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Welcome to the LitCharts study guide on Stephen Vincent Benet's *By the Waters of Babylon*. Created by the original team behind SparkNotes, LitCharts are the world's best literature guides. Benet's father was a US military officer with a strong interest in literature. Benet spent his childhood moving between army bases, and his older brother and sister were also writers. He published his first poetry collection as a 17-year-old freshman at Yale University. During WWI, Benet left college for a year of civilian military service, but eventually returned to Yale to earn both a BA and an MA in English. In 1920, he traveled to Paris, where he met his future wife, Rosemary Carr. The couple returned to Paris in 1925. A prolific writer across many genres, Benet is best known for his poetry, novels, and short stories, but he also wrote screenplays, radio broadcasts, and even an opera libretto. Benet's writing often focuses on historical and folkloric themes, and his 1937 short story *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and his 1928 epic poem *John Browns Body* are among his best known works. Benet died in New York after a heart attack at the age of 44. Benet did not see military combat during WWI; he spent his year of civilian service working as a cipher-clerk but he would have been keenly aware of the devastating effects of the war, which left over 20 million people wounded and more than 17 million dead. The wars high casualty rates were, in part, a result of new military technology like machine guns and poisonous mustard gas. Benet's year in Paris coincided with the heyday of young expatriate American writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who came to be known as the Lost Generation. The story was first published during the Spanish Civil War, just months after the Bombing of Guernica on April 26, 1937. The bombing, which caused international humanitarian outcry, intentionally targeted civilians in a busy marketplace and was carried out by German and Italian allies of the fascist Spanish National government. The title *By the Waters of Babylon* is an allusion to Psalm 137 in the King James Bible. The first verse of the Psalm reads, *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. The Psalm recalls the Babylonian Captivity, a period between 598 and 538 BCE, when the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II conquered Jerusalem and transported enslaved Israelites to the city of Babylon. Like the Israelites, Johns tribe was forced out of a city (New York) destroyed by a terrible war. Key Facts about By the Waters of Babylon Full Title: By the Waters of Babylon When Written: 1937 Where Written: United States of America When Published: The story appeared in the July 31, 1937 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* as *The Place of the Gods*, and was first published under the title *By the Waters of Babylon* in *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction* in 1943. Literary Period: Modernist Literature/ Lost Generation Genre: Short story, Speculative fiction, Post-apocalyptic fiction Setting: Upstate New York and New York City (referred to as the Place of the Gods or New York) in a post-apocalyptic, post-technological world. Climax: John finds the remains of the dead god and realizes that the gods were, in fact, an earlier, technologically advanced human society. Point of View: First person limited Benet's Fears for the Future. In the years leading up to WWII, Benet grew increasingly alarmed by the rise of fascism in Europe. His fears for the future of democratic society inspired him to write the poetry collection *Burning City*. Published in 1936, the poems offer a nightmarish vision of a world where technology has turned against humans and society is embroiled in a political and moral crisis. 0 ratings 0% found this document useful (0 votes) 30 views The document contains a set of comprehension and literary analysis questions for Stephen Vincent Benet's story "By the Waters of Babylon." It prompts readers to explore themes, character motivations, and the author's use of symbolism. After reading the story, students are directed to answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper or document. Upload the document or photo to the E-Joker. What profession does John plan to have? 2. Why does John set out on his journey? 3. What does John discover to be untrue about the Place of the Gods? 4. When and where does this story take place? 5. Why is it forbidden for anyone but a priest to visit the Dead Places? 6. Make Inferences About Setting What do you think the following places are actually referring to? a. Ou-dis-sunb. The Bitter Waterc. UBTREASd. ASHINg. Great caves and tunnels? 7. What is the theme, or message, of this story? 8. How do the words of Psalm 137 relate to the discoveries John makes about the Great Burning and the gods? 9. Evaluate Narrative Device John is an example of a nave narrator a narrator with limited knowledge, who does not fully understand what he experiences. Why did Benet choose this kind of narrator for *By the Waters of Babylon*? 10. Evaluate Narrative Device Where does the author use the techniques of foreshadowing and flashback? What is their effect on the narrative? 