

**‘Arcadia’ by Tom Stoppard**

**A revision booklet for Year 13**

**'I thought that quantum mechanics and chaos mathematics suggested themselves as quite interesting and powerful metaphors for human behaviour ... the way in which it suggested a determined life, a life ruled by determinism, and a life which is subject simply to random causes and effect. Chaos mathematics is precisely to do with the unpredictability of determinism.' (Tom Stoppard)**

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| **'Believe in God, the soul, the spirit, the infinite, believe in angels if you like, but not in the great celestial get-together for an exchange of views. If the answers are in the back of the book I can wait, but what a drag. Better to struggle on knowing that failure is final.'**  What is the point of ‘Arcadia’ the play?  The play explores the unpredictability of passion, the clash of rationality and the way chaos can emerge from order. It explores the metaphysical questions of life: it asks how far mathematics and science can explain the meaning of life. These lead to Septimus being driven mad by the thought of a dying universe.  What background knowledge do I need?!  Tom Stoppard addresses many different subjects, ideas and context in his play. You need a working knowledge and understanding of:   * Eden and The Fall * The Tree of Knowledge * Arcadia * Newton’s Second Law of Thermodynamics * Chaos Theory * The Enlightenment * Romanticism VS Classicism * Lord Byron * The history of classical/picturesque gardens   **Themes**  **Scientific Theories**  ‘Arcadia’ investigates scientific theories concerning the workings of the universe. This is shown through:   * mainly the dialogue of characters, but also echoed through parallels between two periods on stage * there may be some order but it is not the conventional belief in the Newtonian model, but more likely the Chaos model, as amongst all the differences there are patterns that emerge through the repetitions: characters say the same lines, they pursue the same things in life such as sex and love, ask the same metaphysical questions of existence, seek fame and their lives are full of minor details and disputes   **Life**  The play also explores the idea that life needs to be lived for the moment rather than being consumed and obsessed by what lies beyond. Death is the one certainty; for the individual and the universe. Life might be trivial but it is wanting to know that makes us human (Hannah Jarvis in Act 2). There might be no answers but it is the search that is important.  This is shown through:   * the dance at the end of the play when characters in both periods become part of life, involved in relationships and ignore the other * the sounds of the piano which can overtake the sounds of the steam engine present the idea that the harmonies of life can forestall death, even if momentarily, and are a source of vitality * the sounds of the thumping, threatening steam engine is a reminder of that heat energy can never be restored and that universe is dying   **Sexuality**  Sexuality is explored as a theme, viewing it as a force that is innately human and unpredictable, and a variable that makes any simple attempts at explaining life or the workings of the universe impossible.  While acknowledging this, sexuality and the constant affairs that scatter the play as well as the numerous sexual allusions and innuendos, are used comically through humorous witty remarks or the ridiculous situations that arise from the many sexual liaisons. Thus it serves to entertain and create comedy while also suggesting a more serious side that seems to be beyond human control.  Love and sex seem the driving forces in the world. People are attracted to those other than their spouses and seem unable to avoid the catastrophes that often result. In the long run humans are fallible creatures who are driven by instinctual desires. The play proposes that it is this desire that causes the disorder in an otherwise orderly universe. It is the one variable that cannot be controlled.  This is shown through:   * actions, dialogue and interrelationships of characters in both periods. Articulated in dialogue by Chloe and visually seen by the conflicts that result   **Death**  Death is a theme in the form of the death of the universe as well as death that awaits us all as shown in the reference to the painting, 'Et in Arcadia ego'.  The play questions the notion of knowledge as necessarily a progressive element.  This is shown through:   * actions and interactions of characters in the 1990s * all the knowledge that had informed the world from to 1809 to the present seems to have made little difference to the everyday lives of the characters; they still look for meaning yet it is elusive * the prop of the apple reminds the audience that paradise is not a place, that Eden and knowledge that is not self-knowledge, can bring disaster as in the case of Septimus   The title is ironic as the world shown at Sidley Park in the past or present is not the perfect world; even in Arcadia is the shadow of death. The name 'Arcadia' is used ironically as a word used naively in the past by those believing in a possible utopian world, but the play clearly shows that human nature changes little and it is these very flaws that make us human.  **Characters**  Thomasina is the most balanced of characters, combining the forces of Romanticism and Classicism. She is a child prodigy who loves mathematics and literature. She is passionate in her explorations of new forms of equations and these are connected with drawing the graphs of the natural world. She is also a lover of literature and in a powerfully evocative speech she weeps over the loss of the great plays of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles in the fire of the Library at Alexandria.  She is also seen as a precocious, intellectually adept thirteen year old though still a child in other ways. In the last scene the play moves to 1812, the eve before she turns seventeen. She is in love with Septimus and wants to learn to dance.  **Title, Apple, Eden**  In the Bible, Eden is the idyllic paradise where there is no suffering or death. It is the serpent who offers the apple that brings about The Fall and it has traditionally been associated with the temptation of sexuality. It also condemns humankind to be burdened with original sin, to suffer the pains of life, to be self-conscious, live in doubt and inevitably die.  At the same time the play seems to suggest that it is our flawed state and imperfections that make us human. In the face of great suffering, pain, and inevitable death the individual becomes heroic in the struggle against forces too great and incomprehensible.  The actual apple onstage is left by Gus as a token of his affection for Hannah. At different points in the play it symbolises different ideas.  Initially it is associated with the famous apple that fictitiously falls on Newton's head, and his discovery of the law of gravity; later with the attempt to find an equation for the leaf of the apple it is connected with the twentieth century geometry of forms, it then symbolises the temptations of sexuality and all lost paradises, and human's doomed existence - to be mortal after the Fall.  In ‘Arcadia’ the setting of Sidley Park in 1809 is modelled on the Edenic landscape which is being remodelled by Noakes along picturesque lines to become even more like Nature. The play comically re-stages The Fall, with the verbal reference to the serpent and the 'carnal embrace' in the gazebo.  The apple relates closely to the Edenic references throughout the play. Arcadia was a region in ancient Greece but its importance is its place in myth where it is an imaginary place where there was a perfect state of love and peace, a place where humankind existed in harmony with nature. The play centres on both these aspects of Arcadia but love is replaced with casual sex and little peace, and the landscaped gardens are in a state of change and there seems to be little harmony.  In the 1809 setting Lady Croom laments the changes in her garden as she believes that it is 'nature as God intended', and comments further by alluding to the painting 'Et in Arcadia ego', interpreting this Latin tag as 'Here I am in Arcadia'. This is ironic as her reference to the painting fails to acknowledge that the painting is centrally concerned with the tomb that the figures stand around and that death is still present in Arcadia, as noticed by Septimus who says 'Even in Arcadia, there am I', referring to death.  On one level this irony simply shows Lady Croom's nature - she refuses to accept the harsher realities of life and lives a frivolous life as a member of the upper class, however it does show the theme of death that permeates the play, which is the great punishment for succumbing to temptation and the eating of the apple.  Adam and Eve's act of eating the apple resulted in the punishment of mortality, and in the play the apple symbolises the fact that we must all die, and die uncertain of the what is to follow, the afterlife. This theme takes on greater significance in the play as the scientific discovery of The Second Law of Thermodynamics theorises that eventually the universe will also die. This becomes a central idea explored by the characters of Septimus and Thomasina and the former is so obsessed with such a thought that he drifts into insanity, becoming a hermit who tries to disprove the theory.  The apple first appears when Thomasina takes a leaf from it and speculates on devising an equation of irregular nature, exactly what is at the core of fractal mathematics and Chaos Theory. It is the Edenic theme restaged differently again as the apple from the Tree of Knowledge brings with it scientific theories that will undermine and question the epistemological and moral certainties of the traditional past. Her discoveries that lead to the idea that the universe is dying send Septimus mad as he cannot reconcile himself to this state of affairs and becomes a hermit in the wild search of disproving her hypothesis. Significantly the young girl is not disturbed by the knowledge and adopts a 'live for the moment' philosophy, saying in the face of all this there is life and we must enjoy the moment: 'Then we shall dance.'  In this context mathematical and scientific knowledge can be threatening and dangerous to the individual's state of mind, but it is eventually left to the individual to come to terms with the metaphysical questions of life. The apple and the knowledge it brings can be both soul-destroying and liberating, just as those who see the eating of the apple as a rebellious act that frees humankind from the shackles of blind obedience and servitude.  