

***Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* by Tony Kushner**

**Part I: Questions**

*Angels in America*, Tony Kushner (Theater Communications Group), ISBN: 978-1559363846

[https://www.amazon.com/Angels-America-Fantasia-NationalComplete/dp/1559363843/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1494809326&sr=1-1&keywords=angels+in+america+tony+kushner](https://www.amazon.com/Angels-America-Fantasia-NationalComplete/dp/1559363843/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1494809326&sr=1-1&keywords=angels+in+america+tony+kushner)

Please answer the following questions thoughtfully. You do not have to answer in narrative form, but your answers should be thorough. These will be used as a basis for our discussions about Kushner's epic play. Make sure to use textual evidence to support your answers, and to cite it using correct MLA-format for in-text citations and "Works Cited." Your answers should be typed, using either Google Docs or Word.

**Due Date = Wednesday, August 29 (first day of classes):** You will be expected to share your completed assignment with me at [karino@idyllwildarts.org](mailto:karino@idyllwildarts.org)

**1. The Story/Plot:** Kushner's play is in two parts: *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. In your own words retell the story of each part of *Angels in America*. As you retell the stories, consider what you think is important and how the conflicts move the plot forward.

**2. Content and Structure:**

"*Angels in America* is an 'epic' drama, which means its plot unfolds over great distances of time and place, involves many characters, and more than one story line. Two complete plays form the entire plot: the first part, *Millennium Approaches* and its second installment, *Perestroika*. Together, they present more than thirty characters in eight acts, fifty-nine scenes, and an epilogue." (enotes.com)

- Discuss the ways the two parts complement each other, in terms of **content** and resolution of conflicts.
- In addition, you should write about the **structure or format**.
  - What do you notice about how the scenes are enacted?
  - And how the characters are played? How might you characterize individual characters' language?
  - How do the stage instructions give you a sense of the tone or type of play (realistic? fantastical?)?
- What are the **similarities** between the two parts? How are they **different**?

**3. Character Development:** There are many characters in this play. Choose one character and trace how s/he experiences some kind of transformation (or not) over both parts of *Angels in America*. In your analysis, consider how other characters contribute to the changes, as well as what theme(s) is addressed through your character's development.

**4. Challenges:** Choose a difficult passage in either part of Kushner's play. Make sure you discuss the passage in its entirety. Engage actively with the passage you've chosen:

- Ask questions of the text.
- Note and look up terms or concepts that you do not know.
- Reflect on what makes it difficult: Is it the ideas presented or how it is presented?
- Write what you think is going on in this passage and what it means.

**5. Relevance and Themes:** Tony Kushner's play was originally written and performed in the early 1990s. Certainly, AIDs and our response to this health crisis is an important context. And the place and power of gays in American society has evolved since the play's inception, though there continues to be ignorance and oppression of the LGBTQ community.

So, why read this play in 2018? What does it have to say to us today? What are some of the themes it speaks to? Is this play bound to its time and place? Or does it have a universal message?

Formulate several (2-3) **essential questions** that will help us grapple with some of the themes Kushner raises with his epic play. Think about how you formulate these questions to best elicit discussion. Write down some of your initial thoughts in response to your questions.

## Part II: Essay

There is a lot to say and write about when reflecting on this text. The second part of your summer writing assignment is to write an essay in which you will have the opportunity to express your ideas about *Angels in America*. I would like to see what you think, how you develop and support an argument, and how you write.

This is a short essay (500-750 words) and should be considered a good draft. You will revise based on our class discussions and my feedback.

**Due Date = 2nd class meeting:** You will be expected to share your essay with me at [karino@idyllwildarts.org](mailto:karino@idyllwildarts.org)

**You may choose to write about your own theme** or answer one of the prompts below. In any case, you are to discuss both parts of *Angels*, referring to specific examples from the text. Make sure to cite the text using correct MLA-format for in-text citations and "Works Cited." Your essay should be typed, using either Google Docs or Word.

**1. Human Life and Society in *Angels in America*:** In an essay titled “With a Little Help from My Friends” (see “Afterword” in your book), Tony Kushner writes about how art and life are created collaboratively and with the intellectual, emotional, and practical input and support of many. He ends this essay with the following:

[Karl] Marx was right: The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls[,] societies, the social world, human life springs. And also plays. (*Angels* 289)

How might this quote also apply to the play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*? In what ways does Kushner’s play address this question of where the meaning of life comes from? What does *Angels* suggest about community and how human beings come together to form “nets of souls”?

**2. *Angels in America* as Drama:** In the following quote, Tony Kushner talks about two different kinds of dramatists:

[...] the ones who ask small questions but give great answers (the traditionalists) and the ones who ask huge questions and often, as a consequence of the ambitiousness of their questions, fail to give good answers or even any answers at all (the experimentalists, the vessel breakers); both are necessary. (James Fisher *The Theater of Tony Kushner* x)

In his drama, Kushner tackles many different kinds of questions or themes. Which category of dramatist would you place him in? In attempting to answer this question, use one of your essential questions (or themes). What do you think Kushner is trying to accomplish with his play? Do you think he achieves his purpose?

**3. Your theme ...**