11. This story was published in 1937, when the threat of a second world war loomed large over the face of Europe. In what ways is this historical context reflected in the story? Explain your answer. Report this resource to let us know if it violates our terms and conditions. Our customer service team will review your report and will be in touch. Ask a Question Answers: Asked by nyiah a #1341805 Last updated by nyiah a #1341805 on 4/11/2024 1:13 PM Answers: Asked by kelly j #1250361 Last updated by Honesty H #1334188 on 1/23/2024 4:49 AM Answers: Asked by Alyssa M #468647 Last updated by jill d #170087 on 12/8/2023 1:14 PM Answers: Asked by Kayla W #1321151 Last updated by Aslanon 9/26/2023 4:33 PM Answers: Asked by adriana p #804235 Last updated by Sujey J #1139453 on 5/6/2023 4:22 AM Answers: Asked by Daede H #989628 Last updated by Aslanon 3/24/2023 12:53 AM Answers: Asked by Artez C #1275302 Last updated by Aslanon 12/1/2022 11:58 PM Answers: Asked by braden k #1205196 Last updated by braden k #1205196 on 11/12/2022 7:56 AM Answers: Asked by shid j #1185291 Last updated by jill d #170087 on 10/25/2021 3:51 PM Answers: Asked by shid j #1185391 Last updated by jill d #170087 on 10/25/2021 3:31 PM Answers: Asked by alex s #1185272 Last updated by alex s #1185272 on 10/25/2021 2:32 AM Answers: Asked by amaris l #1183712 Last updated by Aslanon 10/19/2021 6:10 PM Answers: Asked by Ulysses W #1180511 Last updated by Aslanon 10/7/2021 10:38 PM Answers: Asked by Mary G #1176162 Last updated by Aslanon 9/21/2021 6:01 PM Answers: Asked by bygary a #1169855 Last updated by Aslanon 8/26/2021 4:41 PM Answers: Asked by Kowar A #1152464 Last updated by jill d #170087 on 5/21/2021 3:30 PM Answers: Asked by emma h #1150666 Last updated by jill d #170087 on 5/17/2021 6:56 PM Answers: Asked by Mia H #1127756 Last updated by Aslanon 3/19/2021 4:31 AM Answers: Asked by Roniyah h #1124070 Last updated by Aslanon 3/9/2021 8:47 PM Answers: Asked by samantha c #1122711 Last updated by Aslanon 3/7/2021 2:07 AM Answers: Asked by Luke G #1115332 Last updated by Aslanon 2/18/2021 10:06 PM Answers: Asked by Xavier J #1109370 Last updated by Aslanon 2/4/2021 8:31 PM Answers: Asked by Tasneem S #1108580 Last updated by jill d #170087 on 2/3/2021 7:51 PM Answers: Asked by Isabella G #1108333 Last updated by Aslanon 2/3/2021 3:42 AM Synopsis John is the son of a priest in a futuristic society where social class and rules are paramount. Knowledge is vital to John, and he invests a great deal of energy in his search for truths. Johns father discovered his potential when he was very young and treats him differently from his siblings. John values tradition and order; he takes broken rules and consequences very seriously. John journeys to the Place of the Gods in search for truth and what he finds will change what he has known. This Place of the Gods is revealed to be New York City, which has been destroyed by a war called *The Great Burning*. Read the entire selection, peeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching *The Academic Vocabulary*. During Teaching Students read the entire selection independently. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i. e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.) Text Dependent Questions Text-dependent Questions Evidence-based Answers The author establishes the setting. Describe the setting. What words and phrases does the author use to develop the setting? The story is set in a society with priests and also hunters; there are also very strict laws. The narrator says The north and the south and the west are Good hunting ground It is forbidden to go east. This helps establish the setting of the story and frames the story action. The author creates mystery and suspense. What words/phrases help create this mystery? Cite specific evidence in your answer. The narrator says, these are the rules and the laws; they are well made. The reader is able to determine this is a strict society but doesnt know yet how this will play into the story. What tone is established? Cite specific words from the text that help establish the tone. There is a reboding tone established in the first several paragraphs. The words dead places, demons, forbidden, and spirit help establish this tone. Summarize the actions that are forbidden in this society. Cite specific evidence to support your answer. It is forbidden to go to the Dead Places, to touch metal unless you are a priest, to cross the river, and to go east. It also says that these actions have been forbidden since the beginning of time. What is the significance of knowledge in this society? What can we infer from the fact that only the priests possess the knowledge? Cite specific evidence to support your answer. Knowledge is very important to this society. \* See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading It is desired by the narrator; he says my knowledge and my lack of knowledge runner in me- I wished to know more. \* The priests are obviously the most important group in the society, so it speaks to the importance of knowledge that it is the priests who are wise. \*The narrator separates his society from others by saying, we are not ignorant like the forest People \* Knowledge is also portrayed as hard work; it says We have not forgotten the old writings, although they are hard to understand. The narrator says, My knowledge made me happy-it was like a fire in my heart. What is meant by this? The narrator means that knowledge made him feel alive. He