1. What are the main methods of control in the Gileadean regime and how are these portrayed? Discuss Atwood’s depiction of oppression in the public and in the private life in *A Handmaid’s Tale*. How totalitarian is Gilead?
   * Atwood’s concerns in *A Handmaid’s Tale* also go beyond women’s freedom. Discuss ways that this novel made you think differently about society and in the world.
   * *The Handmaid’s Tale* has been referred to as “a scathing satire and a dire warning.” What elements of contemporary society is Margaret Atwood satirizing? How does she use irony?
2. What effects have Gileadean political structures had on women? Explore the issues concerning women and feminism raised in the novel.
   * Discuss the significance of names and of naming in *A Handmaid’s Tale*.
   * Talk about the role of Moira, “women’s grapevines” (of gossip/information), and stories in the text.
   * How does the relationship between language/literacy and power contribute to the meaning of Atwood’s novel?
3. How and why does Atwood use religion in the novel? How does Gilead use religion as a tool? Is Gilead actually religiously orthodox? How does this relate to the real world?
4. “I’m sorry there is so much pain in this story. I’m sorry it’s in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there’s nothing I can do to change it.” (279). Discuss the literary choices (form, genre, narrative voice, point of view, etc.) Atwood has chosen to present Offred’s story to us, stating how effective you find it.
5. **Examine Atwood’s reasons for including the “Historical Notes” explaining how they take up and develop the concerns shown in the rest of the novel. To what extent are the “Historical Notes” necessary to the narrative?**
   * **What does it reveal about the leadership of Gilead? How does this change your understanding of the Commander?**
6. “Ordinary,” said Aunt Lydia, “is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary.” Discuss the author’s treatment of the dangers of apathy in *The Handmaid’s Tale*.
   * Discuss the relationship between apathy and “**Boring and Tolerable**” in dystopias and *The Handmaid’s Tale*.
7. **Discuss the evidence of rape culture in Gilead vs. the United States. Has Gilead protected women? Do they value women more equitably (as the Commander suggests at Jezebel’s)? How can we end rape culture in the USA?**
8. Why are two of the bigger villians in the text women? What is Atwood’s purpose for this?
9. How is Commander Waterford hypocritical? What does it matter?
   * Ultimately, is he more evil, naïve, oppressed, or a product of Doublethink? Compare to O’brien from *1984*?
10. **Discuss Fascism and the rise of Gilead from the ashes of America.**
11. Compare and contrast Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale* to England in *Children of Men—*which country response to a lack of babies seems more believable?
12. **Discuss the Ceremony and sex within Gilead. What is Atwood’s purpose for writing about sex in the way she does? What can we learn about creating healthy sexual relationships from Gilead’s destruction of sex?**