Wonders
7. Provide a well-developed discussion of how you see this book (written recently, but set 400 years ago) as relevant to the modern world. Use both SPECIFICS from the book and from your modern experience to make your case.

