

Name:  
"The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"  
Ursula K. Le Guin

Date:  
Anticipation Guide

**Part A**

Read the following statements. If you agree, circle AGREE; if you disagree, circle DISAGREE.

- |  |       |          |
|--|-------|----------|
| 1. Ignorance is bliss.....   | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 2. Stupidity is happiness.....                                       | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 3. Pain is intellectual.....   | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 4. Evil is interesting.....  | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 5. There can be no happiness without suffering.....                  | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 6. To praise despair is to condemn delight.....                      | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 7. To embrace violence is to lose hold of everything else.....       | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 8. Turning a blind eye to injustice means you are not complicit..... | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 9. Childhood is innocence.....                                       | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 10. You can always justify one's immoral actions.....                | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 11. Happiness comes at a price.....                                  | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 12. You can always exit an uncomfortable situation.....              | AGREE | DISAGREE |

**Part B**

Pick one of the statements from above. Clarify the meaning of the statement and explain in a few sentences why you agree or disagree.

Name:

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Literary Terms  
“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”  
By Ursula K. Le Guin

Literary Term	Definition
utopia	
dystopia	
coming of age	
allegory	
paradox	
psychomyth	

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Academic Vocabulary

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
procession	noun	
restive	adjective	
borne	adjective	
banality	noun	
languor	noun	
magnanimous	adjective	
imperious	adjective	
feeble-minded	adjective	
uncouth	adjective	
sniveling	adjective	

**Answers**  
**Academic Vocabulary**

“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” by Ursula K. Le Guin

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
procession	<i>noun</i>	a number of people or vehicles moving forward in an orderly fashion, especially as part of a ceremony or festival
restive	<i>adjective</i>	unable to keep still or silent and becoming increasingly difficult to control
borne	<i>adjective</i>	carried or transported by the thing specified
banality	<i>noun</i>	something that lacks originality
languor	<i>noun</i>	weakness or weariness of body or mind
magnanimous	<i>adjective</i>	generous or forgiving, especially toward a rival or less powerful person
imperious	<i>adjective</i>	arrogant assurance; domineering
feeble-minded	<i>adjective</i>	impaired intellectually
uncouth	<i>adjective</i>	lacking good manners, refinement, or grace
sniveling	<i>adjective</i>	crying in a feeble way

Name:

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**"The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"  
Reading Questions**

1. Describe the Festival of Summer.

2. How is Omelas presented as a utopian society?

3. Explain the following quote: "They were not naive and happy children— though their children were, in fact, happy."

4. What types of things are NOT in Omelas?

5. What principles is Omelas's happiness founded? (What three things must they be able to distinguish?)

6. Why does the narrator say "...comfort, luxury, exuberance, etc. — they could perfectly well have central heating, subway trains, washing machines, and all kinds of marvelous devices not yet invented here, floating light-sources, fuelless power, a cure for the common cold. Or they could have none of that; it doesn't matter..."? Why doesn't it matter?

7. What is drooz? What conclusion does the narrator come to regarding drooz?

8. What is Omelas's dark secret?

9. At what age does one discover Omelas's dark secret? How does this support a "coming of age" theme?

10. How strict are the laws regarding the child in the cellar?

11. What terrible paradox must those who observe the suffering child face?

12. How do residents of Omelas feel after witnessing the suffering child for the first time?

13. For those who accept Omelas's truth, how do they rationalize their compliance?

14. How does the narrator further defend the citizens of Omelas for their refusal to help the child?

15. How is this story an allegory? What is the message?

16. How would you describe the narrator in this story?

17. How is this story a representation of individuals versus society?

18. What type of person do you think walks away from a seemingly perfect happy place like Omelas?

19. It is morally justifiable to inflict suffering on one person in the service of others' happiness?

20. What details in the story are left unresolved or unexplained?



## **ANSWER KEY**

### **“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” Reading Questions**

1. Describe the Festival of Summer.

Bells are ringing, and it's a beautiful day; the birds are soaring. People are celebrating everywhere: in the parks, the Green Fields, between buildings, houses, and in the harbor. Music plays in the streets while people dance. Horses's manes are decorated with ribbons as they prepare for a friendly race. The children are naked and free.

2. How is Omelas presented as a utopian society?

The city is described like a fairy tale where everyone is happy and joyous. There is no king, no slaves, no knights. Everyone co-exists and lives together peacefully.

3. Explain the following quote: “They were not naive and happy children— though their children were, in fact, happy.”

The narrator thinks that by saying the children are all blissfully happy, that it implies they are stupid or foolish due to the common thought that to be happy, one must be blind to the harsh realities of the world. The narrator wants to assure readers that the citizens of Omelas are happy, but they are very aware of where their happiness comes from and they are not unintelligent.

4. What types of things are NOT in Omelas?

There is no corruption in Omelas: no stock exchange, advertisements, or secret police. There is seemingly no one in charge or in power. There's not one person who is more valuable than the next. There is no war and there's no crime.

