

## *Postmortal* Reading Journal Assignment for Writing Classes

Approach: Require that students purchase a writing journal for the course. You can choose to give them a specific size or allow them to choose. Typical journals are 9 ¼ x 7 ½ inches college-lined. Determine how many points to assign the journals and how many pages of writing you will require. Post this information in your syllabus. Explain that you will not be grading journals on grammar, spelling, or structure. Its purpose is to explore ideas that are inspired by reading a text, in this case *The Postmortal*. Reading Journal prompts in this guide include questions based on individual chapters. Page numbers are listed and the questions are listed in order. Give students the list of prompts when they begin reading *The Postmortal*. You can assign specific questions to the class if they are only reading sections of the book. If students are reading the book as an outside reading text, you can assign a number of pages to be read each week and let students choose the questions from each assigned section.

## Reading Journal Prompts

Choose a topic to write about in your reading journal. Write at least 1 page single spaced or two pages double spaced in response to the topic. Write your ideas and thoughts. Do not retell the story. Your teacher will not grade you on grammar, spelling, or structure. Write your own ideas and use your own words.

1. "A Note about the Text" (1): The last sentence reads: "The cure for aging must never again be legalized." Do you think the cure for aging should be legalized if it is discovered? Explain why or why not.

### 1 Prohibition : June 2019

2. "Immortality Will Kill Us All" (5): These words are posted along "First Avenue" according to the narrator. Can you remember a bumper sticker message or a bill board message you have seen recently? What was it? Do you agree with the message or disagree with it? How did it make you feel? Why?

3. "Death is the only thing keeping us in line" (12): The narrator says, "When I was a kid, I saw religion as insurance against death." Now he thinks the cure might be "insurance against religion." Do you think religion would still have a purpose if people could live 1000 years? Why or why not?

4. "I'm always gonna get my period" (15): If you could get the cure today, what would be the good points and bad points of living in your current state for 1000 years?

5. "Cake-batter mixes are one of the great food innovations of the past sixty years" (19): In this chapter, the narrator's father predicts his favorite invention (cake mix) will be able to fly in the future. What is your favorite invention? How do you think it will be improved upon in the future?

6. "The Woman in the Elevator" (24): The narrator suggests that there is no longer any urgency to finish tasks and reach goals because he now has all the time in the world. If you could get the cure today, would you stay in school? Or would you quit and do other things you want to do? Why or why not? What would you do?

7. "You realize you can never retire now, right?" (29): The narrator says the cure is making him feel great. Do you think the feeling is going to last? Predict how he will feel in 10 years.

8. "The Conservative Case for Legalizing the Cure" (32): The narrator's friend sends him a transcript of Allan Atkins' speech. Describe the tone in Jeff's introduction to the speech. How has the tone of the book changed from the first chapter? How do you know?
9. "They're all getting divorced" (35): Why are people suddenly getting divorced? How has the cure changed "the parameters" of marriage?
10. "I never thought I had the luxury of time--now it's all I'm gonna have" (38): What adjective can you use to describe how the narrator feels at the end of this chapter. Why does he feel this way? Can you predict what he will do next as a result?
11. "At the Protests" (44): The mood of the population continues to change. Can you explain how people seem to be feeling now? How is it different from the mood at the beginning of the book?
12. "A little bit of bloodshed now or a lot later on" (44): Can you think of someone in history who was punished or ridiculed for something he or she created? How is that person similar to and different from Graham Otto?
13. "How could you be so dumb?" (56): The narrator's sister can't decide whether or not to get the cure. She lists many of her concerns. What would be your major pros and cons about getting the cure?
14. "DC Apparently Stands for 'Don't Come'" (61): What would you do if people were protesting to get the cure? Would you join them or would you stay away?
15. "A Blond Everywhere I Turn" (63): Who do you think the "blonde" is? Do you think she had anything to do with Katy's death? Explain your hypothesis.
16. "The Worst Since Kent State" (64): Why is what happened in Concord compared to what happened at Kent State in 1970? If you don't know about what happened in Kent State, ask someone. Then write about it.
17. "One Infinite Generation" (66): In his speech, the President says, "The nation that adapts to the effects of this cure and masters a world changed by postmorality is the nation that will lead the world into the next century and well beyond" (68). This sounds like a positive message. Do you think he is right? What does the future hold for the postmortal world? What do you predict?
18. "The floodgates are wide open" (70): Explain in your own words, some of the different responses to the President's announcement in the previous chapter. Which one would you agree with?