states that he was taught to read in the old books, and make the old writings In this context, fire is associated with passion. The heart is usually equated with love, so the author is indirectly comparing knowledge to love. What is the significance of signs and dreams in this society? How do these signs and dreams relate to knowledge? Cite textual specific evidence in your answer. The dreams and the signs are the tools by which the knowledge is given to the narrator. These dreams and signs determine the behaviors and actions of the narrator, thus the dreams are very important. The narrators father says, is strong dream. He also says, It may eat you up. The narrators father states that the narrators strong dream may eat you up. How does the narrator tie the events to the fathers statement? As his father has predicted, the narrator is so consumed with his dream that he continues on into the place of the gods, rather than just viewing it from the cliff. He says It was enough to spend the night upon the cliff. Yet he knows he has to continue on even though its dangerous. He says, I knew that I should have to cross the river and walk in the place of the gods, although the gods ate me up. How does the author indicate that the narrator walked for 8 days? Cite specific evidence to support your answer. The narrator says, It is eight suns journey to the east. This indicates that it takes him eight days to get to the place of the gods. The narrator says, It is better to lose one life than ones spirit What does he mean by this? Why does he feel this way? Cite specific text evidence to support your opinion. He means that the spirit and the soul are more important than a persons physical life. He feels this way, in part, because his society has conditioned him to feel this way. He uses this reasoning to reject his fear of death. He says, If I did not go, I could never be at peace with my spirit again. The narrator disproves some of the other priests teachings. Summarize the truths he discovers. Given the importance of knowledge in this society, why might this be significant? Cite specific text evidence to support See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading your answer. The narrator learns that the ground does not burn continuously, that the island is not foggy, that the spirits are not screaming, and the towers are not all broken. It is significant because knowledge is constantly expanding. It is significant that the narrator adds to his knowledge by correcting the teachings of other priests. The narrator says, It is not true either, what some of our priests say The narrator says, My hunger for knowledge burned in me-there was so much that I could not understand. What impact does the author achieve in using this figure of speech? What can we infer about the narrators desire for knowledge? Cite specific text evidence in your response. The implied comparison is the desire for knowledge and the primitive need for food. The subtlety the author achieves is important because it requires the reader to infer the comparison. The narrators desire for knowledge is as natural for him as the need for food; he says After a while, I knew my belly was hungry. The narrator says I had gone past what was forbidden. What is meant by this? What does this tell us about the narrators actions at this point in the story? Cite specific textual evidence in your response. The narrator is so far into his journey and has broken so many of the society rules and laws. It makes him all the more brave. He uses this as reason to go further and learn more. After telling of a previous incident when he ate a jar of jelly he was forbidden from eating he says Entered the likeliest of towers, looking for the food of the gods. What leads the narrator to conclude that the god who lived there must have been wise? What can we infer about the importance of knowledge to the narrator? Cite specific text evidence in your answer. The narrator discovers there were books and writings (knowledge) and assumes that because of this the god who lived there must have been very wise. This further reveals the importance of knowledge to the narrator and his society. He feels his knowledge gives him the Right there, as I sought knowledge also. What does the narrator realize about his gods knowledge? Cite specific text evidence in your answer. The narrator realizes that even the gods knowledge did not prevent their downfall. He says, And yet not all they did was well done Their wisdom could not grow until all was peace. What is the significance about the way the narrator learns about the events of the Great Burning and Devastation? How does this reinforce the earlier connection between dreams and knowledge? Cite specific text evidence to support your answer. He learns of the events through a vision or a dream. The narrator tells what he sees in the smoke of the fire; it is what I have always seen in Dreams and visions are tools of knowledge in this society; those chosen to possess knowledge are given that knowledge through these visions and dreams. He says, Some will say I slept. See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading but I had stepped out of my body. What does the ultimate truth learned by the narrator reveal about the relationship between knowledge and truth? The narrator learns that the gods were actually men. He says, For then I knew he was a man. This is