

Critical Reading Questions to Guide Reading of Novels
Candide - Chapter 6

1. What might the word “beautiful” mean in the chapter title? Why do you think Voltaire would choose to use this word? How might readers be influenced by this choice of language?



François Marie Arouet de Voltaire.

2. Read the passage and answer the questions that follow:

“After the earthquake had destroyed three-fourths of Lisbon, the sages of that country could think of no means more effectual to prevent utter ruin than . . . that the burning of a few people alive by a slow fire, and with great ceremony, is an infallible secret to hinder the earth from quaking.”

Which words from this passage are most important to the actual meaning Voltaire was trying to convey? How might changing (or omitting) these words alter the meaning of the passage? Why?

3. In which ways does Voltaire use understated language to describe the action in the second paragraph? What point might Voltaire be making here? Do you think that this is effective? Why or why not?

4. What is the purpose of the detail Voltaire uses in describing the clothes that Candide and Pangloss wear to the auto-de-fe? Why is this important to the reader?

5. Read the passage, and answer the questions that follow:

“Candide, terrified, amazed, desperate, all bloody, all palpitating, said to himself: ‘If this is the best of possible worlds, what then are the others?’”

If you could rewrite Candide’s reaction in this sentence, how would you do it? Why?

ACTIVITY #1:

Satire and parody, as exemplified throughout this chapter, are quite commonplace in today’s entertainment canon (e.g., *Daily Show*, *Colbert Report*, etc.). Identify an issue from chapter 6 of *Candide* and, with your classmates, create a 7-10 minute performance sketch/skit to bring it into the modern day.

ACTIVITY #2:

Voltaire makes great use of specific word choices throughout the chapter.

Find a news article online, and rewrite it by changing two or three words per paragraph to completely alter the meaning. What does this activity make you think about the importance of words?

Links to Make You Think:

Voltaire and the English writer Jonathan Swift are often linked together because of their use of literary satire in attacking what they perceived to be society's follies. These links offer insight into their styles, works, and relationship (see below):

[Irony and Social Critique in “A Modest Proposal” and Candide](#) — This essay compares and contrasts two of the writers' most famous works; it's very thorough and provocative.

[Voltaire's Visit to England 1726-1729. By Archibald Ballantyne](#) — This free e-book details Voltaire's visit to England and includes correspondence between the two great writers.



Broader questions for this adventure, chapters 5-7 (unused):

How is satire manifested through the actions of Pangloss following the earthquake at the end of chapter 5?

How does the choice of the narrator's point of view in Candide allow Voltaire to express his opinions on a number of topics in ways other points of view might not allow?

How is the arrest of Candide in Lisbon symbolic of the unwillingness of contemporary government (in Voltaire's time) to acknowledge and protect basic rights?

There are several themes prominent throughout Candide. How is the theme of religious tolerance addressed throughout chapter 6?

How does the setting of chapters 6 and 7 shape the perspective of the lead characters?