

Appendix

Teaching *Anthem*: A Guide for High School and University Teachers

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A perennial favorite in high school and college classes, *Anthem* is read by thousands of students each year. Young readers enjoy *Anthem*'s mysterious setting and exciting story line; they are drawn in particular to its courageous and inspiring hero.

Like other literary heroes, Equality 7-2521¹ possesses strength and valor. What sets him apart, however, is his ruthlessly independent mind. Whether he is choosing a friend, conducting a scientific experiment, or forming a new moral code to guide his life, Equality looks to reality; he refuses to blindly obey the dictates of his society. In this hero, readers find a man who stands proudly alone on the strength of the knowledge that he is right.

This heroic portrayal is especially valuable to *young* readers, who are forming their adult character and basic worldview. They are developing answers to such fundamental questions as: What kind of person do I want to be? Can I direct my life? Should I live for myself or for others? and, more broadly, in what kind of society do I want to live? Written as a prose poem, *Anthem* has few characters, a straightforward progression of events, and an austere style. Despite its apparent simplicity, however, this novella does convey answers to such broad philosophical questions.

This essay is intended as a guide for teachers as they help their students understand *Anthem* with greater depth and clarity. The teaching process begins by familiarizing students with the novella's content—what happened, who did it, and where. To aid in this comprehension and analysis, the chapter questions in the first section of this essay focus on the most important aspects of *Anthem*'s story line, characters, and setting. They require students to progress from mere factual recall to deeper interpretation—from identifying *what* to understanding *why*.

The next stage in the teaching process should be one of integration, because a story's concretes, even if clearly understood, are too numerous to retain as discrete units. Discussing the more abstract questions in the second part of this essay will help students to unite these concretes into a holistic grasp of character, storyline, and, finally, theme. In terms of characterization, this entails tying together a character's speeches, thoughts, descriptions, and actions to identify his central purpose. For instance, once students identify what motivates the governing Councils, their actions—from relegating Equality to the job of Street Sweeper to rejecting his invention—are more fully comprehended and easily recalled. In this second part, I also suggest methods of

teaching the philosophical ideas contained in *Anthem*, and offer questions focusing on literary style.

Once students have achieved an integrated understanding of *Anthem*, they should be encouraged to relate their newfound knowledge to the world around them. Their knowledge is not useful if it is compartmentalized. The third part of this guide is designed to help students apply *Anthem*'s meaning to other areas of study, the real world, and their own lives. This is accomplished by means of advanced research projects and essay questions in the areas of literature, history, and politics, as well as personal response questions.

The final stage of literary study prompts students to clarify their thinking by expressing their ideas in writing. Suggested topics for creative and expository writing are contained in the last part of this essay.

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

What follows is a list of content questions for each chapter of *Anthem*. They can be used to facilitate classroom discussion or to monitor student comprehension during independent study. They may also prove useful for regular homework assignments and for quizzes and unit tests.

Chapter I

1. a) How would you describe the society in which *Anthem* is set? Some areas to consider are political structure, technology, social relationships, quality of life, and education,
b) Would you want to live in this society? Why or why not?
2. Equality 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 this society.
3. Religious terms of condemnation (such as “transgression,” “sin,” “curse,” “crime,” “evil,” and “damned”) appear throughout *Anthem*. For each of these terms:
 - a) Find several examples in which it refers to an act or character in the novel.
 - b) Explain why this act or character is condemned.
 - c) Argue whether you think it *should* be condemned, and why.
4. Ayn Rand intended Equality to stand out from his “brothers.” Explain how she accomplishes this by contrasting Equality’s character traits and physical qualities with 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 do the events of *Anthem* 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. a) At this point in the story, does Equality accept the moral teachings of his society?
b) If so, why doesn’t he feel shame or remorse when he knows that he is committing a crime? Support your answer with textual evidence.
9. Would you want to be friends with someone like Equality? Why or why not?

