Discussion Questions for ***Testament of Youth*—2nd week**

**Directions**: These questions are only for our discussion—no need to write your answers, at least not as homework.

1. As you read Vera’s account of her story, first from the published diaries of this era, which she drew on for the memoir *Testament of Youth,* and then from the memoir itself, consider how your impression of this story changes from what you felt and understood from the film version.

2. Consider also how the very personal thoughts and feelings she shares about her closest relationships relates to her statements about public, primarily political questions. How well do you think these two elements of the story work together to give both a personal eye-witness account of the changing times she experienced as an individual and the “big picture” story of the society as a whole?

3. Based on what Vera Brittain says about her own education and personal reading, consider how fiction seems to inform her memoir. You might also consider how your own reading and film viewing influences readers’ responses to Vera and her story. Because Vera grew up steeped in the great literature of her own and earlier eras, and because of what she says about herself, we can see that her own self-image was at least partly shaped by the models she got in fiction. In the way she presents herself, can you tell what heroines she might have taken to heart? What characters might we have in mind as we read her autobiography (including characters that might be more recent that she wouldn’t have had access to herself)?

4. In the reading selections I have pieced together from Vera’s writings, a few themes emerge. Consider how they relate to other things we have read about and seen in films.

a. How does her own personal suffering influence her call to public service? How does this compare to this theme in *Desert Flower*?

b. How does the prevailing code of gender and class roles that Vera grew up with affect her outlook on the world? Would you say she is mostly in rebellion against it, or mostly an exemplar of those codes, or some combination of these? Education, love and marriage, work, and duty to family and country are some key topics to consider here.

You should also consider how her brother and fiancé both respond to and rebel against the rules guiding their conduct, somewhat different rules from Vera’s because of their gender, obviously.

How does Vera’s response to her culture’s rules compare to the response of Mathilde (from Ridicule) and Waris (from *Desert Flower*) to the rules of their societies?

c. Like Vera and Roland, Mohan is also motivated by a sense of *noblesse oblige*. How is this different in his case? How is it similar?

5. Choose one passage from the Vera Brittain readings that you find particularly striking or one that has a personal resonance for you and discuss it in some depth. What does it say to someone of your age and cultural background?