Now hailed as an American classic, "Tropic of Cancer," Henry Miller's masterpiece, was banned as obscene in this country for twenty-seven years after its first publication in Paris in 1934. Only a historic court ruling that changed American censorship standards, ushering in a new era of freedom and frankness in modern literature, permitted the publication of this first volume of Miller's famed mixture of memoir and fiction, which chronicles with unapologetic gusto the bawdy adventures of a young expatriate writer, his friends, and the characters they meet in Paris in the 1930s. "Tropic of Cancer" is now considered, as Norman Mailer said, "one of the ten or twenty great novels of our century."

Henry Valentine Miller was born in New York City in 1891 and raised in Brooklyn. He lived in Europe, particularly Paris, Berlin, the south of France, and Greece; in New York; and in Beverly Glen, Big Sur, and Pacific Palisades, California where he died in 1980. He is also the author, among many other works, of "Tropic of Capricorn", the "Rosy Crucifixion" trilogy ("Sexus", "Plexus", "Nexus"), and "The Air-Conditioned Nightmare".

1. What do you think about the differences between literature and commercial fiction? Does literature ever become commercial fiction? If so, give examples.
2. What do you think about Paris as a character in the novel?
3. Does Miller want to return to America?
4. Compare and contrast Paris with New York City. What attracts artists, poets and writers to Paris? Has New York City changed since the first publication of Henry's novel?
5. Pick one scene of a sexually explicit nature and analyze it in the context of Miller's detractors' assertion that his work is mere pornography. Do you agree or disagree?
6. The novel is considered to have contributed to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. How has the sexual revolution of the 1960s changed society? Have the changes been permanent or transitory?
7. Why was the novel banned in the United States until 1961?
8. Why does Henry withhold his name as the narrator until the middle of the novel?
9. How is Henry selfish? How is he altruistic?
10. Describe Henry's attitude toward religion.
11. Why does Henry think that everyone is dead like the moon?
12. What is the role of friendship in the novel? How does it play out, and what does Miller seem to be arguing?
13. Miller describes Walt Whitman as “that one lone figure America has produced in the course of her brief life.” Why?
14. What is it about Germaine that appeals to Miller so deeply?
15. What do you think about the style of Miller's prose?
16. How would you interpret the lines: "I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive"?
17. Consider your reactions to the book while reading it, versus finishing the last chapter.
18. What do you think about the ending of *Tropic of Cancer* in regards to Miller's relationship to the past?

Additional sources: