

“A Room With a View” Discussion Questions

February 27, 2016

1. The Bloomsbury Group, which included Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, and the author, amongst others, believed that “one's prime objects in life were love, the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience and the pursuit of knowledge.” This view is in opposition to the strictures of the Victorians. In what ways does “A Room With a View” represent the views of the Bloomsbury group?
2. What is Forster's view of art in this book? Are there right and wrong ways to understand and appreciate artwork? How do the characters in the novel present this view?
3. What do you think about the way the British travelers conceive of Italians and Italy? How might their attitudes reflect the elitist, imperialist mindset that Forster seems to criticize throughout the book?
4. How does Forster use the variations of light and darkness, vision and blindness, and day and night to express the themes of clarity and shadow in the book?
5. What is the role of nature in the book and what is its relevance to the struggles of characters to make decisions about their lives?
6. A frequent criticism of Forster's plots is his reliance on coincidence and chance. What improbable circumstances are required to unite Lucy and George? Is George right when he says of their reunion in England, “It is Fate. Everything is Fate.”? Does the novel suggest an external force that brings the lovers together?
7. There are many kinds of deceit in the book: betrayal by friends, secrets between lovers, and most importantly Lucy's self-deceit. Four of the last five chapters show Lucy lying to nearly everyone else in the book. Which kinds of lies are most harmful to the “personal relations” that Forster cherished?
8. According to Mr. Emerson's view and the view that the book most sympathetically presents, the best way to live one's life is to be true to one's nature, and to follow it in spite of all societal pressures, which requires great strength. Do you think that Lucy has a strong character? Is she an example of a strong woman?
9. Lucy and George both stand outside Britain's traditional class structure. George is a clerk, the son of a journalist and grandson of a laborer. Lucy is the daughter of a lawyer and her social status is “more splendid than her antecedents entitled her to.” What role does social class play in the novel? Why did Forster choose Cecil to deliver the statement: “The classes ought to mix... There ought to be intermarriage—all sorts of things. I believe in democracy.”?
10. Charlotte and Mr. Beebe both act “out of character” near the end of the book. How can these behaviors be accounted for, given what is known about them so far? Do you think that Forster gives satisfactory preparation for their actions? If not, what purpose does the ambiguity serve?