The 'carnal embrace' motif introduces the theme of sexuality in the first moments of the play and it continues throughout with casual sex occurring in the gazebos and rooms. Characters like Mrs Chater, Lady Croom and Septimus have multiple partners in the 1809 setting and Bernard having affairs with Hermione (the present day Lady Croom) and Chloe in the present. All these are directly related to the temptation of the apple and it would seem that the play, although it is not criticising sexual promiscuity (indeed it shows it is a part of human nature), is stating that it is yet another element that can lead to chaos.  Sex is the attraction that cannot be rationally explained and in this context temptation and the presence of the apple is a visual reminder to the audience that there are things that cannot be controlled and predictable, like Chaos Theory, and may be the very things that make us human. It can cause problems and the proposed duel shows this, but the play treats this comically and the duel never takes place, though the participants are exiled from Sidley Park (just as Adam and Eve are exiled from Eden). No great harm is caused by Bernard's affairs, but again they are shown as the things humans get themselves into, and despite a temporary pleasure there is little else gained.  **Setting**  In his stage directions Stoppard makes explicit comments on how the same setting, Lady Croom's room, should fit both periods of time. By having the same books, furniture and tortoise it makes the links between past and present visible on stage so that the audience can hardly distinguish the two, especially at the end where the group in the 1990s are dressed in Regency dress, as if time is an illusion.  The parallels between characters and patterns that emerge, similar to the Chaos Theory, despite the unpredictability factor, are made visible. Thomasina and Septimus are involved in the ramifications of scientific theory on the future of the universe, while Bernard and Hannah are involved with working out what happened in the past. There are numerous patterns that emerge and repetitions - lines of dialogue are repeated by different characters in the different eras - that disrupt the notion that past and present are entirely separate entities.  The room is set in a stately home on large grounds. The grounds are a topic of conversation throughout the play, initiating discussions on the Classical ordered gardens of the past and the change to the picturesque with its more contrived natural and chaotic appearance (and therefore, ironically, not natural at all). These gardens parallel the mathematical and scientific theories explored in the play, which in turn link to philosophical ideas of free will and determinism, the nature of life and love (chaos of relationships and conversations throughout the play) and the human condition in general.  Yet it is the room in the aristocratic house that is centre stage and while all changes outside, there is little change within. This can act as a metaphor for a set of universal values that suggest that human life in their essence remain the same in some ways as people still search for love or sex, attempt to be famous, quibble over the nature of existence or are involved in more petty things.  It has been suggested that the setting evokes the Garden of Eden, with its connection to Arcadia and perfection and the repeated references to the apple and knowledge. The play's backdrop is an allusion to the Garden of Eden. Lady Croom refers to her gardens as 'nature as God intended it', and feels that she is living in an idyllic Edenic surrounding - 'Here I am in Arcadia'. However, when the play starts it is undergoing change and it is Richard Noakes, the gardener, who constantly shapes and moulds the garden which serves as a visual reminder of human's futile struggle to recreate perfection. When Adam ate the apple, human's punishment was mortality, life became finite and death always waited.  The time and place in the play is of integral importance as the past setting of 1809 is a time when there is a shift in thinking from a Classical to a Romantic aesthetic. The ideas associated with these two paradigms of thinking is constantly referred to in conversations, especially the modern setting where the merits of both are argued.  Hannah sees the shift as a 'decline from thinking to feeling', while Bernard embodies the tenets of Romanticism, believing in intuition, individuality and genius. The setting in the late twentieth century also is a time where scientific theories, such as Chaos Theory, suggests another shift in understanding the world, where order may be the guiding principal of the universe, but it can never be grasped or known for sure as undetectable changes can produce totally unpredictable results, like the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil producing a tornado in Texas.  The setting in the stately home of the English aristocracy also sets the scene for a privileged world where people live idle lives, filling in their ample leisure time with activities such as illicit affairs and hunting parties being ways to quell the boredom. This is of significance as if the play is concerned with exploring the great metaphysical and scientific questions of life it shows a group of people isolated from the world of social injustice and suffering - perhaps like Eden - who are nevertheless unfulfilled and mindlessly searching for things that will amuse them or give meaning to their lives. Included in this world of the privileged are other characters, such as Septimus, whose studies of poetry and mathematics reveal a deeper engagement with the questions of life. This also occurs in the modern setting where Bernard, Hannah and Valentine all put forth ideas that are ways to find strategies to cope with existence.  