

2014 Study Guide for *Water by the Spoonful* by Quiara Alegria Hudes

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the history of online chatrooms. What is the purpose of a chatroom? What are the generally accepted rules of chatroom etiquette? What is the function of a chatroom moderator? This and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chat_room
2. Familiarize yourself with the following references: haiku, the board game Chutes & Ladders and Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*. These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5782>
http://boardgames.about.com/od/gamehistories/p/chutes_ladders.htm
<http://aynrandlexicon.com/ayn-rand-works/the-fountainhead.html>
3. Research mental health disorders among war veterans. What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? Why might veterans with mental disorders like PTSD and depression be more likely to have co-occurring substance abuse problems? These and other websites provide information:
<http://iava.org/content/invisible-injuries>
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/winter09/articles/winter09pg10-14.html>
<http://iava.org/content/substance-abuse>
<http://maketheconnection.net/conditions/depression>
4. Familiarize yourself with the following commonly abused drugs: crack cocaine, Adderall, and opioids. What are the negative effects of drug addiction? How does dependency develop? What are symptoms of withdrawal? What factors may lead to relapse? These and other websites provide information:
<http://drugabuse.com/library/get-the-facts-on-substance-abuse/>

<http://drugabuse.com/library/crack-abuse/>

<http://drugabuse.com/library/the-effects-of-adderall-use/>

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids>

5. Research the following belief systems: agnosticism, atheism, Catholicism and Buddhism. What are the main principles of each? These and other websites provide information:

<http://atheism.about.com/od/aboutagnosticism/a/Atheist-vs-Agnostic-Difference.htm>

http://www.theopedia.com/Roman_Catholicism

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/5minbud.htm>

6. Listen to examples of musical *consonance* as well as *dissonance*. How would you describe the experience of listening to each? What is *resolution*? Why might listeners be more drawn to music that eventually resolves? Who was John Coltrane? What is Free Jazz? These and other websites provide information:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consonance_and_dissonance

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resolution_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resolution_(music))

<http://www.wildmusic-jazz.com/jcbio.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_jazz

7. What does water symbolize in literature? This and other websites provide information:

<http://symbolism.wikia.com/wiki/Water>

Resources

John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* (1964)

<http://www.allmusic.com/album/a-love-supreme-mw0000187827>

John Coltrane's *Ascension* (1965)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgrOqBTdfhk>

After seeing/reading the play

1. What is the significance of the ghost that appears to Elliot? What does the ghost ask of Elliot and why? How do Elliot's encounters with the ghost change during the course of the play?
2. Many of the characters in the play communicate through an online chatroom called *recoverttogether.com*? What are the rules of this chatroom? Why might the specific rules have been put into place? How does this chatroom help the characters in their recovery from drug addiction?
3. What is the significance of the usernames Haikumom, Orangutan and Chutes&Ladders? What does each username reveal about the individual who has chosen it? How does each username coincide or contrast with the way the individual exists outside the virtual world?
4. Refer to your research on drug abuse. Chutes&Ladders says, "Wow, that little white rock sure doesn't discriminate." What does he mean by this? How is this lack of discrimination present in the play?
5. Refer to your research on music. In what ways is the relationship between dissonance and resolution a symbol for Yaz's situation at the beginning of the play? What is dissonant in Yaz's life? What resolution does Yaz seek?
6. Chutes&Ladders tells a story about being saved from drowning by a lifeguard. What is the significance of the water wing Haikumom gives to Chutes&Ladders? What causes him to inflate it? What does this gesture mean for him?
7. Refer to your research on *The Fountainhead*. What does Fountainhead's username reveal about him? Why are Chutes&Ladders and Orangutan so hostile toward Fountainhead when he first joins the chatroom? Why is Chutes&Ladders so adamant that Fountainhead use the term "crackhead" as a self-identifier? Why is it so difficult for Fountainhead to use the term?
8. Refer to your research on dependency, withdrawal and relapse. What are Fountainhead's reasons for keeping his addiction from his wife? Why do the other

characters urge him to tell her? At what point do Orangutan and Chutes&Ladders become accepting of Fountainhead as a member of their recovery community and why?

