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3. Each of the novel’s characters sees himself or herself, most of the time, as a failure. Virginia Woolf, as she walks to her death, reflects that “She herself has failed. She is not a writer at all, really; she is merely a gifted eccentric” (4). Richard, disgustedly, admits to Clarissa, “I thought I was a genius. I actually used that word, privately, to myself” (65). Are the novel's characters unusual, or are such feelings of failure an essential and inevitable part of the human condition?

4. Toward the end of Clarissa’s day, she realizes that kissing Richard beside the pond in Wellfleet was the high point, the culmination, of her life. Richard, apparently, feels the same. Are we meant to think, though, that their lives would have been better, more heightened, had they stayed together? Or does Cunningham imply that as we age we inevitably feel regret for some lost chance, and that what we in fact regret is youth itself?

5. The Hours could on one level be said to be a novel about middle age, the final relinquishment of youth and the youthful self. What does middle age mean to these characters? In what essential ways do these middle-aged people—Clarissa, Richard, Louis, Virginia—differ from their youthful selves? Which of them resists the change most strenuously?

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7. Would you describe The Hours as a modern version of Mrs. Dalloway? A commentary upon it? A dialogue with it? Which characters in The Hours correspond with those of Woolf’s novel? In what ways are they similar, and at what point do the similarities cease and the characters become freestanding individuals in their own right?

8. For the most part, the characters in The Hours have either a different gender or a different sexual orientation from their prototypes in Mrs. Dalloway. How much has all this gender-bending affected or changed the situations, the relationships, and the people?

9. Why has Cunningham chosen The Hours for the title of his novel (aside from the fact that it was Woolf’s working title for Mrs. Dalloway)? In what ways is the title appropriate, descriptive? What do hours mean to Richard? To Laura? To Clarissa?

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