Stoppard asks if 'We are all doomed?' why bother. Hannah serves to articulate his answer with her comment:  ‘It's all trivial - your grouse, my hermit, Bernard's Byron. Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It's wanting to know that makes us matter.’  This echoes a major value in the play. The answers to life will never be found and though people continually seek to find Eden or Arcadia, it is not the end that is sought, but merely the process of living and learning, finding fulfilment in the small victories. A thirst for knowledge, a desire to experience what life offers is what makes existence meaningful.  The setting with its allusions to Eden is ironic on one level as it is not paradise. The word 'paradise' suggests perfection, but the play goes to great lengths to show (this time evoking Chaos Theory) that all things are unpredictable, though there seems an order within. Chloe suggests it is sex that disrupts this will for order, but it is Thomasina, the child prodigy, who discovers that all things must die, including the universe, says 'Phooey to death' and finally responds to Septimus' despondent question on what to do with life if this is the case, says 'We shall dance.' Life lived in the small moments, contentment in learning and living.  On stage the room remains the same. Besides the practicalities it serves in presenting two eras, it also defies time. In theoretical Physics time and space are not common sense realities and on stage the past and present are **both** separate entities **and** the same. Parallels are drawn through this method to show people still living either frivolous lives or seeking other ways of making sense out of it. People have sex (offstage), they try to find patterns to come up with answers, they argue over petty things and they dance. Characters repeat the same lines and ideas in both periods.  In ‘Arcadia’ past and present intersect and are brought together in the final scene. In this scene the 1990s characters change into Regency dress in preparation for a dance being held at Sidley Park (the play ends in both periods with a dance). Then at one point as Hannah and Valentine sit reading, Thomasina and her brother fly into the room, two kids teasing each other. Characters from both eras, who had been separate in previous scenes, suddenly appear onstage together. The effect is dramatic, reinforcing the sense that although the world is unpredictable, patterns emerge as time marches on. A moment later, Valentine and Septimus are, in their separate times, examining Thomasina's drawing of a heat engine, solid proof that she had anticipated the Second law of Thermodynamics.  By cross-cutting between centuries in the same room the audience become engaged in the real story behind the scholarship, and see not only how the literary detective work hits and misses its mark, but how the past and the future speak to each other in hidden ways.  **Piano**  The piano can be seen to link Thomasina and Gus who are both suspected of being geniuses. They are the only ones to play the piano and this draws a parallel between the two characters and the two different eras. This parallel reveals the characters' willingness to dance and celebrate life, rather than refuse to participate in life as there is no definite meaning.  The final moments of the play are a poignant moment, visually and aurally, as Gus dances with Hannah (seemingly she has moved from 'thinking to feeling') and Thomasina dances with Septimus, for although we know she will die in a fire later that night, it is the joy of the moment that is important and the fact that the universe will die one day does not spoil a life that has been lived. As shown repeatedly through the play it is the music (perhaps metaphorically the life force) that drives the dance of life.  However on another level the piano, like other props is used ironically. Stoppard uses props and repeated motifs to echo the central themes in the play: the world is not ordered and predictable as scientists would like us to believe, yet humans continue to attempt to find a hidden order and make sense of their lives within the cosmos. Props such as the piano and its music are linked to other aspects of the play; Thomasina's piano playing is referred to as 'noise', then the problem with finding order within grouse numbers is referred to as 'noisy' by Valentine who compares the noise to 'a piano in the next room, it's playing your song, but unfortunately it's out of whack…' - finding the answer involves 'guessing what the tune might be'. The audience is encouraged to see these links and try to make connections, however this is the central irony in the play as the connections remain oblique and though we would like to believe there is some meaning between the piano and the grouse numbers it remains beyond our understanding. In this way the irony refers to the idea that life cannot be measured and explained simply and our attempts to find order are absurd just like finding connected motifs within the play.  