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Question 6 Act I (p. 13)

Plaatjes ignores the first eight questions Stella asks, but smiles when she asks, "Do you ever get lonely here?" How do you explain that?

Here are the first eight questions from the play:

Were you a boat builder before? ... Can you remember how long (you have been on this island)? ... You live in the Kraal with the others? ... You ever been to Mossel Bay? Do you think one can swim to shore? ... You're going to do it, aren't you? Escape with your boat? ... It'll be our secret if you like? ... Do you think the water will heal them (lepers)?

In what way are these questions different from the one that causes Plaatjes to smile?

Question 7 Act I (p. 16)

When Plaatjes says "Bad tides", Barney thinks he is predicting a storm. In the light of what happens later in the play, however, what can we understand it to refer to?

(You need to have read to the end of the play in order to say what happens to Plaatjes that could be thought of as a "bad tide".)

Question 8 Act I (p. 16)

Lamprecht asks Barney if he has seen his wife. Why does Barney lie and pretend that he hasn't seen her?

(What do you think Lamprecht's reaction would be if Barney admitted that he'd been speaking to Stella and that she had been talking to Plaatjes?)

Act II (pp. 18–24)**Question 9 Act II (p. 18)**

What is odd about Stella's question, "Who?" and what does it imply?

Read the dialogue between Lamprecht and Stella from his question, "Just like that story about old what's his name?" to her question, "Who?"

Question 10 Act II (p. 19–20)

Study the interaction between Lamprecht and Stella until he exits and then describe the attitudes and feelings each of them has towards the other.

To prepare yourself properly for this question, fill in the blanks in the table below. Choose the letter (A to E) that you think applies to each of the quotations. Fill in more than one letter in a block if you see reason to.

Attitudes and feelings Lamprecht and Stella has towards each other	
Lamprecht is rude and aggressive towards Stella.	
Lamprecht wants to keep Stella from interacting with other people.	
Lamprecht doesn't trust Stella with other men.	
Stella feels cold and hostile towards Lamprecht.	
Stella objects to Lamprecht's attempts to control her.	
Stella feels intimidated by Lamprecht.	
Stella refuses to be intimidated by Lamprecht.	
Stella would like to improve the relationship.	

Lines from Scene 2		A/B/C/D/E
LAMPRECHT:	People crowd your thoughts and feelings. Much better to observe them from a distance. What you say, Stella?	
LAMPRECHT:	How was your walk this afternoon?	
STELLA:	Fine.	
LAMPRECHT:	Fine.	
STELLA:	Yes.	
LAMPRECHT:	Fine?	
STELLA:	Yes. (silence)	

v. See p. 41

(LAMPRECHT suddenly leaps on to PLAATJES grabbing him by the head and forcing his mouth open. He cuts his tongue out with his knife. Blood covers them both. PLAATJES gasps for breath.)

Question 23 Act VI

Do you believe Stella when she calls out to Lamprecht, “They’re your letters, you fool. They were all written for you!”?

Discuss both possible answers. First explain how it might indeed be possible for her to be writing these love letters to Lamprecht, and then explain why the letters do not seem to apply to her feelings about the marriage as we see it in the play.

Page-by-page: explanatory notes on the text

p. 11

The first part of Plaatjes' monologue as he crosses the stage sounds like a jumble of disconnected thoughts, but they serve to inform us of his miserable plight as a prisoner. He urges himself to be brave and to forget these memories. "*Mijn baas*" is how he has been taught to address the prison warders – in Dutch. Later when Barney is bullying him he addresses him as "*mijn baas*". "*Molimo*" is the Sesotho word for God. He also addresses God as "my Lord" and "God" further down the page. This, and his familiarity with the Book of Revelations (later) indicate that he is religious. He addresses freedom as "my captain".

As he reaches the boat he is busy building from driftwood planks, he cheers up because it represents freedom to him. *Hey'ta* is a colloquial greeting. He names the planks according to the six stranded ships whose planks have washed up on Robben Island (*Hope, Gondolier*), which indicates that he is intelligent and knowledgeable.

p. 12

He addresses the seagulls flying overhead as his brothers, since he plans to leave Robben Island in his boat, just as they are free to leave it with their wings. "*Ndidlala*" is Xhosa for "rejoice" or "let's play". The rest of the page contains an extended metaphor in which he personifies "that far shore calling in the wind" as a beautiful woman. Waves breaking against the shore are likened to her feet "dangling in the waters of the dock" and to "shoes shining in a late afternoon". Clouds are likened to her hair blowing in the southeaster (the wind) and to a blanket pulled around the "shoulders" of Table Mountain. The red and blue referring to "her lips" and "her eyes" might refer to the red grapes that grow on the peninsula and to the blue of the sky.

As he hugs himself in anticipation of returning to the "embrace" of the mainland, he turns and sees Stella, who has been watching him "for a while" and listening to his words. Her actual entry is not specified.

Stella knows his name, indicating that he is talked about on the island, and she tells him his words were beautiful, but, despite this, Plaatjes hides behind the boat and tells her rudely in Xhosa to go away ("*Hamba!*") and spits at her. Stella tries to pacify him by telling him who she is and to draw him out by asking if he knows her husband.

p. 13

Plaatjes responds rudely (*suka!* also means "go away") to Stella's second question and spits again, but she is not put off, even when he knocks her down and threatens her with his hammer after pushing her away from his boat.

Stella spends the rest of the page trying to get through to Plaatjes. She tries to find common ground between them by asking him questions about himself and telling him about herself. She compares the ocean around Mossel Bay (warm and inviting) with the icy, shark-infested sea separating them from the mainland. She describes the feeling of freedom she experienced when swimming, but even this doesn't tempt Plaatjes to respond to her. The breakthrough occurs near the bottom of the page when she asks, "You ever get lonely out here?" His smile suggests that loneliness is an important theme in the play.

The *Kraal* is the converted sheep pen where black mental patients and lepers were housed. Port Nolloth is a town on the Cape west coast; the Skeleton Coast is the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean coast of Namibia between the Kunene and Swakop Rivers; Mossel Bay is a town on the east coast.