Chapter II

1. a) Re-read the account of Liberty 5-3000 (38–39).² Which character traits are revealed in this brief description?
b) Why does Equality give her a new name: “The Golden One”?
2. Find several examples of the ways in which this society tries to obliterate individuality by quashing personal choices, desires, and values.
3. Contrast Equality with the rest of the men living in this society.
4. Of the whole range of feelings possible to man (joy, excitement, anger, guilt, etc.), why is fear the prevalent emotion in this society?
5. Explain the following: the Great Truth, the Unmentionable Times, the Uncharted Forest, the Evil Ones, the Great Rebirth.
6. a) What word is Equality struggling to recapture?
b) Why is mentioning this word the only crime punishable by death? 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 make life more productive and enjoyable.
2. Outline several of the Council of Scholars’ beliefs and Equality’s refutation of those beliefs.

Chapter IV

1. Discuss the appropriateness of the new name given to Equality by Liberty: “The Unconquered.”

Chapter V

1. Equality understands that his invention will greatly benefit mankind; 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. Why is Equality so interested in seeing his own image at this point in the story? What emotion is he feeling?

Chapter VI

1. What do the old locks and lack of guards in the Palace of Corrective Detention imply?

Chapter VII

1. List four reasons given by the Council for rejecting Equality’s invention. Are these the Council’s real reasons for rejecting the gift? If not, what are?

2. What does Equality mean when he says, “We are old now, yet we were young this morning” (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?

Chapter IX

1. Liberty contrasts Equality to his fellow men (82–83). Paraphrase this passage.
2. 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.

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 might 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. Re-read the incident with the Saint of the pyre (50). Does Equality now understand why the Saint felt joy and pride rather than pain and disgrace? Explain.

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 Equality (Prometheus) plan to do in the future?
3. Equality (Prometheus) reaches the important realization that “To be free, a man must be free of his brothers” (101). Cite several examples from *Anthem* that illustrate what Ayn Rand means by this.

INTEGRATION

Too often, students are taught how to analyze a work of literature, but not how to synthesize its elements into a conceptual whole. The following questions prompt the students to integrate *Anthem*'s discrete descriptions, actions, and dialogue in order to grasp its abstract meaning.

1. What does Equality finally understand about his society when the Council threatens to destroy his invention?
2. For each of the main characters, write a short description that captures his or her central character trait(s) and key motivation in the story.
3. *Anthem* is a heroic and inspiring story about the triumph of the individual's independent spirit. Even though, in the end, Equality is greatly outnumbered and the society he escapes is wallowing in primitive stagnation; it is a story of liberation and hope—not of despair. Discuss.
4. Aside from very rare exceptions (Equality, the Saint of the pyre) there is 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?
5. To fully control a man, one must not only enslave his body, but also destroy his mind. Discuss how the leaders in *Anthem* seek to accomplish this tyrannical practice.
6. Equality is a vivid illustration of man's free will—of how his choices determine his future. It is not an innate superiority that enables Equality to escape from his society. He is able to break free because he chooses to question when others choose to accept, he chooses to think when others choose to evade, he chooses to defy when others choose to obey. Discuss with reference to specific examples from the story. (Note to the teacher: This question addresses an aspect of the novel that students sometimes misinterpret. Young readers may mistakenly conclude that Equality succeeds because he was born with superior intelligence, strength, or ability.)
7. Ayn Rand identified *Anthem*'s theme as “the word *I*.”³ Explain the ways in which the characters and story line in *Anthem* illustrate this theme.

Additional Questions on Literary Style

1. Figurative language is employed effectively, if sparingly, in this novella. 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*.
 - a) “We blew out the candle. Darkness swallowed us. There was nothing left around us, nothing save night and a thin thread of flame in it, as a crack in the wall of a prison” (59–60).
 - b) “But International 4-8818 are different. They are a tall, strong youth and their eyes are like fireflies” (29).
 - c) “[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 as a beggar under their feet” (38–39).
 - d) “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” (46).