This occurs again when Gus's playing in the background is heard when Valentine and Hannah are discussing 'noise' and order within chaos. She asks what he is playing and Valentine says ‘I don't know. He makes it up’. On one level there is an association, but as Valentine shows it is arbitrary as Gus simply plays without motive. Again this echoes the idea related to Chaos Theory that patterns are present but they cannot always be perceived or predicted. There are patterns within but it is always changing and the answer is elusive.  **The Waltz**  Despite seeming rather conservative in present times the waltz was seen as controversial in the early nineteenth century and came to represent an expressive form of human passion, and it evoked a feeling of happiness. It broke with tradition and demonstrated a rebellious spirit and personal freedom. For Thomasina it is a romantic dance that she needs to learn as part of her social education and, again, it is Septimus who teaches her.  It is a visual representation on stage of human passion and interpersonal closeness. The play has been dominated by dialogue - long intellectual conversations and witty repartee - but in the last moments it takes on a more poignant, serious tone where no one speaks and the music and waltz presents the final image of human needs.  Earlier in the play Septimus had asked: 'When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore', and Thomasina had replied 'Then we will dance. Is this a waltz?'. Despite all the scientific theories that suggest that human existence is lonely and futile, the dance is a way of coping with existence. In this respect the last waltz is a life-affirming demonstration that meaning is found in relationships and living life for the moment and not being shattered by any attempt at finding order and purpose in external factors.  **Steam Engine**  The intrusive sounds of the steam engine are a reminder to the audience that the universe is ultimately doomed as it is clear proof of entropy and the Second Law of Thermodynamics as it is through the loss of heat and energy in engines that led to this discovery ('But the heat equation cares very much, it goes only one way. That is the reason Mr Noakes's engine cannot give the power to drive Mr Noakes's engines'). It persists in the background but can be overcome by the music and this reveals that the 'dance of life' is a way of forestalling the inevitable doom of the universe. One of the central values of the play is that the human dimension of life - love, sex, communication - are more important than scientific explanations that present existence as merely abstract theorising as shown by the power of the piano music to block out the steam engine.  **Comedies can also involve themselves with serious issues.**  Arcadia is a comedy that uses wit, irony, situational humour, as well as stock characters to make the play entertaining, while also exploring serious issues. The play is centrally concerned with the big metaphysical questions that have always intrigued humankind: is there meaning to our existence? How do we live meaningful lives when there appears no verifiable meaning? To this Stoppard adds the great scientific discoveries of the last two hundred years that point to the inevitable death of the universe.  Arcadia sets up a dialogue between past and present by juxtaposing scenes from 1809 with the 1990s. Traditional world views represented by Newton's deterministic laws and the ordered landscape of English gardens are being questioned when the play commences and the forces of disorder (Romanticism, Gothic gardens and Thomasina's discovery that the universe will one day die from a loss of heat) have already arisen and these are developed by the ideas explored in the present setting. Stoppard uses these ideas of science, mathematics and landscape architecture to investigate whether these 'truths' can possibly explain the meaning to our existence. The Second Law of Thermodynamics gives scientific proof that the world is in a state of entropy and will eventually die. This has drastic ramifications for those (including the characters) who believe in traditional religious truths or just in the idea that the universe is at least the one finite, immortal thing. In the play these ideas are dealt with using the scientific language appropriate, and characters argue these in dialogue, however the play never gets bogged down with taking these 'serious issues' too seriously.  Instead Stoppard infuses humour into the exploration of these ideas, and it could be seen that humour and laughter are all part of the answer to life. When Septimus is overcome with the prospect that all seems meaningless and says with melancholy and a seeming nostalgia for a past where life had order and meaning, 'When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore', he is quickly rebutted by Thomasina (who, ironically considering that she dies, represents a life force), 'Then we will dance. Is this a waltz?' and then adds 'Goody'. The play doesn't allow the metaphysical questions to become a burden to the characters or the audience and constantly keeps the audience laughing.  The play explores the various ways that humans attempt to find order and meaning to existence. Science and mathematics are subjects that attempt to give order to disorder, to give reasons for the phenomena of all things. They underpin many of the discussions within the play and also represent logic and reason as opposed to feeling, intuition and emotion. The play sets up a conflict between these polarities: between Romanticism and Classicism, the old landscape and the gothic, natural look of Noakes' garden, determinism and free will, Newton's deterministic laws and Chaos Theory. These ideas that are part of the serious issues explored are never discussed by the characters in a totally straight way. Undermining anything when it is becoming too serious is the usual comic device of sex. 