

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON PRIMO LEVI'S THE PERIODIC TABLE

IN WHAT WAY IS THIS A GREAT SCIENCE BOOK?

HOW DID LEVI'S CAREER UNFOLD?

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE PRIMO LEVI'S JEWISH IDENTITY FROM READING THE PERIODIC TABLE?

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT HIM AS A WRITER e.g. HIS MOTIVATION FOR WRITING THIS BOOK AND HIS BOOKS ABOUT AUSCHWITZ?

THEME OF FORGIVENESS IN ARSENIC & VANADIUM

THE CHEMICAL ELEMENTS AS METAPHORS [e.g. argon & gold]

HOW DOES PRIMO LEVI BALANCE HUMOUR AND TRAGEDY?

HOW GOOD IS HE AT DESCRIBING CHARACTERS? WHOM DO YOU WISH YOU HAD MET?

CHARACTERS WHO ARE UNNATURALLY CALM & RESILIENT: ARSENIC, IRON, TIN, SULPHUR

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE STORY?

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THE NON-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORIES LEAD, MERCURY & TITANIUM?

SPECIFIC STORIES TO DISCUSS:

GOLD - what does this element represent?

CERIUM – morality and survival

SULPHUR - why did Lanza have the urge to tell about his night but not tell?

CARBON - One interpreter has said: "Levi speaks of the "atom," which, inserted as part of an architectural structure, is "subjected to complicated exchanges and balances". By this he seems to mean the Jews and their history. ... Levi's description of how carbon is involved in the creation of wine and how it is stored in the human liver to be activated in exacerbated circumstances refers to how the Jews were destined to be abused and, in a sense, kept in reserve for those moments in history when the world needed to lash out at a scapegoat."