

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

## Themes **Sample Answers** **Evidence and Analysis**

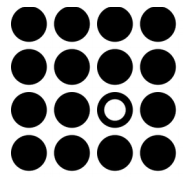


**Directions:** A theme is a concept or idea that an author explores in a literary work. For each theme, collect 5-6 details from *Mrs Dalloway* (such as specific plot points, symbols, or quotes) that the author uses to explore that theme and enter them in the Evidence section of the table.

Next, use the evidence you've collected to write a Theme Description that explains the role of the theme in *Mrs Dalloway*. Your Theme Description should be 1-2 paragraphs. Here are some questions to consider as you write each Theme Description:

- How do the ideas or actions of the main characters reflect different aspects of the theme?
- Does the theme develop or change over the course of *Mrs Dalloway*? If so, how?
- If your evidence includes symbols, explain how the author uses those symbols to explore the theme.
- If your evidence includes specific quotes from the text, explain how those quotes provide examples of how the theme applies to *Mrs Dalloway*?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



## Privacy, Loneliness, and Communication

Evidence		
1.	2.	3.
4.	5.	6.

Theme Description
<p>Throughout <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> Virginia Woolf gives us glimpses into the minds of her characters while at the same time showing their outward communication with other people. This framework leads to a complex series of relations, and her characters deal with the privacy, loneliness, and communication of these relationships in different ways. <b>Peter Walsh</b> is notably introverted, and gets swept up in his personal fantasies. Even <b>Clarissa</b>, who loves parties, deeply experiences her own incommunicable thoughts and the independence of her existence. She enjoys mingling with other people, but thinks that the true heart of life lies in the fact that the <b>old woman</b> across the way has her own room, and Clarissa has hers.</p> <p>The inherent privacy of the soul is not always positive, though, and it often appears as loneliness. <b>Septimus</b> is the greatest example of this. No one understands his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and inner turmoil. Woolf shows the loneliness of the soul in nearly every interaction between characters, as she contrasts people's rich inner dialogues with their often mundane, failed attempts at communication with each other. <b>Richard</b> tries to say "I love you" to Clarissa, but is unable to do so and gives her flowers instead. Clarissa even sees Septimus's suicide as an act of communication, but by its very nature Septimus can receive no response from the world. The important reunion pointed to by the entire book – the meeting between Clarissa, Peter, and <b>Sally</b> – only takes place beyond the page, just after the novel ends. With all this privacy, loneliness, and failed communication Woolf shows how difficult it is to make meaningful connections in the modern world. Something as seemingly-frivolous as Clarissa's party then takes on a deeper, more important meaning, as it as an effort by Clarissa to try to draw people together.</p>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



## Social Criticism

Evidence		
1.	2.	3.
4.	5.	6.

Theme Description
<p>Though <i>Mrs. Dalloway's</i> action concerns only one day and mostly follows a lady throwing a party, Woolf manages to thread her novel with criticism of English society and post-War conservatism. In Woolf's time the British Empire was the strongest in the world, with colonies all across the globe (including Canada, India, and Australia), but after World War I England's power began to crumble. England was technically victorious in the War, but hundreds of thousands of soldiers died and the country suffered huge financial losses. <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> then shows how the English upper class tried to cling to old, outmoded traditions and pretend that nothing had changed. This is tragically exhibited through <b>Septimus</b>, as society ignores his PTSD. Septimus fought for his country, but now the country is trying to pretend that the horrors of war left no lasting traces on its soldiers. The empty tradition and conservatism of the aristocracy is also shown in the characters of <b>Lady Bruton</b>, <b>Aunt Helena</b>, and <b>Hugh Whitbread</b>, who have traditional values and manners but are hopelessly removed from modern life. <b>Richard</b> works for the Conservative Party, which is portrayed as outdated, stuffy, and soon to be replaced by the Labor Party. All the characters are still preoccupied with social class, as when <b>Clarissa</b> snobbily avoids inviting her poor cousin <b>Elsie</b> to her party. Even the poor <b>Doris Kilman</b> is endlessly bitter towards Clarissa for her wealth and charm. The futility of classism and outdated conservatism then culminates in the figure of the Prime Minister. He is first mentioned as <b>Peter's</b> critique of Clarissa (that she will marry a prime minister and so become a useless appendage to a role rather than the partner to a man) and then his "greatness" is discussed by people in the street, but when the Prime Minister actually appears in person he is ordinary and almost laughable. The Prime Minister belongs to the old order of Empire, repression, and classism, which Woolf shows must be discarded so that England can survive in the modern era.</p>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



## Time

Evidence		
1.	2.	3.
4.	5.	6.