'No, its all because of sex... That's what I think. The universe is deterministic all right, just like Newton said, I mean it's trying to be, but the only thing going wrong is people fancying people who aren't supposed to be in that part of the plan.' The sexual motifs and sexual innuendo and explicitness are all part of the exploration of human existence. The play infuses the serious scientific themes with a human side. As the above quotation shows, despite all the efforts made by scientists and theologians to give a meaning to life, an order that may make life comprehensible, sex is the one variable that disrupts all these planned explanations.  From the beginning of the play the audience witness hilarious situations that arise from people 'fancying people who aren't supposed to be in that part of the plan.' Septimus's 'poke in the gazebo' with Mrs Chater introduces a whole series of events (which is paralleled with how Chaos Theory works) that are comic, but reveal how each small event will alter the conditions upon which other phenomena occur. His 'poke' leads to Mr Chater challenging him to a duel, letters from Mrs Chater which he places in a book that Byron takes and all lead to events almost two hundred years later where Bernard believes that Byron had shot Mr Chater. This belief leads him to Sidley Park and the series of events that involve him with Hannah and lead to her finding out the true identity of the hermit. It is absurd and ludicrous, but it parallels and reveals how Chaos Theory works and though there is no predictability, there is an underlining order even amongst all this disorder.  The play, though predominantly involved with scientific theory, still asks questions that relate to the human attempt at making life worthwhile. When enquiring about sex Thomasina asks 'Is it the same as love?', which Septimus replies 'Oh no, it is much nicer than that.' It supports the view that life is to be lived without too much concern about reasons or purposes that can never be known. Science and mathematics can never truly know the answers, as sex and love (and the consequences of these) lead to unknown events that can never be predicted. In this way perhaps it is only Chaos Theory, with its inbuilt lack of predictability that is the preferred model.  Sexuality is explored as a theme, viewing it as a force that is innately human and unpredictable, and a variable that makes any simple attempts at explaining life or the workings of the universe impossible. While acknowledging this, sexuality and the constant affairs that scatter the play as well as the numerous sexual allusions and innuendos, are used comically through humorous witty remarks ('Carnal embrace is the practice of throwing one's arms around a side of beef') or the ridiculous situations (Septimus' mocking indignant manner when owning up to having sex with Chater's wife: 'I made love to your wife in the gazebo ... and if someone is putting it about that I did not turn up, by God, sir, it is a slander.') that arise from the many sexual liaisons. Thus it serves to entertain and create comedy while also suggesting a more serious side that seems to beyond human control.  Love and sex seem the driving forces in the world. People are attracted to those other than their spouses and seem unable to avoid the catastrophes that often result. In the long run humans are fallible creatures who are driven by instinctual desires. The play proposes that it is this desire that causes the disorder in an otherwise orderly universe. It is the one variable that cannot be controlled, and it is in this very unpredictability that makes us human and beyond any easy classifying.  Therefore it can be seen that Arcadia explored serious issues related to how human make sense of their lives, how they may be overawed or annihilated by the seeming meaninglessness of it all if accepting scientific truth, but it manages to do this without resorting to didactic methods and infusing the drama with the human elements of humour and laughter. In fact it is a way to face the unknown, the darkness ahead: to know it might be there, but laugh and enjoy the moments you have.  **Knowledge**  The play commences with a tutor and his student in search of knowledge, though it takes many comic turns and instead of geometry and Latin it becomes more a lesson in sexual relationships. Thomasina turns the lesson into an investigation of science and the metaphysical questions, though sex is never far away. As the title suggests and reaffirmed by the prop of the apple that appears throughout the play, there are echoes of a lost paradise, Arcadia, an Eden; and like Eden the two inhabitants are thrown from paradise for tasting from the Tree of Knowledge. Thomasina suffers death by fire and Septimus lives out a mad life in the hermitage like an exile.  