5. What principles is Omelas's happiness founded? (What three things must people be able to distinguish?)

Happiness is based on a just discrimination of:

- 1) what is necessary
- 2) what is neither necessary nor destructive
- 3) what is destructive

Citizens must be able to tell the difference between these three descriptions.

6. Why does the narrator say “...comfort, luxury, exuberance, etc.—they could perfectly well have central heating, subway trains, washing machines, and all kinds of marvelous devices not yet invented here, floating light-sources, fuelless power, a cure for the common cold. Or they could have none of that; it doesn't matter...”? Why doesn't it matter?

Here, the narrator reveals that Omelas is not actually a real place. It is an imaginary world where people choose their ideal setting as long as it's not destructive to happiness. The narrator feels some technologies would destruct the happiness in Omelas and thus believes they would be absent in this society. But, what Person A might want is not what Person B might want; so whether the narrator says there's technology or no technology, it doesn't matter because it's your choice as you imagine Omelas in your mind.

7. What is drooz? What conclusion does the narrator come to regarding drooz?

Drooz is a fictional drug that the narrator supposes some of the people of Omelas take to make them feel happy. At first the narrator thought there shouldn't be drugs allowed in this society because drugs are bad in real life and harmful and destructive; however, this is Omelas, this is not real life. The narrator realizes that banning drooz is too oppressive and if it makes people feel good and isn't habit-forming, it's ok. Many people don't take drooz anyway because they are high on life; they are already happy and don't need it. (Which makes sense because most people use drugs to ease their suffering, but in Omelas, the people are not suffering!)



8. What is Omelas's dark secret?

**Everyone who lives in Omelas must be made aware of an unwritten social contract which says the happiness of the entire city depends on the suffering of one child. There is a child kept in a cellar, barely fed, lives in its own feces, naked, is ignored when it cries for help, and EVERYONE must treat it horribly. The happiness of this utopian society relies on the complete misery of this individual child.**

9. At what age does one discover Omelas's dark secret? How does this support a "coming of age" theme?

**Between ages 8-12. Once they discover the news, they are now enlightened to the truth behind their happiness. They must decide if they can accept this truth or not. Those who cannot come to terms with the child's suffering leave the city alone on foot. This huge life decision and ethical dilemma is fitting of a "coming of age" theme.**

10. How strict are the laws regarding the child in the cellar?

**The laws are very strict. They are absolute. You may not even speak one kind word to the child.**

11. What terrible paradox must those who observe the suffering child face?

**The people of Omelas are willing to exchange the suffering of one child for the happiness of the rest of the town. If they have full knowledge that a child suffers in order to provide happiness for everyone else, their own sense of joy is corrupt. You would have to destroy the happiness of thousands to save the child; you would hypothetically provide the chance of happiness to one person at the cost of many.**

12. How do residents of Omelas feel after witnessing the suffering child for the first time?

**They go home in tears. They are enraged, shocked, and sickened at the sight.**

13. For those who accept Omelas's truth, how do they rationalize their compliance?

**They claim the child has become so uncouth and inhuman that he/she would not be happy even if it became free. The child wouldn't know how to behave and would most likely be afraid of the free world.**

14. How does the narrator further defend the citizens of Omelas for their refusal to help the child?

**"Yet it is their tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and the acceptance of their helplessness, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives." The narrator claims the acknowledgement of the child's suffering is the source of their happiness and it makes their happiness more responsible and mature. The knowledge of the suffering child forces the citizens of Omelas to recognize the beauty of their own lives.**

15. How is this story an allegory? What is the message?

**The story symbolizes the imbalance of suffering and happiness amongst society. The child is a metaphor for those who live miserable lives in order for others to be successful and happy. For example: modern slaves, those in poverty, those who are forced to fight wars, or anyone who is severely under paid. The message is happiness cannot exist without suffering.**

16. How would you describe the narrator in this story?

**The narrator is uncertain. The narrator finds difficulty in explaining to readers a true representation of what Omelas is. The narrator is a semi-informed bystander, rather than someone living in the town of Omelas.**

17. How is this story a representation of individuals versus society?

**Aside from the child, no other character is treated as an individual. The other characters can be divided into two categories: those who walk away from Omelas and those who don't.**



18. What type of person do you think walks away from a seemingly perfect happy place like Omelas?

Answers will vary. It requires someone with a conscious and bravery to reject the comfort of society in a stand for one's own sense of morality.

19. It is morally justifiable to inflict suffering on one person in the service of others' happiness?

Answers will vary.

20. What details in the story are left unresolved or unexplained?

Answers will vary.

Where do the people go who leave? What happens to them?

Who is the suffering child? How do you choose the child who suffers?

Who created this law of imbalance? What would happen if you were nice to the child?

Why doesn't anyone ever try to revolt or substantiate this theory of abusing the child?

Why does it have to be a child? Why not an adult? etc.

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Directions: Complete the following acrostic poem with details from the story.

