

# Download Ebook Discussion Questions The Wesleyan Anthology Of Science

## III. Discussion Questions

### a. Individual Stories

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844)

1. As an early sf tale, this story makes important contributions to the sf megatext. What images, situations, plots, characters, settings, and themes do you recognize in Hawthorne's story that recur in contemporary sf works in various media?
2. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the worst sin is to violate, "in cold blood, the sanctity of the human heart." In what ways do the male characters of "Rappaccini's Daughter" commit this sin?
3. In what ways can Beatrice be seen as a pawn of the men, as a strong and intelligent woman, as an alien being? How do these different views interact with one another?
4. Many descriptions in the story lead us to question what is "Actual" and what is "Imaginary"? How do these descriptions function to work both symbolically and literally in the story?
5. What is the attitude toward science in the story? How can it be compared to the attitude toward science in other stories from the anthology?

Jules Verne, excerpt from *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864)

1. Who is narrator of this tale? In your opinion, why would Verne choose this particular character to be the narrator? Describe his relationship with the other members of this subterranean expedition. Many of Verne's early novels feature a trio of protagonists who symbolize the "head," the "heart," and the "hand." Why? How does this notion apply to the protagonists in Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*?
2. Verne's works were among the first successful examples of didactic "hard" sf. Verne himself called them "novels of science," and one critic has described them as being more "scientific fiction" than science fiction. What is the difference between science fiction and scientific fiction? Where in this excerpt do you see examples of Verne teaching "hard" science to the reader?
3. The heroes' discovery of an underground forest of giant mushrooms is a scene that appears in virtually all movie versions of the novel (even the most unfaithful). Why? What is there about his particular scene that captures the imagination? How does it exemplify the epic nature of this "extraordinary voyage"?
4. Professor Lidenbrock says "Science, my boy, is built upon errors but they are errors that are good to make, for they lead little by little to the truth." In this story, how is scientific knowledge obtained? How is nature portrayed? What is the role of the scientist? How are the scientist's discoveries ultimately rewarded?
5. Verne's narrative style is a constant oscillation between Romantic reverie and Positivistic realism, between flights of imagination and logical reasons, between poetic description and dialogical debate. Where in this excerpt do you see this back-and-forth dynamic at work? How does it serve as a kind of narrative bridge between the "science" and the "fiction" in this story?

H.G. Wells, "The Star" (1897)

1. Why does Wells end "The Star" with comments by Martian astronomers? How does the story demonstrate "how small the vastest of human catastrophes may seem, at a distance of a few million miles?"
2. Unlike most of the "asteroids-careening-toward-Earth" stories and movies that followed it, "The Star" does not involve individual heroes or rescue projects. Why do you think Wells decided not to include them?
3. Some readers might see "The Star" as a moral parable; others, as a plausible scenario for a future encounter between Earth and a dangerous object in space. Could the story be told without either the moral point of view or the scientific details? What would it gain or lose?
4. Who is the narrator? How does the story's structure reinforce its message?
5. The basic plot of "The Star" has been used many times, from Wells's own day, to modern films like *Meteor*, *Asteroid*, and *Deep Impact*, all the way to contemporary scientific speculations about how to defend against errant asteroids. What is the appeal of such stories about objects in space threatening the Earth?



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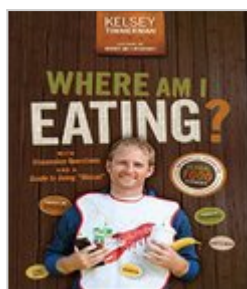
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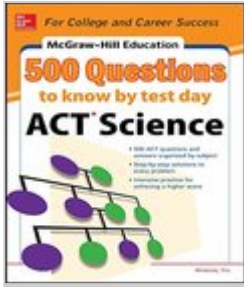


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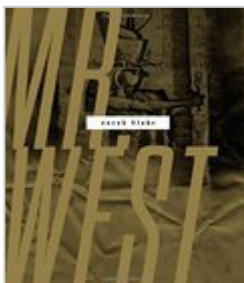
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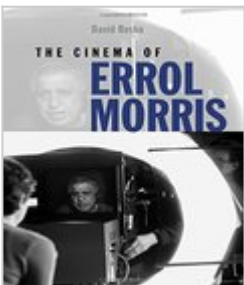
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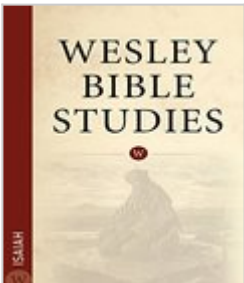
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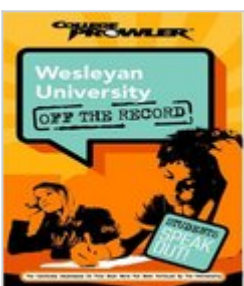
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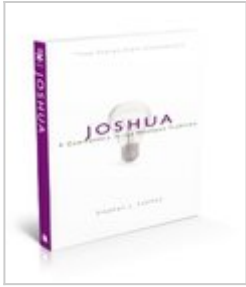
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