

## ***The Chrysalids: Questions for Analysis and Discussion***

### **Part One: Life in Waknuk (Chapters 1- 4)**

1. Compared to our society, the one that David lives in seems both familiar and unusual. Compare the similarities and differences in terms of speech, climate and geography, laws and customs (e.g. offenses and blasphemies,) and farming and other occupations.
2. What information can you glean about David's family history? Consider both the mother and the father.
3. How does the incident with Sophie (initially and later) suggest why David might be a person who will question things as they are?
4. According to David, only two books have survived from earlier times: The Bible and Nicolson's repentance's. Read the novel and identify what the major tenants of the two books are. (Refer to pages 12-13 of the novel)
5. How are the two books similar? Consider which account is followed in Waknuk.
6. Indicate the ways in which they differ. Focus on the personality of God, the actual words used, the place of woman in creation, etc. Which account does our society appear to follow?

7. The word “chrysalid” means a state into which the larvae of most insects pass before becoming perfect insects. The chrysalid takes in no food and is inactive. In general, the word can mean a sheltered state of growth. IF we use this definition as a description of life in Waknuk, what are the people sheltering themselves from? What is the “perfect state” they are trying to achieve?
  
8. In the first few chapters, are the residents of Waknuk getting closer or further away from perfection? There is evidence for both sides, so be sure to have this in your answer.
  
9. David has two dreams: a happy one of a fabulous city (pg. 7) and a nightmare (pg. 30). What are some of the things he finds appealing in the happy dream?
  
10. What does he make of this recurrence? With what people does he share his dream? How does he do so?
  
11. Suggest why Uncle Axel is concerned about David and his friends. Review details of Waknuk society, its fears and beliefs.
  
12. What does David’s nightmare suggest about his nature and character? What are the dangers he may have to face.

## ***The Chrysalids: Questions for Analysis and Discussion*** **Part II: Death in Waknuk (Chapters 5-11)**

1. Uncle Axel's Geography lesson and talks with David in chapters 6 and 8 extend our knowledge of the geography of Labrador and well beyond. Although he uses names that are unfamiliar to us, what familiar area does he seem to be describing? Give details. In your opinion, what could have possibly happened to that area?
2. Why do you think that some parts of the world have been affected differently than others? Develop a scale or a system to help you to rate the parts of the world most adversely affected.
3. In what ways does Uncle Axel's lesson help explain the fanatic beliefs of the people of Labrador and Waknuk? Are you more sympathetic to them now?
4. What hints are we given about the origins of the Fringes? Why might Marther's journal be upsetting to Mr. Storm in particular? (Refer to pages 61)
5. Even though Uncle Axel does not believe the religious version of the "Tribulation" held by those in Waknuk, he is still puzzled by what did happen and why. What is he trying to tell David about "the quality of mind" pgs. 80-83, and his (David's) possible role in the evolution of society?
6. In these chapters, we see the results of the beliefs and the laws of Waknuk in stark and human terms. Many things we would consider "rights" such as: personal freedom, the natural love between mother and child, the simple pleasures of peer friendships, and family joys, are cut short by the need for purification and perfection. For each of the following examples, write one point explaining how one or more of these "rights" has been violated:  
(See following page)

- The purging of the Wenders (ch 5)
- Petra's birth and Aunt Harriet's visit (ch 7)
- David's realization of his "mutancy" (pg. 80)
- Petra's accident (pgs. 86-88)
- Old Jacobs opinion (pgs. 90-92)
- Romance- David and Rosalind
- Anne and Alan (ch 10)
- Petra and the Creature (ch 11)
- Uncle Axel's admission (pg. 121)

7. Allowing for the strict laws and their purposes in Waknuk, could any of the injustices or cruelties illustrated above have been avoided? Could they at least have been dealt with more fairly and humanely? Give your views and reasons.

8. How many of the cruelties and injustices are due as much to character of the individuals involved as to the absolute need for purification? Remember as old Jacob said, "Mutants used to be burned." Give examples and explain.

9. Even up to Chapter 11, and despite many tragic events, David and his group are not really active rebels or even dangerous non-conformists. Rather they behave more like normal young people who possess one exceptional gift, that of telepathy. Referring to the events and statements in these chapters, show to what extent you agree with this assessment.

10. Describe carefully the exact nature of the gift- uses, limits, and types. At this point, are you inclined to agree with Uncle Axel's view of its purpose or those of the Waknuk elders? (Before deciding, discuss the possible dangers in any society of such advancement of human development; e.g. what if five of your classmates had the gift and the rest didn't?)

11. At this point (Chapter 11) as the need for decisive action increases, do you feel that David's human qualities will be a positive or negative factor in his taking on a leadership role within the group.

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**Part III: To the Fringes and the Brave New World**  
**(Chapters 12-17)**

1. At last, we gradually begin to see the real “Fringes” and get hints about the rest of the world out there. Describe the nature and the quality of life among the “Fringe People” as David and the others meet them.
2. In your opinion, what is the most inhumane aspect of the lives the Fringe people have been doomed to by the laws of Labrador? Would they be better off having been burnt as in the old days? Focus on Sophie and Spider Man.
3. To what degree was uncle Axel right in his guesses about what happens to the natural world in the fringes and its possible effect on the future? Do you now see Waknuk’s beliefs in a softer light?
4. Why do you think that the men of Waknuk are pursuing the group so far and so desperately?
5. From the information in chapters 12 to 16, reconstruct what may have happened at Tribulation to various parts of the world. What “good” appears to have come out of destruction and deviation?
6. Despite their fear and the horrors around them, David and his group manage to display many of the humane and natural qualities so obviously lacking in Waknuk: love, loyalty, courage, and individual responsibility. Illustrate, with reference to David, Rosalind and Michael, the qualities of character they display.

7. How much of her former humanity has Sophie left? What do you feel about her actions and motives in the final chapters of the novel?
  
8. From what you have learned about Sealand, are people like David and Rosalind likely to prosper there? Carefully review the motives for the Sealanders' rescue mission; compare their treatment of Petra and Michael.
  
9. What is the significance of the Sealanders' attitudes towards the slain people? Connect your response to their apparent views of humanity's future.
  
10. From listening to the woman from Sealand, David has concerns about it even before going to this "Brave New World". What are they? Are the Sealanders more or less technologically advanced than the people of Waknuk? Are they as violent? What form do their battles take as opposed to those between the Fringes and Waknuk?
  
11. Is Sealand or Waknuk more likely to cause another tribulation? Is either of them a perfect society? For example, do they share some of the same faults, beliefs and hopes? Give your considered opinion after reviewing Uncle Axel's notions about humanity's evolution and the discussion between Petra and the woman from Sealand.
  
12. Reflect on the novel and consider the following and final question. Which society are we most like? Are we the "Old People" that David's group wants to be like? What do you think John Wyndam's novel is telling us about our future? (It was published in 1955, so think of its historical context.)