## II Spread: June 2029 (Ten Years Later)

19. "Photo No. 3,653" (75): How would you feel if you looked exactly the same in ten years as you do today? Would you like it, or would you try to change your appearance? Why or why not?
20. "'You said you'd love me forever'" (77) How do you feel about the narrator's decision to not marry Sonya? Does it change your opinion of him? How does his decision make you feel about the book in general?
21. "I Seek the Grail" (82): The grails that people are buying represent a fad, a popular behavior in the culture. What is a fad that you have participated in? Have you ever bought anything just because it is popular?
22. "Field Trip: The Fountain of Youth" (85): Have you ever been to Las Vegas? If not, would you want to go? Why or why not?
23. "A Day in the Life of a Terra Troll" (90): Do you know of a famous criminal or dictator who is alive today? Who is it and what do you know about him? If you could ask him a question, what would you ask?
24. "Afternoon Link Roundup" (95): Which of the news reports in this chapter is the most disturbing or frightening to you? Explain why it is disturbing. What other event can you imagine might happen at this point in the story? Create your own news story to add to the list.
25. "'I've made a terrible mistake'" (97): Why does the narrator's father regret his decision to get the cure? Describe what you think he will do next?
26. "The Truth about China" (100): Why did the Chinese government outlaw the cure? If you were the leader of a country, would you want to make the cure illegal? Why or why not?
27. "The Back of the Ambulance" (107): If you had the cure and you lived in a society of people with the cure and people without the cure, what would be your greatest fear? How would your fear influence the decisions you made?
28. "Afternoon Link Roundup" (109): How would you qualify success if world records were broken every day?
29. "Confessions of a Nonstockpiler" (111): If you knew you might live for 1000 years, would you collect things or would you get rid of things? What things would you value most?
30. "What Do We Do With Baby Emilia?" (116): Do you think Mia Burkhardt belongs in jail? If not, why not? If so, what do you think should be done with Baby Emilia?

31. "He looks just like you" (123): How do you think you would feel if you let someone else raise your child?
32. "The Man Who Will Live Everywhere" (127): The Australian man is following a dream to live everywhere because he wants to "take advantage" of being around for a long time. If you had the cure, what dream would you pursue?
33. "Warmest Greetings from the Church of Man" (130): The tenets of the Church of Man are described in this chapter. Which tenets can you agree with? Which ones are you unable to agree with? Explain.
34. "We'll see you again" (135): The narrator meets his childhood crush when he is older. Did you have a childhood crush? How would you feel if you met your childhood crush now by chance? Would you pursue a relationship? Do you think it would be a good idea?
35. "XMN Was Right" (144): If you never aged, do you think it would be difficult to recover from a trauma, or would it be easier?
36. "Does it hurt?"(145): The narrator tells Alison that he found her when he was ready for her. What does he mean? What do you think will happen to their relationship?
37. "Yeah, that's one of them'" (147): Do you think the narrator did the right thing when he identified the Greenie at the police station? What do you think will happen as a result?
38. "Did you know that cigarettes have almond oil in them?" (149): How does the narrator's father feel about getting cancer? Why does he feel that way? Can you empathize with his father?
39. "When They Tell You Not to Mess with Texas, They Mean It" (152): If people could live forever, do you think there would be more reason for the death penalty? Would it make sense to keep people in prison for life?
40. "I'm not even sure this is a marriage anymore" (156): Do you think you could stay married to the same person for 1000 years?
41. "I don't know if anyone will ever get married again" (160): If people stopped aging, would it take away hope?
42. "Afternoon Link Roundup" (164): Take one of the news reports and explain why you think the cure has influenced its occurrence or explain its implications for the future.

43. "This is good" (166): How many generations is 1000 years? If you lived 1000 years, how many generations of descendants would you have? Would you like to have that many great-grandchildren? How would you celebrate holidays? What would you do about birthdays?

44. "Home Cure?" (171): What do you think will happen now that the cure is available for home use? Describe a scenario of someone getting the home cure. Would people create special ceremonies for getting the cure at home?

45. "'Look at me'" (172): What will happen to the narrator after what he has done and what happens to Alison? Will the events of this chapter change him? How? The book is only half over.

### III Saturation: March 2059 (Twenty-eight years later)

46. "The cure for the cure" (179): If people could live 1000 years, do you think society would view murder differently than they do now? Explain.

47. "The Hippie in the Graveyard" (187): If it were your time to die, how would you want to go? Where would you want to be? Who would you want to be there?

48. "What They're Saying about End Specialization" (193): One of the writers in this chapter says, "We spend forty minutes waiting in line at the charging station, we spend an hour looking to park, we share a one-room apartment with three other people, and we're wishing everyone else would just get out of our way" (195). Her words describe the way life has evolved since the cure. How is this description different from the way life is now? How is it similar?