2. Discuss the symbolic importance of the Uncharted Forest, Equality’s manuscript, and the light bulb.
3. Comment on the irony of the characters’ names.
4. 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 work. Consider: How is the diary form crucial to 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 Forbidden Word? How would using first-person minor or third-person-omniscient point of view weaken the novella?
5. *Anthem* is replete with moral concepts typically reserved for religious reference: from “holy,” “god,” “revere,” and “worship,” to “sin,” “transgression,” “evil,” and “damned.” Even the title, *Anthem*, can be defined as “A religious choral song usually based on words from the Bible.”⁴ However, Ayn Rand’s referents for these terms are diametrically opposed to those of religion. She worships not a supernatural deity, but the best in man. She glorifies not pain and self-sacrifice, but happiness and egoism. Discuss how the use of religious terminology in *Anthem* helps to convey Ayn Rand’s radical moral code of rational egoism—the antithesis of religion’s morality of self-sacrifice.⁵

Teaching Philosophical Concepts

In order for students to comprehend *Anthem* fully, they need to be taught the precise meaning of the following concepts: altruism, egoism, collectivism, individualism, conformity, obedience, and independence.

Using the Socratic method, teachers can begin by posing straightforward questions about *Anthem*. For example, what does the society portrayed in *Anthem* consider to be good or virtuous? Garner 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. Ask for further examples of altruism from modern society (i.e., former president Clinton’s Volunteerism campaign). Next, discuss the opposite code of egoism. Repeat for each concept. Alternatively, the teacher can begin by supplying terms and definitions to the class. He can then ask students to find illustrations of each term from the novel and from real life. Students can consider personal experiences, current laws, newspaper articles, etc.⁶

APPLICATIONS

In the following assignments, students are asked to apply their understanding of *Anthem* to literature, politics, history, and issues in our society. Students are encouraged to consider the ideas in *Anthem* while examining the world around them; in turn, research from these areas of study can help students develop a fuller understanding of Ayn Rand’s ideas.

Literature

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.”⁷ Compare and contrast Equality to a few of your favorite literary

- heroes. Discuss the qualities they share and make a case for 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*; Joan of Arc in Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*; Sir Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*; Henry Drummond in *Inherit the Wind*; Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*; Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*.
2. Compare and contrast *Anthem* to other anti-utopian novels, such as George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.
 3. Contrast the hero in a Romantic work such as *Anthem* to the anti-hero in a Naturalistic work, such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.
 4. Look up the Greek myths on Gaea and Prometheus, and explain why Ayn Rand chose these names for her characters in *Anthem*.
 5. Contrast the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden to the story of Equality and Liberty (Prometheus and Gaea) in *Anthem*. Include in your analysis the "sins" for which each was condemned.
 6. In a letter discussing *Anthem*, Ayn Rand wrote that it "has the same relation to *The Fountainhead* as the preliminary sketches which artists draw for their future big canvases. I wrote [*Anthem*] while working on *The Fountainhead*—it has the same theme, spirit, and intention, although in quite a different form."⁸ After reading both works, write a comparative essay with this latter statement as its thesis.
 7. Liberty chooses "The Unconquered" as a fitting name for Equality. Similarly, William Henley's most famous poem is entitled "Invictus" (1875), which is Latin for "Unconquered." Write a short essay on the similarities between the main characters in each of these works.

Politics

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 . . ." (28). 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 75 years in Japan to a low of 28.6 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 expectancies, and briefly research their political systems. Consider the following questions:
 - a) Do citizens have the right to life, liberty, the pursuit of personal happiness, and ownership of private property? Do they enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of mobility, and of religion?
 - b) How are their leaders chosen?
 - c) To what extent does the government control and regulate the economy?
 - d) Is the rule of law respected?

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. This and nothing else” (101). In fact, Ayn Rand defined freedom, in a political context, as “the absence of physical coercion.”⁹ This definition of freedom, however, stands in direct contrast to the one held by many modern thinkers, writers, and politicians—a common view of freedom, and one that Ayn Rand rejects: “Freedom must [entail] . . . an increased power on the part of the individual to share in the goods which a society has produced and an enlarged ability to contribute to the common good.”¹⁰ Write an essay contrasting these two definitions of freedom, 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, Castro’s Cuba, present-day Iran, etc.

History

While recounting man’s struggle for freedom throughout history, Equality laments:

At first, man was enslaved by the gods . . . then he was enslaved by the kings . . . he was enslaved by his birth, by his kin, by 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. (101–102)

Ask the student to 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 novella, must man understand to enable him to pass through the threshold of freedom that, in the past, he so nearly reached?