The play explores the epistemological foundations of knowledge, questioning what we know and how we derive this knowledge. In the nineteenth century plot science and mathematics with a century of the Enlightenment behind them are valued and trusted ways of understanding the world. It is Thomasina, the child prodigy, who finds out that the universe is doomed as it can never regain the heat energy it loses and is in a state of entropy. This knowledge, like the knowledge that Adam and Eve gain only bring sadness and eventually madness to Septimus, who in a state of melancholy says: 'When have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore’. In contrast the young Thomasina is not depressed by this knowledge and replies 'Then we will dance.' This suggests that life is not what comes after, as echoed by Hannah in the twentieth century, 'It's wanting to know that makes us matter... Believe in God, the soul. the spirit ... but not in the great celestial get-together for an exchange of views', but must be lived wholly as symbolised by the dance to the piano at the end of the play.  Despite the massive increases in knowledge and understandings in the two hundred years between the settings there seems no alleviation to the metaphysical doubts that plague humankind. The characters in both eras still search for temporary relief in sexual relationships, that often turn wrong, and the characters would do embrace in the waltz at the end of the play have not have sex. They still ask the same questions and have no answers. Nevertheless the play still celebrates the meaning and purpose that can be gained in the search for knowledge - the search for absolutes may be absurd, but knowledge does not need to be fixed and unalterable to have meaning.  Septimus dabbles in science and literature, as well as sex/love. These are the three great areas that are explored in the play. All are areas of knowledge (even sex as Septimus teaches Thomasina and has to explain it to Augustus later in the play) and are ways of understanding or coping with the world.  Science explains the world in rational terms, literature explores the more human element as articulated by Bernard ('If knowledge isn't self-knowledge it isn't doing much, mate) and recites lines of poetry in defence.  The play explores the notion of whether the world is ordered: is there purpose and meaning, an overall design, an afterlife waiting. The text suggests that there may be some order but it is more on the Chaos model and most things are unpredictable and are altered by the human dimensions, such as sex and attraction.  Nevertheless the play's central value is not the futility of knowledge as it shows knowledge, the fall from innocence (like the exile from Eden) brings with it free will and promotes a balance between the search and living for the moment.  **Offstage**  The theme of sexuality and the ways people are attracted to those they should not be underlies many of the more philosophical and scientific ideas in the play. It is the 'attraction that Newton left out' and disrupts the ordered nature of the world. The play has numerous sexual liaisons, all which happen offstage. Septimus' 'poke in the gazebo' with Mrs Chater, his relationship with Lady Croom, and Lord Byron with Mrs Chater and Lady Croom, as well as Bernard with Chloe in the cottage, and presumably somewhere with Hermione.  These are generally treated comically in the play with conflict and confusion occurring onstage after their offstage activities have been revealed on stage. Having these events happen offstage is both a practical dramatic device as well as being a source of comedy, as shown in the scene where Lady Croom's comments about the new garden are misunderstood by Septimus as being concerned with his sexual dealings with Mrs Chater. The conversations is full of double entendres and dramatic irony, and the humour can only operate by having these events remaining offstage.  Characters such as Byron, Lord Croom in both eras and Hermione never appear onstage and are referred to in the dialogue of the other characters. Through this the audience never really knows these people so they remain abstract figures who are usually used as the butt of jokes - Lord Croom with his bad hearing, who never realises any of the adventures of his wife - and are used in the play for specifically this reason.  The gardens which are talked about so often and are at the core of many of the ideas explored in the play remain outside the sight of the audience. Again for practical staging reasons this is the case, but it also leaves it to the audience's imagination to speculate on the changes. This is also augmented by the sounds of the steam engine, which remains unseen, but thumps disturbingly in the background  **Dialogue**  While the sounds, use of props and the visual element certainly play a central role, Stoppard's use of dialogue interacts with these dramatic techniques on many important levels. Wit, humour and irony are all important but it is also the role of language and in particular the way dialogue's role in the desire to know and the quest for knowledge. Words and their manipulation, especially by Bernard and Septimus, are integral to the thematic concern with a search for order and interference with order by chaos. Language interacts with the prop of the books to draw the audience into the search of the modern day caharacers into the past, where they are similarly duped and shown the relative nature of truth and the rather absurd side to academic pursuits. In fact it is with a play on words that the play begins - carnal embrace' - immediately introducing the gap between signs and the the reality - our efforts to name and capture the truth through language are thus an integral aspect of our search for order in a universe in which the word and the world do not always correspond or fit into predetermined patterns.  