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Close Reading Organizer - Section 1 **Sample Answers**

Directions: Read each summary entry and think about which themes listed in the Themes Key apply to it, then color in those themes in the Theme Tracker. Next, write a few sentences of Analysis to explain how the themes you chose apply to each summary section.

Note: There is not always a definitive set of “correct” answers for which themes should appear in the Theme Tracker. Answers that differ from the ones we propose below should therefore not automatically be treated as incorrect, and in fact can serve as great discussion starters.

Themes Key

1	Privacy, Loneliness, and Communication
2	Social Criticism
3	Time
4	Psychology and Perception
5	Death

Summary	Theme Tracker					Your Analysis
It is a June morning in London, and Clarissa Dalloway , an upper-class, fifty-two-year-old woman, is hosting a party that night. She offers to buy flowers for the party instead of sending her busy servant Lucy , and she goes out into the morning light. The sudden “plunge” into sunlight reminds Clarissa of opening the windows on her father’s country estate at Bourton (when she was eighteen). She would feel the freshness of the morning but also the feeling “that something awful was about to	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> is mostly written in “free indirect discourse,” a style in which the third-person narrator often slips into the voice of the character they are describing. Woolf only occasionally uses quotation marks to denote speech, and often a character’s musings are mingled with their perceptions or actions in reality. This first scene captures the tone of the novel – Clarissa loves life and its small sensations, but she is also constantly aware of death, with a foreboding that her joy is fragile.

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happen.”						
<p>Clarissa has recently recovered from influenza. She goes out into the street and hears Big Ben tolling ten o’clock, and she thinks of the “leaden circles dissolved in the air.” It is a bustling Wednesday morning and Clarissa notes the setting: it is five years after the end of World War I, the King and Queen are at the palace, and the streets are full of carriages and cars.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	<p>Clarissa’s influenza is rarely mentioned, but it is an important brush with death that makes her appreciate life all the more. Big Ben, the famous London clock tower, acts as a symbol of tradition and the past (it is part of the Palace of Westminster) but also of the inevitable march of time. Big Ben’s tolling will be both a divider and uniter in the novel, marking out each hour but also connecting people as being part of that same passage of time, hearing its tolling all together.</p>
<p>Clarissa feels that she loves life and all the little moments and movements of the people in the street. This is why she is throwing a party, to “kindle and illuminate” that love in others. Clarissa runs into her old friend Hugh Whitbread. Hugh is a proper, traditional English gentleman who is in London to take his wife Evelyn to the doctor. When they part Clarissa feels self-conscious about her hat.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	<p>The book is set five years after Armistice Day, when World War I ended, but England is still recovering – hundreds of thousands of soldiers died and the country suffered severe financial losses. Clarissa’s party is a seemingly frivolous event, but all the characters’ pasts and their inner thoughts make the party something much more meaningful.</p>
<p>Clarissa thinks about how she has always liked Hugh, though her husband Richard and her old friend Peter Walsh do not. Clarissa thinks again of Bourton years earlier,</p>	1	2	3	4	5	<p>Hugh Whitbread is the epitome of the “English gentleman” – he is always well-dressed, charming, and wealthy, but he has no real substance to him, making him a symbol of traditional</p>

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when Peter was making fun of Hugh for having no heart or brain, but only “the manners and breeding of an English gentleman.”						England. Memories of Bourton add a layer of significance to the present.
Clarissa then thinks more about Peter Walsh , who has been in India for years but is returning soon. She imagines him critiquing her present life, and remembers him bringing her to tears by saying that she would marry a Prime Minister and become a “perfect hostess” someday. Peter had once asked Clarissa to marry him, but she refused him. Clarissa still feels that she does not live up to Peter’s standards, but she is also angered that Peter himself has failed to accomplish his dreams.	1	2	3	4	5	We are first presented with this relationship through Clarissa’s point of view – she reassures herself that she was right to refuse Peter, but she also tries to avoid thinking of the pain she caused him with such a refusal. The Prime Minister (head of the Cabinet) first appears as this representation of conventionality and stuffiness. In many ways Clarissa <i>has</i> become a “perfect hostess” now, but Peter also has failed in his youthful dreams.
Clarissa keeps walking and thinks about death. She has always felt that “it was very, very dangerous to live even one day.” She herself feels like an ordinary person, with little education but a gift for knowing people by instinct. She watches people in the street and imagines how such life will go on even after she is dead. She remembers some lines from Shakespeare’s <i>Cymbeline</i> about the comforts of death: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun / Nor the	1	2	3	4	5	Clarissa’s instinctive feeling has great meaning for the novel, which lasts only the period of one day. The juxtaposition of the bustle and joy of London life with the constant danger of death continues throughout the book. Shakespeare reappears many times, particularly these lines from a funeral song about the comforts found in death.

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furious winter's rages."						
Clarissa looks at open books in a shop window. She thinks about how she does not do "things for themselves," but only to affect other people's opinions about her. She wishes that she was more like her hero, Lady Bexborough , who is large, dark, and opened a bazaar. Clarissa thinks of herself as small and birdlike, and she is conscious that the world sees her as invisible, an extension of her politician husband – as "Mrs. Richard Dalloway " instead of "Clarissa."	1	2	3	4	5	As we learn more about Clarissa's past, we see how she has changed from her Radical youth and settled for a kind of worldly conventionality, despite her rich inner life. Lady Bexborough never actually appears, but Clarissa often thinks of her as an idol. Clarissa feels aimless in life, as her society has no real purpose for her after she has married and had children.
Clarissa walks past a glove shop and thinks about her daughter, Elizabeth , who cares nothing for fashion but loves her dog and has been spending a lot of time with her history teacher, Miss Kilman . Miss Kilman takes Elizabeth to communion and reads the prayer book with her, which upsets the atheistic Clarissa. Clarissa worries that Elizabeth might be falling in love with Miss Kilman, but Richard thinks it is just a phase.	1	2	3	4	5	Woolf herself had a passionate intellectual (and briefly physical) romance with another woman, the writer Vita Sackville-West, and the idea of repressed homosexuality is an undercurrent to <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> , as such relationships were condemned in Woolf's time. Clarissa, who has a similar love for Sally Seton, can see the potential for those feelings in Elizabeth.
Miss Kilman always wears an uncomfortable mackintosh (a rubber raincoat), which Clarissa	1	2	3	4	5	Despite her kindly, joyful appearance there is also a darkness in Clarissa. Woolf characterizes this fierce

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sees as Miss Kilman's way of constantly reminding the world of what a martyr she is for being poor and unattractive. Clarissa hates Miss Kilman for this, for her bitterness and the superiority she derives from her own poverty, but Clarissa recognizes that her hatred is irrational. She thinks of this hatred as a monster living in her soul.						hatred of Miss Kilman and protectiveness of Elizabeth as a kind of nameless monster in the woods of Clarissa's soul. We first see Miss Kilman from Clarissa's perspective, but we will later slip into her thoughts as well.
Clarissa goes into the flower shop and is comforted by all the beautiful flowers. She has done a favor in the past for Miss Pym , the flower shop owner, and Clarissa tries to let the flowers' beauty and Miss Pym's "liking her" wash away her hatred of Miss Kilman . Clarissa suddenly thinks she hears a pistol shot in the street, but Miss Pym says it is only a car backfiring.	1	2	3	4	5	Flowers are often a traditional symbol of femininity and beauty, and for Clarissa they also represent the joy she takes in life. She chooses to focus on beautiful things like flowers to banish the darker parts of her soul. The car backfiring is a sudden reminder of war, as it sounds like a pistol. Death is always close at hand, with pistol shots even among the flowers.