Our Society

1. 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.
2. Our society appears to be in the midst of a crisis of personal responsibility. Everything from poverty to criminal behavior to obesity is blamed on causes beyond one’s control. We hear the cry “It’s not my fault! It’s my family (or class or race or even fast-food chains) that controls my actions!” Such individuals claim that outside factors determine their destiny. Judging from *Anthem*, how do you think Ayn Rand would reply? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Personal Response

The following is a suggested pre-reading assignment for students:

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. And most significantly, consider your views about the nature of the world, your place in it, and how you should live.

Discuss with the students how and why they chose these values. This assignment can help the students to better understand the connection between the mind (thoughts, choices, etc.) and the self.

Then discuss with students the following questions after they have read *Anthem*:

Review your pre-reading activity. Which of your ideas and personal values, goals, and loves would be allowed in the society portrayed in *Anthem*? Would any of them be forbidden? Why? What do you think of this?

This exercise can help students better understand the completely selfless society in *Anthem*. Students can see how living in this society would affect them directly. They will more fully understand Ayn Rand's conviction that the obliteration of the mind is the destruction of the self.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

An inspiring piece of literature can present a wonderful opportunity to hone students' writing skills. Further, writing about a literary work can serve to further clarify students' thinking on a given topic. With this in mind, I offer the following suggestions for writing assignments on *Anthem*.

1. *Anthem* illustrates the importance of thinking and judging independently and of acting according to 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 magazine explaining *Anthem*'s benefits for young readers.
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. Explain how their acting skills and physical characteristics would enable them to portray these characters.
 - b) A detailed description of the setting (geographical location or set design).
 - c) An explanation of the theme of this novel, and its relevance and value to modern viewers.
 - d) Other topics—musical suggestions for certain scenes, costumes, a description of the opening shot, etc.
3. Write a letter to Ayn Rand about *Anthem*. State your reaction to it (what you found particularly surprising, exciting, moving, etc.), and ask about those aspects of the novel that puzzled you. If applicable, comment on how Equality's struggle relates to your own life.
4. Write the “missing scene” from Chapter I, in which the Council of Vocations is deciding 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' 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. Re-write the first meeting between Equality and Liberty from her perspective.
7. Re-write the scene about the Saint of 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 Equality's trial before the Council for his "sins." How will Equality 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, Equality confidently declares that he is not afraid of his brothers. He knows that his new home is impassable to them, "For they have nothing to fight me with, save the brute forces of their numbers. I have my mind" (100). Write a short story in which the main character's intelligence, resourcefulness, and ingenuity (i.e., his mind) triumphs over his opponents' brute force or sheer numbers.

CONCLUSION

As with Ayn Rand's other works of fiction, *Anthem* can be enjoyed and understood on several different levels. On the surface, it recounts a young scientist's heroic struggle to rediscover what has been lost to man: scientific knowledge, love, freedom, the very concept "I." Dig deeper and it is a commentary on collectivist societies; it depicts the poverty, stagnation, and despair that necessarily accompany the subjugation of the individual to the collective. On a more fundamental level, this work is an anthem to the very nature of man. It glorifies the independent mind as the self—as the source of one's ability to create, to value, to judge, to *be*—and thus as a thing to be worshipped. This guide should help teachers and their students to better understand *Anthem*, and thereby gain even deeper insight and inspiration from this important work.

NOTES

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1. For simplicity's sake, I shall henceforth refer to the hero of *Anthem* as "Equality."
 2. For simplicity's sake, I shall henceforth refer to the heroine of *Anthem* as "Liberty."
 3. Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction*, ed. Tore Boeckmann (New York: Plume, 2000), 36.
 4. David B. Guralnik, ed., *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1961), 31.
 5. See a fuller discussion of this topic in Leonard Peikoff's introduction to the fiftieth anniversary paperback edition of Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 1995), vi–vii.
 6. For Ayn Rand's definition of these terms, see Harry Binswanger, ed., *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z* (New York: New American Library, 1986), and Allison T. Kunze and Jean Moroney, eds., *Glossary of Objectivist Definitions* (Gaylordville, CT: Second Renaissance Books, 1999).
 7. C. Carter Colwell, *A Student's Guide to Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).
 8. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 314.

9. Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1966; Signet expanded paperback edition, 1967), 46.
10. George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1973), 658.