Theme Description
<p><i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> takes place over the course of one day, and in its very framework Woolf emphasizes the passage of time. There are no real chapter breaks, and the most notable divider of the narrative is the chiming of Big Ben as the day progresses. All the novel's action is so compressed (and usually composed of thoughts and memories) that a few minutes can fill many pages. The chiming of Big Ben is a reminder of the inevitable march of time, and fits with <b>Clarissa</b>'s fear of death and the danger of living even one day.</p> <p>The circular presence of the past is also deeply intertwined with the forward ticking of the clock. Clarissa, <b>Peter</b>, <b>Richard</b>, and <b>Sally</b> interact very little in the present, but Clarissa and Peter relive in great depth their youth at Bourton, so their past relations add weight and complexity to their present interactions. <b>Septimus</b> is even more ruthlessly pursued by the past, as he actually sees visions of <b>Evans</b>, his dead soldier friend. One of Woolf's original titles for the book was "The Hours," so she clearly finds the idea of time important, and by simultaneously emphasizing the chiming of the hours and the ubiquity of past memories, she ends up showing the fluidity of time, which can be both linear and circular at once.</p>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



## Psychology and Perception

Evidence		
1.	2.	3.
4.	5.	6.

Theme Description
<p>The novel mostly consists of inner dialogue and stream of consciousness (a modernist technique that Woolf helped pioneer), so the inner workings of the characters' minds are very important to the work. Woolf herself suffered from mental illness (and ultimately committed suicide), and certain aspects of her own psychological struggles appear in the book, particularly through <b>Septimus</b>. Woolf had a distrust of doctors regarding psychology, which she shows clearly in <b>Dr. Holms</b> and <b>Sir William Bradshaw</b>. Septimus is a tragic example of just how much harm doctors can do when they prefer conversion to understanding, refusing to truly examine another's mental state.</p> <p>In <i>Septimus</i> Woolf shows the inner workings of PTSD and mental illness, but in her other characters she also gives a brilliant, sensitive treatment of how the mind understands external sensations and time. Long, poetic passages capture the perception of images, sounds, memories, and stream of consciousness all at once. The science of psychology was still young in Woolf's time, but in her intricate, penetrating character development she shows her own knowledge of the brain, creating personalities that exhibit the inner workings of all kinds of minds.</p>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



## Death

Evidence		
1.	2.	3.
4.	5.	6.

Theme Description
Though much of the novel's action consists of preparations for a seemingly frivolous party, death is a constant undercurrent to the characters' thoughts and actions. The obvious example of this is <b>Septimus</b> , who suffers from mental illness and ends up killing himself. In his inner dialogue Septimus sees himself as a godlike figure who has gone from "life to death," and his situation as a former soldier shows how the death and violence of World War I have corrupted his mind. <b>Peter Walsh</b> fears growing old and dying, and so tries to pretend he is young and invincible by living in fantasies and pursuing younger women. <b>Clarissa</b> is also preoccupied with death even as she goes about the business of enjoying life, making small talk, and throwing parties. From the start she feels the danger of living even one day, and repeatedly quotes from Shakespeare's play <i>Cymbeline</i> , a passage about the comfort of death: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages." In the parallel characters of Septimus and Clarissa, Woolf shows two ways of dealing with the terror of living one day - Clarissa affirms life by throwing a party, while Septimus offers his suicide as an act of defiance and communication. These two characters never meet, but when Clarissa hears about Septimus's suicide she feels that she understands him.