



# Colorado Book Club Resource

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

1. Some critics question whether the androgynous nature of the Gethenians is central to the story or not. For some, the idea of androgyny exists independent from the story. Others find it essential. Do you agree with either of these assessments? Something in the middle? Don't forget to explain your reasoning.
2. How would the story change if the Gethenians were either male or female all the time? Would Le Guin have been able to write it that way?
3. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is written like a report by Genly Ai. This means Ai "selected" the extra materials to include (for example Estraven's chapters, the Orgota creation myth, and so on). Why do you suppose he chose to include these sections as the in-story author? Alternatively, why do you think Le Guin chose to write these sections like she did?
4. Gethen is named "Winter" by the Ekumen Investigators. Why do you imagine Le Guin added this little detail? What significance does this name have?
5. As he reminds us often, Genly Ai thinks himself a manly, macho man. Do you think his views on the Gethenians would be different if he were Gina Ai, sensual flower of womanhood? Would the story change? For example, would Estraven and Ai have a different relationship?
6. Estraven never tells Ai about his child with Arek, his brother. We don't discover this factoid until the final pages of the novel. Why do you suppose Estraven never divulged the information? Also, why would Le Guin wait until the end of the novel to make the big reveal? What purpose do you think it serves?
7. How are the past and the future related in *The Left Hand of Darkness*? What role does each play in Gethenian society and where do you see certain characters siding with either? Does one hinder or help the Gethenians more than the other?

***Questions from Shmoop.com.***



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