

Blindness Discussion Questions

Task: In your assigned group, discuss the chosen question and reach a consensus when it applies. Take notes be able to provide at least two (2) specific textual examples to prove the group's position on the given question.

1. Who / what is ultimately to blame for the atrocities that occur in the asylum? Defend your answer.
2. What meanings can we attribute to the white blindness? To what extent does it represent ignorance, political ineptitude, the absence of personal and social morality, and the failure of imagination? What other meanings can you suggest? How does the "harsh, cruel, implacable kingdom of the blind" differ, if at all, from our everyday world?
3. A literary critic has noted that *Blindness* conveys "the disturbing notion... that full humanity is achieved only through suffering." Do you agree or disagree with this statement, in respect to both actual life and Saramago's novel? Which characters achieve a fuller humanity because of their suffering?
4. "The whole world is right here," the doctor's wife says to her husband on the morning of their fourth day in the hospital. In what ways does the mental hospital contain "the whole world"? To what extent may we read *Blindness* as a commentary on the excesses and horrors of the world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?
5. How do the women in the novel differ from the men in their attitude toward the blindness and the resulting conditions of life? What moral, emotional, psychological, and imaginative capacities do the women possess that the men lack?
6. How does the novel illustrate the doctor's wife's observation that "what is right and what is wrong are simply different ways of understanding our relationships with others"?
7. Variants of the phrase "when the beast dies, the poison dies with it" recur in the novel. And we are told that "the mind suffers delusions when it succumbs to the monsters it has itself created." What beasts and monsters, actual and delusional, are the subjects of this novel?
8. What pattern(s) emerge(s) in respect to the breakdown of order and of the various systems that we all take for granted—civic, social, political, and so on? How do individuals, identifiable groups, and institutions of authority contribute to that breakdown? How does the structure of society itself alter to fit a world in which virtually everyone is blind?
9. In what ways do the central characters' experiences lead them to a new kind of interdependence and, at the same time, a new awareness of the human potential for selfishness and cruelty? How do both contribute to the emergence or re-emergence of tenderness and love?
10. "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." (141) What do you make of Saramago using this Marx quote here? What other political statements does this book make relating to organization, leadership, duty, morality, tyranny, law, equality, government, and military.
11. In response to the newly interned old man's report on conditions out-side the hospital, the doctor comments, "Perhaps only in a world of the blind will things be what they truly are.... People, too, no one will be there to see them." In what ways might this be true, and to what degree?
12. What is the purpose of Saramago's use of proverbs, folk sayings, and cliches throughout the novel? How does the characters' new reality affect their former habits of expression and create new habits of expression? What are the implications of the narrator's later comment that "if sayings are to retain any meaning and to continue to be used they have to adapt to the times"?