Questions for "Once Upon a Time” by Nadine Gordimer

1. What do the introductory paragraphs reveal about the narrator of this story?

2. What is the tone of the introductory paragraphs? What words from introduction support your tone?

3. What do the introductory paragraphs reveal about the society in which the narrator lives?

4. Notice the shift from 1st person to 3rd person point of view. What is happening with this shift? Why does the story include the introductory 1st person paragraphs?

5. What are some characteristics about this story that make it similar to other fairy tales or children’s literature?

6. Why do the characters in the story behave the way they do / What are their motives?

7. How would you describe the tone of the story? What words support your tone?

8. Why do you think Nadine Gordimer titled the story “Once Upon a Time?”

9. “Once Upon a Time” is a story about irony. What is the irony in this situation?

10. This story is an allegory. Why?

**1.** What were your feelings when you read the grisly end of this story?

**2.** Which passages in the story obviously have humorous intent? Did you find them funny? Overall, what is Gordimer’s **tone**?

**3.** Point out elements of the fairy-tale genre that are used by Gordimer. (For example, the setting is not specified and the characters are not named.) How would you describe the effect of Gordimer’s **parody**?

**4.** Why do you think Gordimer uses a nonfictional opening? How do you interpret the opening after reading the story?

**5.** How can the wall in the story be seen as a **symbol**?

**6.** Fairy tales often contain **moral** lessons. What are some of the morals of fairy tales you’ve read? What, in contrast, is the moral of “Once upon a Time”?

**7.** In your opinion, are the husband and wife racists who cause their own tragedy? Explain your answer.

**8.** When you think of a wall, what do you picture? What does your wall keep in and keep out?  How does “Once upon a Time” support or change your picture of a wall?

**9.** Think about ads for home protection systems. What messages do they give visually and verbally? What emotions do they play on?

**10.** Do you think this story is too brutal or violent? Compare and discuss your responses in class.