

***To the Lighthouse*, Scotland and Empire**

Discussion Questions

To the Lighthouse is set on the Isle of Skye (the largest of the Inner Hebrides islands off the northwest coast of Scotland) in the years immediately before, during and after the First World War (1914-18).

1) What do you know about the British Empire? What roles did Scots and Scotland play in 'building' the British Empire? Can you find evidence of the roles Hebridean communities (such as that on Skye) had in British colonialism during the Victorian and Edwardian eras?

2) Why do you think Woolf set the novel in Skye? How does the novel represent Skye's relationship to England, and to other countries?

3) Urmila Sheshagiri has described Woolf's fiction as 'full of the spoils of colonialism.' How many objects can you find mentioned in *To the Lighthouse* that might have come from British colonies?

4) Can Mrs Ramsay's role as wife and mother be compared to Queen Victoria's role as sovereign of the British Empire?

5) What is the significance of Lily Briscoe's 'Chinese eyes'? Do you find such descriptions racist? Consider the reasons for your answer.

6) The character of Mr Ramsay muses, 'perhaps civilisation relies upon the existence of a slave class.' Do you think the narrator of *To the Lighthouse* encourages us to agree or disagree with this proposition?

7) Janet Winston argues that *To the Lighthouse* 'challenges' traditional ways of narrating time and history. What aspects of *To the Lighthouse*'s language, imagery, themes and structure might pose this challenge?