

A204 Summer 2010 Midterm Preview

What You Need to Know

- The primary works we've studied in class
 - Title, author/director, date
 - Contents
 - Setting (historical context of the story)
 - Storyline
 - Characters
 - Themes
 - Prominent scenes
 - Historical context of the work's creation and circulation
- The secondary readings (scholarly articles)
 - Title
 - Author
 - Main ideas
 - Key terms

What the Exam Will Contain

I. You will be given two quotes or scenes from the works of fiction and film we have covered in class. For each, you will explain:

1. What work it is from (title, author, date);
2. What is going on within the quote or scene;
3. What is its thematic significance—how does the content of this scene or quote relate to the broader issues or ideas the work is concerned with?
 - a. Explain what those larger issues or ideas (themes) are.
 - b. Explain how specific features of the quote or scene relate to these themes.
4. The historical context of the work—of its contents, and/or of its creation.

Example:

There is a three-room apartment in the S Club where, it is said, a woman once hanged herself from the locust tree in the courtyard. Although by the

time I arrived the tree had already grown so tall you couldn't reach the lowest branch, there was still no one staying there. For a period of several years I lived in those rooms, devoting whatever spare time I had to making copies of ancient inscriptions. Very few guests came by to shake me from my lethargy and of course I encountered nothing in the inscriptions—no social problems, plans for reform, and so on—to pull me out of it either. And yet the span of my years was in fact silently slipping away. But that was exactly the way I wanted it. On summer nights when there were lots of mosquitoes, I would sit under the locust tree, cooling myself with a rush fan. When I looked up at the patches of blue black sky visible through cracks in the dense foliage, ice-cold caterpillars would often plop down on my neck.

Sample response:

1. Lu Xun, "Preface" to *Cheering from the Sidelines*, 1922.

2. The author is describing the period in his life when his attempt to start a literary magazine has failed, and he is living and working in Beijing. He has apparently abandoned his dreams and is just letting his life slip away.

3. The "Preface" is autobiographical. It tells about the author's life, and about his hopes of using literature to save the soul of his nation. He originally plans to be a doctor, but shifts his hopes to literature when he realizes that his countrymen need healthy spirits more than they need healthy bodies. His efforts fail, and there are many details in this passage that show his despair: the legend of the dead woman, the chilly caterpillars falling on his neck, his hobby of just copying dead words ("ancient inscriptions") that have nothing to do with saving people or solving the nation's problems. This is maybe the low point of his story. Luckily for modern Chinese literature, things don't end here. A friend comes to prod him out of his misery, and he will write "Diary of a Madman" for *New Youth* magazine. Even at the end of the Preface, though, his still has doubts, and he seems unsure just how much literature will really be able to do.

4. Lu Xun's despair is partly personal, but it also has to do with the failure of the Revolution of 1911 and the dark days of the Warlord period. There was a general sense of failure; this is what made *New Youth* and the New Culture Movement call for rejecting Chinese tradition.

II. You will be asked one or two questions about the secondary readings, their main ideas, and their relevance to the primary works we've been studying.