Gus and Thomasina are parallels in many ways but a central contrast is that she is talkative and he is silent. If language is used to create order and meaning then Gus has chosen to live outside this, a pattern within chaos.  The symbolic associations of the apple, steam engine and piano need to be investigated to see how they interact with one another, reflecting the conflicts at the heart of the play between life/death. thinking/feeling, sex/love, classicism/romanticism, order/chaos.  The verbal and diagrammatic significance of the Garden descriptions - the conflict between classicism/romanticism can be aligned with the theory of order/chaos but it is important to note how the romantic garden represents an ordering of Nature ('romantic sham’).  The play is not simply about the futility of knowledge, though it shows the dangers of knowledge, it nevertheless shows that knowledge, and the fall from innocence (like the exile from Eden), brings with it free will and promotes a balance between the search and living for the moment.  **Essay Questions**:  'No, it’s all because of sex... That's what I think. The universe is deterministic all right, just like Newton said, I mean it's trying to be, but the only thing going wrong is people fancying people who aren't supposed to be in that part of the plan.' Discuss this quotation with close reference to the play.  Discuss the significance of the waltz at the end of the play. In what sense is it a culmination of the themes and structures Stoppard has developed in the earlier scenes?  The play is an academic detective story. It is the use of the letters and drawings of Thomasina are all parts of the clues that are onstage throughout and are sources of dramatic irony and suspense. Do you agree with this summary of the play?  ‘The play shows the difficulty in reconstructing the past, calling into question the very ways we presume to construct theories of knowledge’. How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?  Stoppard has been accused of using the stage to explore intellectual ideas rather than create a drama. What is your reaction to this statement?  **Example Responses**  **'Physical absence from a scene can increase a character's significance in a play.' Discuss your views on this statement.**  In Arcadia there are numerous characters who seem to be important to the play and indeed are integral in propelling the action who are never seen onstage. Byron, Mrs Chater, Lord Croom in both periods, Lady Croom in the modern period are all mentioned in the dialogue of other characters and their actions offstage are the cause of many of the conflicts as well as humour that happen in the play. However, it is certainly Byron and Mrs Chater more than the others who are central to the concerns of the play and their physical absence serve to accentuate their role rather than detract from it.  Byron is an important offstage character as most of the play - at least the academic detective story - centres on whether he killed Mr Chater in a duel. He is the archetypal Romantic hero who womanises, writes poetry and lives a life of adventure defying the conventions of the day. It is his actions, being caught out with Mrs Chater while also having an affair with Lady Croom that exiles all the guests from Sidley Park and taking Septimus' copy of the 'Couch of Eros', that set up the circumstances (like the small trigger that have dramatic consequences as in Chaos Theory) for the latter day scholar, Bernard, to solve. It is also his name in the gamebook that propels the action as Bernard believes this is the final proof he needs. It is better for Byron to remain a mysterious figure, unseen on stage, so that his actions are never seen but only related through the dialogue of others. The audience is certainly aware qiuite early that he did not fight a duel but for a while it remains unknown and a source of mystery and suspense.  On a symbolic level Byron also represents Romanticism: unpredictability and emotion in constrast to the ordered, rational Classical gardens and Science. By being always in the background he is a reminder of the life of passion that is explored fully in the play. Both Bernard and Hannah quote lines of his poetry from 200 years in the future, showing that his ideas have survived. On all occasions it is his physical absence that accentuate his significance as it is as a symbol rather than a character that he is needed in the play.  Mrs Chater is another character with a larger than life reputation. The audience hears so much of her promiscuity and sexual energies that she also would have trouble living up to her reputation on stage. However, unlike Byron she is a constant source of humour. She has sex with Septimus, Capt Brice and Byron while being married to Mr Chater, is called the 'village noticeboard', is known according to Septimus for her 'readiness that keeps her in a state of tropical humidity as would grow orchids in her drawers in January'. She is the constant butt of jokes and serves this purpose better as a comic figure who is unseen as her presence onstage may indicate some complexity or understanding that would jeopardise her status as a 'woman whose reputation could not be adequately defended with a platoon of musketry deployed by rota'. Nevertheless it is her actions that set up vital themes in the play, principally that sex is as aspect of human behaviour that creates chaos. |

