

Catholic Summer Reading Program

Discussion Questions for Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*

1. *The Man Who Was Thursday* is most definitely a story with a moral – several of them actually. Chesterton's philosophy is revealed in a much different style than he used in a newspaper article, apologetic essay or public debate. Discuss Chesterton's use of this particular literary vehicle. What are the “morals of the story?”
2. Discuss the Council's role as a secret society. What is important about their ability to function as a group and their determination to keep their activities secret? What is the point of their conspiracy?
3. What is the meaning of the book's title? How does the title's ambiguity and mystery characterize the book as a whole? Is personal identity less important than collective identity, in Chesterton's view? Does Syme, in effect, lose his identity? What does he gain?
4. What meaning does the subtitle of Chesterton's book “...a nightmare” have to the story? What does Chesterton mean by this? Discuss the dedicatory poem that follows. What kind of tone is Chesterton trying to establish? Does he succeed?
5. Discuss the idea of anarchy as presented in the book. What kinds of activities does Gabriel Syme find himself engaged in? Are they dangerous to society, in your opinion? How do you reconcile the council members being revealed as policemen?
6. While the six detectives are chasing Sunday through the streets of London, he keeps throwing notes back to his pursuers, notes such as "Fly at once; the truth about you trouser stretchers is known" or "What about Martin Tupper now?". Why did he throw these notes? Did any of them have the slightest bit of rhyme or reason in them? If so what did they mean?
7. Critics have discussed the book as an allegorical work, particularly in Christian terms. Do you agree with this assessment? Who or what, in your opinion, does Sunday represent?
8. *The Man Who Was Thursday* is a very unusual book, one that even some of Chesterton's warmest fans find inexplicable, frustrating and even a bit alarming. Why is this the case?

Discussion questions provided, in part, by Random House.