

Discussion Questions for “Candide” by Voltaire

July 27, 2019

1. How does Voltaire satirize the philosophy of optimism (popularized by Alexander Pope), in which “all is for the best” in the first chapter?
2. In Chapter II, Candide is forcibly conscripted into the Bulgarian army and participates in the Seven Years War. Later, in Chapters XI through XII, we learn the story of Cunegonde’s servant, the old woman. What is Voltaire’s view of war?
3. The philosophy that mankind has both reason and free will is also lampooned in “Candide.” Can you think of examples in which the author targets free will and supports that the opposite is the way of the world?
4. Throughout Chapters IV through VI, Candide experiences one disaster after another from shipwreck to earthquake to religious persecution, but is elated at being reunited with his teacher, Pangloss. How does Candide view the Catholic Church and the practices like auto-da-fe? Does the author support the theory of Divine Providence, in which a loving and caring God watches over humanity?
5. In Chapters VII through X, Candide is reunited with his first love, Cunegonde. He learns that she was not fatally disemboweled and how she came to be the chattel of both a Grand Inquisitor and a wealthy Jewish banker. At this point, do both Candide and Cunegonde still subscribe to the optimistic philosophy Pangloss taught them?
6. What is the significance of the three men that Candide, an essentially happy-go-lucky and gentle person, kills?
7. There are several utopias depicted in “Candide.” Is Candide satisfied with the various utopias at the beginning in Westphalia and later in Eldorado? Which utopia do you think is the author’s true idea of paradise? Where do we find the most “civilized” people in Candide’s travels?
8. Throughout the story, amazing coincidences occur; those thought to be dead are alive – those thought never to be seen again appear halfway around the world. What is the purpose of these coincidences?
9. What does Candide mean by the decision to cultivate his garden?