an obvious new truth for the narrator. He does not know reconcile this with what he has known previously. The narrator is quite surprised by this truth. The narrator also says hat it was hard to tell and believe. The father says, Truth is a hard deer to hunt. You may die of the truth. What is meant by this statement? Cite textual evidence in your response. The father is saying that when people come across truths that contradict the core knowledge that drives a society, it can be very dangerous. He indicates that is the reason for the laws by saying, It was not idly that our fathers forbade the Dead Places. The father indicates that as times change, new knowledge can be sought and incorporated. I could not have done it in my time, but you come after me. Tell! The narrator says, He was right-it is utter that truth should come little by little. What is meant by this statement? Cite specific evidence to support your answer. The narrator means that such truths-like the ruin of the Place of the Gods- should be carefully integrated into existing knowledge. The narrator believes this is what is best for his society and can prevent its downfall. He says, Perhaps, in the old days, they ate their knowledge too fast. Syntax is the grammatical structure of the text. What is the effect of the use of dashes and hyphens throughout text, particularly when discussing knowledge and truth? The author uses the dashes and hyphens to emphasize important points, especially those concerning knowledge and truth. The narrators explains that his knowledge was like a fire in my heart. That My hunger for knowledge burned in me- L could not understand. He says -it is better the truth should come little by little. In each of these instances, the narrator reinforces his assertions about knowledge and truth. *The Academic Vocabulary* These words require less time to learn (They are concrete or describe an object/event/ process/characteristic that is familiar to students) These words require more time to learn (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part f a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) Meaning can be learned from context bade\* underfoot anteroom\* trembled summoned perplexed\* strictly Gods forbidden knowledge stern chants sacred wailing shriek Meaning needs to be provided fasting enchantments haunches mended burrowed PU reification ignorant Culminating Writing Task Prompt In the story, *By the Waters of Babylon*, the narrator is on a journey for knowledge and discovers unexpected truths that change his beliefs. What does this reveal about the relationship between knowledge and truth? Write a well-developed, complex paragraph as your answer. Cite specific textual evidence in your response. Teacher Instructions Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging! Evidence Quote or paraphrase Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument My knowledge made me happy-it was like a fire in my heart. Knowledge is very important in the narrators society and to him. It is what inspires his quest and drives his actions. At this point the narrator assumes all that he knows to be true; he has yet to learn differently. My hunger for knowledge burned in me-there was so much that I could not understand. The author implies the narrators need for knowledge is physiological and primitive, like the need for food. This underscores the importance of knowledge to the narrator and its role in his behavior. It is not true what some of our priests say Here, the narrator begins to discover new truths that contradict the teachings f the priests in his society, he learns that the island is not covered in fog, not constantly burning, and not all the towers are broken. It is interesting that the narrator easily incorporates these truths. He does not seem to struggle with these contradictions. He assumes that it is his destiny to improve upon the knowledge he has been given. And yet not all they did was well done Their wisdom could not grow until all was peace. The narrator realizes that knowledge does not guarantee prosperity. The gods were very wise, yet their civilization still did not survive. This is a new truth that the narrator learns. That is all of my story. They had been men, neither gods nor demons. This represents the ultimate truth learned by the narrator, when he discovers that they werent really gods; they were men. This is the beginning of the narrators changing beliefs based on his knew truths. He realizes they were no different than his people are today, so they are capable of the same feats. This makes him feel powerful. For the narrator knowledge is power, and this is the ultimate truth. He was right-it is better that truth should come little by little. Truth is a hard deer to hunt. You may die of the truth. Integrating truths into our existing knowledge is difficult and tumultuous process. It can cause great stress and prompt instability in a society. Therefore, according to the narrator, it should be introduced little by little. This also shows the narrators view that he is more sophisticated than others in the society, thus more able to grapple with these new truths. The father of the narrator is saying that truth is hard to find and harder to reconcile with existing knowledge. He is also saying that truth is dangerous and can lead to downfall. This marks the ultimate change in the narrators behavior. After learning the ultimate truth he is convinced that they must See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading rebuild the Dead Places, which previously was a forbidden place. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i. e., Expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, in a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl. English. Purdue. Deed/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www. Indiana. Deed/WTLSP/pamphlets/ thesis. statement. SHTML. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i. e., Modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go). Students complete final draft. Sample Answer In *By the Waters of Babylon*, the narrators journey and discoveries reveal that he truths that were discovered influenced his knowledge and actions. John, the narrator, is the son of a priest and deeply desires knowledge. He says, My hunger for knowledge burned in me-there was so much that I could not understand. It is this hunger which inspires his journey; once he arrives at the Place of the Gods it is not long before new truths begin to reshape his knowledge, saying, It is not true what some of our priests say John begins to discover new knowledge that contradicts the teachings of the priests in his society; he learns that the island is not covered in fog, not constantly burning, ND not all the towers are broken. John easily incorporates this truth into his knowledge. He does not seem to struggle with these contradictions, assuming that it is his destiny to improve upon the knowledge he has been given. John also discovers that knowledge does not guarantee prosperity, saying And yet not all they did was well done Their wisdom could not grow until all was peace. John discovers the truths that even though the Gods were very knowledgeable, their civilization still did not survive. Speaking to this discovery when he returns home, he says it is better that truth should come little by little. Integrating Ruth into existing knowledge is difficult and tumultuous process. It can cause great stress and prompt instability in a society. Therefore, according to the narrator, it should be introduced little by little. Perhaps the most important truth that John learns is the revelation that Gods are actually men: That is all of my story. They had been men, neither gods nor demons. This is the beginning of Johns changing beliefs based on his knew forming knowledge. He realizes they were no different than his people are today, so he is capable of the same feats. This makes him feel powerful. For John, knowledge is power, and this is the ultimate truth. This revelation is what ultimately influences his actions; the story ends with John saying We must build See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading again. This is a stark contrast from the beginning of the story which focused on it is forbidden to go to The Place of the Gods. Johns new knowledge is so powerful that negates the most important law of his society. Additional Tasks Describe a time when you learned something that changed your own perception of the truth. How did you feel? How were your actions altered because of your new-found knowledge? Answer: Answers may vary based on students experiences. Acceptable responses would include a well-developed essay hat provides a clear and coherent definition of the time and experience. The experience needs to have evidence to support the feelings and how they were altered. Minimal punctuation and grammatical errors should be evident. What causes cultures to change over time? Research one culture that has changed and support the reasons for the causes of that change. Type a well developed essay stating the culture, the change, and the causes for the change. Answer: Answers may vary based on students choice of culture. Acceptable responses would include a well-developed essay that provides a clear and coherent definition of he culture, the specific change and the causes for the change. The essay must include resources used. Minimal punctuation and grammatical errors should be evident. Note to Teacher While truth, knowledge, and gods are familiar terms for students, they are included in vocabulary because this story refines students definitions of these words. See Entire Document Join FreeBookSummary to continue reading Reviews This resource will give you everything you need to complete a full, comprehensive reading lesson plan for *By the Waters of Babylon* text by Stephen Vincent Benet. Files are offered as PDFs and Word documents. Included-By The Waters of Babylon Lesson Plan-By The Waters of Babylon Worksheet-By The Waters of Babylon Answer Key-Graphic Organizers:Authors Purpose-Characterization Chart-Figurative Language Chart-Historical Analysis Chart-Imagery Chart-Peer Evaluation Sheet-Plot Diagram-Read for Details-Setting-Style Chart-Symbol Chart-Symbolism Chart-Theme Diagram-Tone and Mood Diagram-Universal Plot Diagram-Venn Diagram-PowerPoints-Characterization-Imagery, Voice, and Person-Irony and Ambiguity-Narrator and Voice-Plot Structure-Symbolism and Allegory-Theme - How to Interpret-Theme-Thank You Bonus Stuff! 1 zip file with-8 PowerPoints-19 PDFs with ready to print pages-18 Word documents with ready to print pages Babylon literature reading lesson graphic organizers symbolism Check out these other great products*

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