

Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters A Reader's Discussion Guide

Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters is a multilayered study of love, sisterhood, and giant octopi. We hope these questions will deepen your appreciation and enjoyment of this towering work of classic sea-monster literature.

1. Marianne has a lifelong fascination with “gentlemen of fortune,” but her most up-close experience with actual pirates is a letdown, to say the least. How do pirate characters and pirate themes (particularly the Dashwoods’ encounter with Dreadbeard) illustrate the gulf between perception and reality?

2. In *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, painful personal setbacks often occur at the same moment as sea-monster attacks, suggesting a metaphorical linkage of “monsters” with the pains of romantic disappointment; for example, Marianne is rebuffed by Willoughby at Hydra-Z precisely as the giant mutant lobsters are staging their mutiny. Have you ever been “attacked by giant lobsters,” either figuratively or literally?

3. Various explanations are floated over the course of the novel for “the Alteration,” which first turned the beasts of the sea against the creatures of land. Which explanation do you find most plausible? Are you satisfied with Mr. Palmer’s tale, in Chapter 49, which blames it all on the slumbering monster-gods who, as the novel closes, have begun to waken?

4. Why is Margaret the only one alarmed by the odd “happenings” on Pestilent Isle, such as the distant chanting and the pillar of steam? Is her

family's dismissal of her concerns only a reflexive skepticism toward young people, or does it suggest a deep-set unwillingness to grapple with the unknown?

5. Which would be worse: being eaten by a shark or consumed by the acidic stomach juice of a sand-shambling man-o'-war?

6. It would be too easy to attribute Marianne's disinterest in Colonel Brandon merely to the fact that she is smitten with Willoughby. Does she overlook the steadfast and wise Brandon as a suitor primarily because of his age? Because he has been "attached" before? Or because of the unspeakable, writhing carnival mask of his lower face?

7. For Elinor and especially for Marianne, matrimony is a state to be ardently desired; but for Lady Middleton it is a prison to be escaped. Is this seeming contradiction a matter of adding depth to the plot, or does it reflect ambiguity on the part of the author toward marriage? And could one woman, with no previous training in nautical engineering, really teach herself to pilot a submarine?

8. Have you ever been romantically involved with someone who turned out to be a sea witch?

9. Life in Sub-Marine Station Beta is marked by a dissipation and devotion to amusement impossible to achieve outside "the Dome," where constant sea-monster attacks are a fact of life. Do you think the apocalyptic destruction of the Station by an army of fish is meant as a comment on that kind of indulgent lifestyle?

10. Is Monsieur Pierre a symbol for something? Name three other well-known works of Western literature that feature orangutan valets. Are those characters also slain by pirates?