Pan's Labyrinth Discussion Questions
Synthesized Ingenious Question Assignments (Discuss any 4)

OLD SCHOOL

Setting

What is the mood or connotative impact of the farming base? The labyrinth itself? The realm of the toad? The Pale Man?

Why is the Underworld presented in such a bright, royal tone, with yellow and red colors?

Character

Protagonist:

Is Ofelia possibly schizophrenic and thereby imagining everything in her fairy tale world?

What is the significance of her name?

If the movie thematically holds "rebellion" and "choices" to be primary themes, how does Ofelia rebel and choose her destiny?

What transgressions throughout the film does Ofelia perform—dress, key, baby brother—and how do these transgressions affect plot?

Antagonist:

Why is Captain Vidal invested so much into "time" and "watch"-repair? Is he obsessed with linear time? Is "masculine" time different from "feminine" time?

Debate: Captain Vidal genuinely loves Ofelia's mother.

Debate: Captain Vidal possesses some sympathetic qualities, making him a round rather than flat character.

Why does Vidal seemingly despise Ofelia and Ofelia's penchant for fantasy?

Alazon (guides, helpers)

El Fauno: In Spanish, faun is fauno; why did the English version insist on making the faun into Pan himself? Who was Pan? Why include the god of forests and nature?

El Fauno: Are we as viewers meant to "trust" the faun?

El Fauno: Plot-wise, in what ways does the faun influence Ofelia to act as a transgressor?

Mercedes: Why doesn't Mercedes simply "off" the Captain when she has the chance?

Mercedes: In terms of "choice" and "rebellion," how does Mercedes choose to rebel?

Mercedes: In the film, people who are "disobedient" get punished, with the EXCEPTION of Mercedes, who adds a Joker-lip to the Captain. Why is Mercedes able to escape traditional punishment for her transgressions?

Mother: Debate: Ofelia's mother genuinely loves the Captain.

Mother: Does Ofelia's mother encourage or discourage a love of fairy tales for her daughter?

OLD SCHOOL

The doctor: As a side character, the doctor himself still holds fast to the themes of "choice" and "rebellion." In what ways? Why?

Symbolism:

Watches and time: What is the symbolism and backstory to Captain Vidal's watch? Why is it an important plot device?

Keys: Keys seemingly play a "key" role in the film. Ofelia uses a key to obtain the sacred dagger; Mercedes gives a key to her brother to open the storage shed for supplies; you might assert that the chalk was a portal of sorts to the lair of the Pale Man. Discuss the symbolic importance of keys to the film.

Mandrake root: The faun prescribed a mandrake root to ease the mother's ailments; Ofelia gives her blood to this baby mandrake root.

1. What is a mandrake root, symbolically?
2. Why are the adults, especially Captain Vidal, so disgusted by the root's utility?
3. Does the ensuing conflagration about the root show a clash between realities: reality medicine versus fantasy/folk medicine—does it show Ofelia's perception of reality? Reality in general?
4. Does the mandrake root show a clash that is popular today (new school): Eastern medicine like acupuncture versus Western medicine like chemotherapy?

Fairies: Should we care about the damn fairies? Why?

Pale Man: What is the symbolism behind the Pale Man's lair?

The buffet line of untouchable delights?
The pile of children's shoes?
His eyes in his hands?
His extreme skinniness?

Essential Themes

Is this a typical Hollywood movie? Discuss and debate. What are the conventions of a Hollywood film? How is this one similar/ different.

Discuss the concepts of "control," "rebellion," and "choice," and see how it links characters?

What is this movie personally telling or teaching you?

What is the film's ending trying to personally convey to you?

New School Questions

History:

New School Current Relevance: How are the themes of "control," "rebellion," and "choice" still relevant in 2009? What specific manifestations of these themes do you see today?

Historical: If del Toro says that the film happened circa 1944 after the Spanish Civil War against Franco, how does history affect the actual events depicted in the film?

Class: Is there a genuine class stratification (setup/hierarchy) in the film? What is the "ladder" of class structures in that film?

What enables the Captain to engage in the casual murder and torture of individuals? What might del Toro be indicating about fascism and totalitarian control?

Is there a theme of "bachi" (retribution) tied to how classes compete with each other? (e.g. Captain gets capped in the face because of how he treated the civilians)

Gender:

How would Pan's Labyrinth be an entirely different movie were Ofelia a boy? Would it have been entirely different?

Ofelia has rather poor "listening" skills in terms of following rules explicitly. If you have seen other films with heroine/protagonist(as), how do those other film heroines "listen"/"stop listening?"

Does this film depict a clash between men and women? How? Why?

Why is it essential that Ofelia be a young, prepubescent girl rather than a young lady who has already reached womanhood (as often heralded as the onset of menstruation)?

Ethnicity:

Universal Symbolism:

Why are circle shapes so prominent everywhere in the film? What do the circle shapes represent?

What would happen if violence were completely devoid in this film, say, if the film were rated G or PG?

Prior and after the toad scene, what is the significance of Ofelia's willingness to sacrifice her cleanliness to complete her task? What does this say about expectations adult typically place on children?

Psychology and Rhetoric

Who or what is the id (unrepressed desires like sexuality and violence)?

Who or what is the superego (controlled sense of order like morality and decency)?

Who or what is the ego (mediating force between id and superego)?

Who or what is *ethos*? (trust, character, reputation)?

Who or what is *logos*? (logic, rationality, numerical efficiency)?

Who or what is *pathos*? (emotion, passion)?