

WHAT DOES RUTH RISK BY SEEING “THAT WOMAN”?

From *The Abortionist: A Woman Against the Law*

By Rickie Solinger

From “African-American Women and Abortion”

By Loretta J. Ross

Vocabulary Warm-Up

Section A

1. An event sanctioned by the school is being allowed and supported by the school. Students would probably need to ask the principal or another administrator to get the event sanctioned.
2. An abortion might have been considered therapeutic if it was necessary for the health of the pregnant woman. A doctor would determine a particular abortion not therapeutic if was not needed for the sake of the pregnant woman’s health or life.
3. A woman might seek the services of a quack surgeon if she could not afford and/or access a legitimate doctor for some reason. Quack surgeons would probably avoid prosecution for their shoddy work because the women would not report it since the service provided, abortion, was illegal.
4. Some pathbreaking ideas of today are genetic therapy and modification to produce healthier babies and treat disease, sustainability as a way to cope with energy and global warming, and space travel (a pathbreaking idea that has been around for a long time). Some of the pathbreaking technological innovations of today are social media and all of the apps that people can now use to do so many things wirelessly as well as advances in environmentally-friendly energy sources.
5. If something is disproportionate it is out of proportion or out of sync with its context. A punishment disproportionate to a crime would be either far more or less severe than the crime itself.

Section B

1. d
2. d
3. b
4. a

Section C

1. Saying that African-American women were grossly affected by the dangers of illegal abortion means that they were excessively affected by these dangers. Saying that they were affected in “grossly disproportionate numbers” means that the degree to which they were affected was extremely out of balance compared to what women overall experienced.
2. Disreputable doctors came to be called quacks because, before the advent of modern medicine in the early 20th century, traveling salesmen who had little or no medical training went around promoting various kinds of remedies or cure-alls, many of which were useless, dangerous, or addictive. Quack is short for the Dutch word quacksalver, which means to promote or “hawk” healing salves or ointments.
3. A story would become an exposé if it revealed something previously hidden or secret, particularly something shocking or controversial. Exposing something about someone is only

necessary if the person's actions affect the public (although of course students may offer different answers here). For example, if a politician is corrupt and has been accepting bribes in exchange for voting certain ways, then the public has a right to know. On the other hand, if a celebrity's child is suffering from a medical condition, it's not okay to expose that without the celebrity's permission.

4. In the first sense, the government is giving its approval or support of something; in the second, the government is expressing its disapproval and taking away support from or punishing someone or something. The two meanings are related because they both have to do with support and approval of something or someone; the exact meaning must be determined from the context in which it is used.

Section D

1. I do not consider violent video games therapeutic; I feel more tense and agitated after playing them, rather than less. I find exercise or taking a walk outside most therapeutic when I need to de-stress and unwind.

2. I would advise the teacher that if she is more open to her students, she can enforce her rules more effectively because she can learn how to explain them in ways the students will better understand and the students might be more willing to respect the rules if they understand them better and if they feel that she cares about their concerns.

3. The journalism students should use their judgment to determine whether what they find has any bearing on the teacher's current position as an educator. Either way, the journalism students should work with the new music teacher to include his perspective in the story. If they work with him, they might find an even more interesting story than what they might find if they just go about looking for a shocking exposé.

4. I think the greatest menace to American society today is the way people of differing opinions refuse to listen to each other and to work together to find compromises that help everyone. Serious problems – like poverty, global warming, etc. – go unsolved because people only want to do it their way.

5. Restaurants or other businesses would try to remedy the issues mentioned in the negative review as quickly as possible. If the business comes to be known as disreputable, it might start losing customers.

6. I think their clandestine meetings were the only way they could see each other at all. If they had expressed their feelings for each other openly, their parents would likely have sent one or both of them away, so they could never see each other, or forced them into arranged marriages to other people.

7. I would probably buy the sanctioned merchandise because it is likely to be of higher quality and I think it's important to support the artists. However, if the sanctioned merchandise was absurdly expensive, then I might consider buying unsanctioned merchandise outside the venue.

Section E

1. c

2. d

3. a

4. d

5. c

6. a

7. a

Check for Understanding

1. d
2. a
3. d
4. c
5. a
6. d
7. a, d, f
8. b
9. b
10. c

Writing and Discussion

Section A: How to talk about abortion?

1. Table A-1: Solinger's use of language

| Solinger's language | What Solinger is emphasizing through her language |
|---|--|
| "experts estimate the annual number of abortions at one million, with only ten thousand of those conducted in hospitals as medically sanctioned therapeutic abortions" | Solinger uses data to stress in objective and concrete terms that abortion was common, but safe abortions in hospitals were far from common. |
| "Alfred Kinsey's pathbreaking study, <i>Sexual Behavior and the Human Female</i> , reported that more than one out of every five women in the United States who had sexual relations – whether inside or outside of marriage – had had an abortion" | Solinger uses this statistic and cites an expert opinion to convey the idea that abortion was widespread and common among both married and unmarried women. |
| "each year nearly 700,000 abortions are performed on unfortunate, desperate women by <i>quack</i> surgeons and <i>disreputable</i> physicians whose criminal and unethical methods annually claim the lives of about eight thousand victims" | Solinger uses these numbers to show that hundreds of thousands of women each year were willing to take the risks that came with having an abortion, despite the fact that thousands died at the hands of the disreputable doctors they had to rely on. |
| "A study of abortion-related deaths in Detroit from 1950 to 1965 found that of the one hundred thirty-eight fatalities at issue, all involved poor women, most of them black" | Solinger uses this statistic to demonstrate that poor women, particularly poor black women, suffered abortion-related deaths far more frequently than other women who had abortions. |