O	
M	
E	
L	
A	
S	

**EXAMPLE**

**“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”**

**By Ursula K. Le Guin**

**Directions: Complete the following acrostic poem with details from the story.**

<b>O</b>	One child must suffer
<b>M</b>	Miraculous lifestyle
<b>E</b>	Equivalent to a dream
<b>L</b>	Life as you want it
<b>A</b>	Always happy
<b>S</b>	Summer festival

**After Reading Learning Menu**  
**“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”**

Directions: Pick one project to complete from the following options.

1) Pretend you have walked away from Omelas. Write a formal letter to the president of the United States with your concern for their society. In detail, explain your experience, the truth of Omelas, your decision to leave, the journey you took to escape, and what action you would like to take moving forward. It should be at least one page in length.

2) Illustrate your own personal utopia on a blank 8.5x11 piece of paper. Your depiction must be detailed, colored, and it should demonstrate a clear image of how your ideal society would function. Include text where needed to explain your premise.

3) There are no characters (aside from the suffering child) in “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas.” Rewrite part of the story introducing multiple characters with backstories and include dialogue to highlight character traits and motivations. Your story should be at least one page in length.

4) Compare this story to our current society. What suffering takes place today but is overlooked, accepted, or ignored? Who knows about it and who doesn't? What false narrative are people given where the reality is much more sinister? Your essay should be at least one page in length.

5) Research the fundamentals of one specific government. Choose from: monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, theocracy, plutocracy, anarchy, or tyranny. Include your opinion on the fairness of that type of government. Compare it to the imbalance of happiness and suffering in the society from “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas.” Who would be the metaphorical child in the government you researched? Your essay should be at least one page in length.

6) Create a pamphlet for Omelas as if you were a travel agent trying to get people to visit or vacation there. Include text and illustrations.

7) Write a personal essay about your morality. What is your idea of justice? What are your personal morals and values? Where do your morals come from? What is the difference between the laws of our country and your sense of what is right and wrong? Your essay should be at least one page in length.

8) Write a concrete poem about the city of Omelas. A concrete poem is a poem that is written in the shape of the subject which the poem is about. The visual appearance of the poem looks like an object that is the main idea of your poem. It does not have to rhyme. Tip: First outline your drawing. Then write your poem in pencil around the shape. When you're happy with the final design, trace over the words with a dark pen and erase all pencil marks.



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flowers the people's hearts  
filled with joy  
splendor and  
every girl and boy

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fields of heaven  
freedom has a small price to pay  
the city is to be a  
the city has no crime  
are certain to miss you  
will be a bird to  
the city is to be a

PREVIEW

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## UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

- Utopian and dystopian fiction are genres of fiction that criticize social and political structures.
- Utopia is a hypothetical society that is perfect in the physical world; it's paradise—the ideal society!
- Dystopia is a hypothetical society full of injustice, oppression, and suffering—due to things like government control, advanced technology, or environmental destruction.

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## COMING OF AGE

- “Coming of age” is a common theme in literature which follows the development of a child or adolescent into adulthood.
- It entails a young person who faces adversity, experiences revelations, discovers life in a new light, or explores self-identity which results in emotional and physical growth or change.

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# ALLEGORY

- Allegories are stories, poems, or art that criticize current events, people, religion, or governmental policies in a subtle way.
- Characters and events in the story are symbols that equate to one bigger message.

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# PARADOX

- A situation or statement that has seemingly contradictory features, yet is true.
- For example:
  - less is more
  - you earn money by spending it
- Authors use paradox to highlight the imperfections of human logic. People are full of contradictions, especially when it comes to behavior and personality.

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## PSYCHOMYTH

- Ursula K. Le Guin, the author, was an iconic American writer known for her science-fiction and fantasy stories.
- Le Guin created the term “psychomyth” to describe her collection of work.
- Psychomyth is a mix of mythological or fantasy stories that focus on human truths and the psychological impacts of growing up.

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## VOCABULARY

- Procession
- Restive
- Borne
- Banality
- Languor
- Magnanimous
- Imperious
- Feeble-minded
- Uncouth
- Sniveling

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## PROCESSION (n)

- a number of people or vehicles moving forward in an orderly fashion, especially as part of a ceremony or festival

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## RESTIVE (adj)

- unable to keep still or silent and becoming increasingly difficult to control

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BORNE (adj)

- carried or transported by the thing specified

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## BANALITY (n)

- something that lacks originality

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NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE



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NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

## LANGUOR (n)

- weakness or weariness of body or mind

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## MAGNANIMOUS (adj)

- generous or forgiving, especially toward a rival or less powerful person

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IMPERIOUS (adj)

- arrogant assurance;  
domineering

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**FEEBLE-MINDED (adj)**

- impaired intellectually

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UNCOUTH (adj)

- lacking good manners, refinement, or grace

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PREVIEW  
NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

SNIVELING (adj)

- crying in a feeble way

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