

Moonflower, Nightshade, All the Hours of the Day by JD Scott Teaching Guide

ISBN13: 978-1-941423-05-9 • 236 pages • \$16.95 • jdscott.com

Questions for Interpreting Stories

- 1) Animals and other creatures appear throughout these stories: chinchillas, cats, birds, aquatic life.... Which stories have animals in them? Are there reasons for why these specific animals are chosen? Are there ecological or environmentalist themes inside any of these stories?
- 2) Some of these stories deal with themes from Christianity (or Abrahamic religions): God, angels, and a retelling of the Crucifixion. What stories contain these elements and to what end is religious iconography or allegory being used?
- 3) What emotional and psychological changes do the character goes through in these stories? How are they different—if they're different—at the end of their respective stories?
- 4) How are LGBTQ+ themes or characters being approached or represented in these stories? Are these stories politically engaged? What makes a story “political” or “unpolitical”?
- 5) In “Chinchilla,” the titular chinchilla (Angelito) is the only character with a name, while the narrator remains unnamed and the boyfriend is simply referred to as “my lover.” What is the significance—if any—of naming a pet while unname humans?
- 6) What do you think happened to the mother at the end of “The Hand That Sews”? Why?
- 7) Where do you think Joshua ended up after he stepped through the magical doorway at the end of “After the End Came the Mall, and the Mall Was Everything”? Why?

Questions for Discussing the Craft of Writing

- 1) Many characters go on journeys or experience a dramatic shift in setting. In “The Teenager,” the boy leaves a strip mall to enter a swamp. In “Chinchilla,” the narrator leaves the city to move to the suburbs. In “After the End Came the Mall...,” there is a distinct juxtaposition between “dead malls” and the part of the mall that Joshua lives in. What is the effect of reading a short story that takes place in multiple locations? How does moving between settings impact the reader’s experience?
- 2) Each story has a varying degree of how the real world is represented (or misrepresented) and woven with a type of magic. In “The Teenager,” there are arguably zero fantastic elements. In “Where Parallel Lines Come to Touch,” Riley is visited by the ghost of her brother, while most of reality stays the same. In stories like “Cross” and “After the End Came the Mall...” the worlds seem to abandon a certain logic because people can walk on water and cats can talk. How are magical elements being used and how do they impact the way the stories are told?
- 3) What makes a story a story? How are stories supposed to look and feel? If a story was a recipe, what “ingredients” are required? What ingredients are accepted or rejected or “substituted” in the stories of *Moonflower, Nightshade, All the Hours of the Day*?

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- 4) Most of the stories in this collection are told from a first-person point-of-view. How does this differ from third- or even second-person? Which stories are told in third-person point-of-view and how are they different from those that are told straight from the mouths of characters?
- 5) The stories in this collection are of varying lengths. Compare and contrast the shortest work, “Fordite Pendant” (under 2000 words) with “After the End Came the Mall...” (over 20,000 words) in terms of what’s accomplished via word count. How is a short story different than a novella-length work? What can shorter stories do that longer stories cannot, and vice versa?
- 6) To create a story collection means the author must order the stories for the reader’s experience. What do you think the thought process was behind organizing these stories in the order they’re in? Is there some narrative or thematic arc to the way the stories are presented?

Creative Writing Prompts & Assignments

- 1) Pick a non-narrator or non-protagonist from one of these stories and re-write the story from a different character’s perspective. What would “Chinchilla” look like if it were told from the lover’s point-of-view? What about the valentine in “Moonflower...”? What if “Where Parallel Lines Come to Touch” was narrated by River instead of Riley? Ricky in “The Hand That Sews”? The girl in “The Teenager”? Maritza in “Night Things”?
- 2) Many of the stories in this collection make use of sensory detail (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). Pick one of the five senses and write a short story paying special attention to that sense.
- 3) Take a familiar fairy tale/myth/parable and retell it in a contemporary (21st century) setting.
- 4) Create a magical object (like the wishing scroll in “The Hand That Sews”) and define the rules of this object. Write a story that is impacted by the presence (or absence) of this object.
- 5) **For the Teacher:** have students research *parables, fairy tales, fables, myths, legends, tall tales,* and *folklore* and compare and contrast these terms to find out what makes them similar/different.

Vocabulary Words & Literary Terms for Discussion

- Allegory
- Allusion
- Fabulism/Fabulist Fiction
- Genre Fiction (compared and contrasted with Literary Fiction)
- Mimesis
- Motif
- Novella
- Realism
- Theme
- Sensory Details
- Symbolism
- Verisimilitude