2. Table A-2: Ross’s use of language

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|--|---|
| Ross’s use of language | Your interpretation of the power and/or effect of Ross’s language here |
| Nurses reported that “sticks, rocks, chopsticks, rubber or plastic tubes, gauze or cotton packing, ballpoint pens, coat hangers, or knitting needles” were frequently used by desperate women. | Ross’s language here suggests that women were willing to inflict great pain on themselves in order to induce an abortion. |
| Or they chose to use “douches believed effective in inducing abortions made from detergents, orange juice, vinegar, bleach, disinfectant, lye, potassium permanganate, or colas. | Ross’s language here indicates that women were willing to try anything they heard might work, even if it meant poisoning or otherwise harming themselves. |
| The gaseous explosions of soft drinks [were] said to cause a miscarriage | Ross’s language suggests that information about abortion that women had access to was subject to rumor and misinformation because it was illegal. |

3. Students should discuss how these two writers use concrete details to achieve their goal of communicating how common the demand for abortion was and how severe the risks associated with illegal abortion were. They should also evaluate the appeal of cut-and-dry statistical evidence and evidence from authorities as opposed to personal anecdotes or more political statements.

Section B: What is Ruth willing to do “for her family”?

1. Table B-1: Reactions to Ruth’s pregnancy and possible abortion

| Character | Textual evidence | Your interpretation |
|------------------|---|---|
| Ruth | Ruth is, according to the stage directions, “[b]eaten,” and she suggests that seeking an abortion is something she would do for her family: “Yes, I would too, Walter.” | Ruth is willing to do anything she needs to, including having an abortion, in order to protect her family, and she seems to see having another baby as a danger to her family. |
| Mama | “we a people who give children life, not who destroys them” “say that we done give up one baby to poverty and that we ain’t going to give up nary another one” | Mama thinks that willingly giving up a child is disgraceful and comes with too high a cost to the pride and soul of the family. She references the fact that Walter and Beneatha had a sibling who died as a result of poverty. |

| | | |
|--------|---|--|
| Walter | “You don’t know Ruth, Mama, if you think she would do that” | Walter can’t believe that Ruth would consider having an abortion; he doesn't think she’s the kind of person who would do such a thing. |
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2. Table B-2: How does Ruth fit the pattern of women who sought illegal abortions in the 50s?

| <i>Raisin</i> | Evidence | Solinger or Ross | Evidence |
|---|---|------------------|--|
| Ruth seems to go to a midwife or other non-doctor | “You went to see that woman, didn’t you?” | Ross | “Poor women . . . went to ‘the lady down the street’ – either a midwife or partially trained medical personnel” |
| Ruth is married | | Solinger | “experts generally agreed that most illegal abortions were performed on married women” |
| Ruth’s pregnancy seems unplanned | “Did you plan it, Ruth?” | Ross | “When . . . methods [of birth control] failed (and they frequently did), Black women relied on underground abortion” |

3. Table B-3: How and why is Ruth “Beaten”

She revives a bit when the check for the \$10,000 arrives, but then loses hope again as Walter argues with Mama about using the money to start a liquor store and then dismisses her attempt to talk to him about the baby.

| How and why Ruth is “Beaten” | Evidence from <i>Raisin</i> |
|---|--|
| Ruth has lost faith in Walter and become repulsed by him. | Ruth says of Walter, “Oh, let him go on out and drink himself to death! He makes me sick to my stomach!” |
| When she first returns from seeing “that woman,” Ruth is clearly exhausted by the prospect of having another child or having an abortion. | She is described in the stage directions as speaking “dispiritedly,” “wearily,” and “dully.” |
| She is willing to take on the | She is sickened and outraged by Travis playing with a rat |

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| risks associated with an abortion because she doesn't want to bring another child into such hopeless living conditions. | outside; she grabs him and “clamps her hand over his mouth and holds him to her” when he’s excitedly describing the rat’s bloody demise. After Beneatha hurries Travis back outside, the stage directions state that “Ruth has her fists clenched on her thighs and is fighting hard to suppress a scream that seems to be rising in her.” |
| Ruth feels hopeless about the conditions the family lives in. | Mama explains to Walter: “When the world gets ugly enough—a woman will do anything for her family. <i>The part that’s already living.</i> ” |

4. Students can talk about how Hansberry uses this plot point to show that Ruth is willing to undertake something illegal, expensive, and dangerous because she believes that bringing another child into the family is even more risky and will capsize their already fragile and desperate existence. Students might also note that the fact that she is willing to risk her life also suggests that she feels so hopeless that she doesn't see the point in continuing to live.