49. "A Few Minutes with the Worst Domestic Terrorist in American History" (196): Baines, the number one FBI most-wanted fugitive, says in his interview, "Everything I have done for this cause has been motivated by a single goal: saving lives. That's what people fail to understand. Without death, we don't learn a goddamn thing about life. I'm trying to help us here." How could he be helping people by killing people? Explain what he means.

50. "Exit Interview: Edgar DuChamp" (201): Did you ever have a difficult day at work or at school? Describe what happened.

51. "You look just like me" (211): What would you do if your child or another person who is close to you wanted you to join a religion that you didn't believe in? Would you try it just to respect your child, or would you refuse? Have you ever had this experience? Explain.

52. "Alison on Stage" (219): John says he lost Alison when he was in "the prime condition of love." Do you think it would be possible to love someone forever? Why or why not?

53. "You get six shots" (221): Why is it dangerous for John to be out doing his job after dark? What other dangers do you think would exist in an overpopulated world like the one in *The Postmortal*?
54. "A Field Trip to the McLean Community Friends Church of Man" (228): In his sermon, the reverend of the Church of Man says he is uplifted by the death of the two pilots. What kinds of things might make people feel hopeful in a Postmortal world?
55. "'We're going to take what we need to survive--and then maybe we'll take a little more'" (235): If soldiers never grew old and could fight forever, what would be the motivation to keep fighting? If you were a soldier in an army for over 100 years, do you think you would become disillusioned? Explain.
56. "My Cure Day Surprise" (244): John's job is to help kill people. In countries where the death penalty is legal, people have to carry out the sentence somehow, by pressing a button. How is the hangman's job similar to or different from John's job?
57. "They can't do anything to us" (253): Matt says his father taught him that "The job doesn't matter so long as you took pride and care in it." Do you think that's true? Can you think of any job that it wouldn't be true for?
58. "Let it overwhelm me" (256): John tells his son, he wants to find the peace that his client found in death. Do you think he'll find it in life?
59. "'The cure for everything else'" (259): Do you think Skeleton Key is possible? Do you think it would be a good thing? Explain.
60. "'They don't think this is the end of it'" (266): Do you think nuclear war is possible? What is the likelihood that it will happen? Under what conditions?
61. "'They just can't help themselves'" (268): How far would you go to fulfill someone's dying wish? Would you compromise what you believed? Write about what you would do and what you would never do.
62. "'Wait over there'" (277): John is depressed when he is in the hospital, but something makes him realize how he is going to deal with his job. What do you think he is going to do?
63. "You're a real end specialist now" (287): Have you ever had a near-death experience? Do you know someone who has? Describe it.
64. "That Was My Hospital" (288): There have been some recent outbreaks of disease like Ebola and SARS. Do you think there will be more outbreaks? Will they spread further? Why or why not?
65. "There is Nothing Left to Lose" (289): Who is Solara Beck? What is John going to do?

## IV Correction: June 2079 (Twenty Years Later)

66. “We weren’t afraid to love her like our own” (295): Do you think livestock should be given the cure if it becomes available in the future? Why or why not?
67. “Today’s Insurgent” (300): The world’s supply of petroleum is not unlimited. What do you think will happen when the planet runs out of oil? Do you think countries will be prepared? or will they be taken by surprise and experience severe crisis?
68. “The Girl in the Marketplace” (306): Do you think John will go through with his plans at the end of the chapter? Predict what he will do.
69. “The Sweep” (315): How has John and Solara’s relationship changed since the first time they met? How do you feel about this change? Which character do you relate to more?
70. “The Birthday Girl” (321): Solara says she’s sick of men falling in love with her. If you lived to be 100 years old and you still looked like you do now, what do you think you would be most tired of?
71. “They Wouldn’t stop eating” (328): In the documentary film John and Solara watch, satellite photos show “endless patches of ocean that have dead whales, polar bears, and other marine life.” These animals died to make more room for the growing population of people. Can you justify the death of animal species as a result of human population growth? Why or why not?
72. “This is the next logical step” (333): Why do you think John makes the decision he makes in this chapter? Explain your answer.
73. “A very urgent feeling” (339): When Solara asks John why he wants to help her he answers, “That’s what people do, Solara. They go along in life and they figure out who’s worth giving a shit about and who they can let fall by the wayside.” Do you think it’s true that we have to make choices about who we care about and who we don’t care about? Is it not possible to care about everyone?
74. “An Unwelcome Dawn” (344): Do you think the character of John Farrell has changed? Do you think people would change if they had 120 years to do it? Or do you think most people would stay the same? Do you think you would change yourself? Why?
75. “The Human Wave” (355): Would you like to be the last person on earth? Why or why not?