9. What do the flowers for Ginny's funeral mean for Elliot? For Yaz? For Haikumom? Why is gardening, growing and nurturing plants important in the play and to whom? Who nurtures growth in the play? Who hinders it?
10. Compare and contrast Haikumom (Odessa) and her sister Ginny. What are their attitudes about loyalty, family, community, and tradition? At her funeral service, Ginny is described as nurturer, a builder, a gardener, one who lived to serve others, and an activist for peace. In what ways does Haikumom share these traits? In what ways does she not?
11. What does Orangutan hope to find by returning to the land of her birth? What does she find? In what ways is her search successful?
12. Describe the relationship between Orangutan and Chutes&Ladders. Why does he warn her about looking for her birth parents? What is her reaction to this warning? What does she want from him? What are his fears about her request? What does Chutes&Ladders equate with a happy life? How does Orangutan's version of happiness differ from his?
13. When do characters prefer to communicate via technology? What are the benefits of this form of communication? What are the challenges? Which characters choose to meet face to face and why? Why are face to face meetings easy or difficult for them?
14. The first time Haikumom meets Fountainhead, she says that Buddhism is not scary because, "If there's spirits they're hiding inside you!" His response is, "Aren't those the scariest kind?" Who is haunted in the play by "spirits hiding inside"? In what ways are those characters successful in overcoming these "spirits"?
15. How does Haikumom behave as the founder of *recoverttogether.com*? How does she behave in real life? How does her online community view her? How do her family members view her? What does the administration of the chatroom give to Haikumom?

16. How does drug addiction affect the people in Haikumom's life? How does it affect the people in Chutes&Ladders life? Orangutan's life? Fountainhead's life? What hinders each character's recovery? What helps it? What contributed to Fountainhead's relapse? To Haikumom's? How do the people around them help in overcoming their addictions? How do the people around them hinder their recovery?
17. Refer to your research on mental health issues among veterans. Elliot doesn't want his buddies to see him working at a Subway Hoagie shop. Why? What else does Elliot hide and why? Why does Elliot hide his addiction to pain medication? Why does Elliot react so strongly to being compared to a crackhead? In what ways is Elliot free of his addiction in the play? In what ways is he not?
18. The themes of neglect and abandonment run throughout the play. Who or what has Haikumom neglected or abandoned in her life and why? How is she neglected or abandoned? Who or what has Elliot neglected or abandoned in his life and why? How is he neglected or abandoned? How have Yaz, Chutes&Ladders, Orangutan and Fountainhead suffered from neglect and abandonment? Who or what have they abandoned or neglected? What resolutions do they find, if any, regarding neglect and abandonment?
19. In what ways does fear drive characters' actions? What is Haikumom afraid of? Chutes&Ladders? Orangutang? Fountainhead? Elliot? Yaz? How does their fear keep them from making meaningful connections with others? What ultimately moves them to connect? Who or what do each of the characters try to reconnect with over the course of the play? In what ways is reconnecting a sign of health for the characters?
20. What are the different meanings of water for Haikumom throughout the play? What is the significance of her screen icon, the water wings, pouring water on the floor, and the bath? In what ways does Haikumom's relationship to water change over the course of the play?
21. Why does Yaz see Haikumom in the light after Haikumom's overdose? What choice does Haikumom make while in the light and why? How does Yaz's connection to

Haikumom motivate her actions toward the end of the play? In what ways are Yaz and Haikumom similar?

22. What are the various ways that characters act as life savers? When and how does Haikumom act as one? Elliot? Yaz? Chutes&Ladders? What is the significance of Fountainhead becoming Haikumom's caretaker? How does this help her? How does it help him?
23. The Spanish phrase, *el barrio* means *the neighborhood*. Why does Yaz return to her old neighborhood? Why does she become interested in planting? What is the significance of Yaz choosing the username Freedom & Noise? What is the significance of her becoming the site administrator? Buying Ginny's house? In what ways has Yaz found resolution at the end of the play?
24. Why does Elliot decide not to return home at the end of the play?
25. What role does forgiveness play in each character's quest for reconnection? Who needs forgiveness and from whom? For what does each character need forgiveness?
26. Refer to your research on the symbolism of water. What are the different ways water is present in the play? What are the various functions of water in the play? What are each characters' relationship to water in their past and in the present? In what ways do their relationships with water change over the course of the play? What is the significance of the play's title?

Members of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Education department created the "2014 Study Guide for *Water by the Spoonful*." These suggestions were designed for students and teachers but may be enjoyed by audiences of all ages. They may be used without restriction for educational purposes. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival is not responsible for the content of any website listed above.

© **Oregon Shakespeare Festival**. No part of the "2014 Study Guide for *Water by the Spoonful*" may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system, for professional or commercial purposes without permission in writing from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Education Department.
