

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – BOOK OF THE DUN COW

1. Beast fables are about very “human” animals and end with strong, instructive morals. Wangerin asserts that *The Book of the Dun Cow* is not a beast fable nor is it, as some have called it, an allegory. Rather it is a novel in which, Wangerin argues, the “meaning ... springs from the reader’s experience.” That being the case, what moral lessons can you identify that might be evident to all age levels, since the book became the *New York Times* Best Children's Book of the Year and won a US National Book Award.
2. There are no humans in this story as there are in *Watership Down* or *Animal Farm*. For Wangerin, this story takes place prior to God’s creation of man. Cite examples where the animals have ‘human’ traits (rooster, dog, hens, weasel, fox, rat, ants, turkey, snake etc). What does that suggest?
3. An important relationship in the book is that between Chauntecleer and the dog Mundo Cani. How is the dog introduced to us and how would you describe his relationship to the rooster? What is the meaning of his “maroooooned” cry?
4. Chauntecleer’s crows occur throughout the book. What is the purpose and the effect of Chauntecleer’s crowing? [In medieval monasteries, stated times of the day were put aside for prayers and devotion. These are: prime-before sunrise; lauds-at the rising of the sun; terce-three hours later; sext-six hours later; none-nine hours later; vespers-at sundown; compline-before sleep.]
5. Why do you think the Weasel is named John Wesley? What is his role? [Historically, the weasel was thought to be able to conquer basilisks; and medieval travelers often took a weasel along when traveling.]
6. In chapter 4, Wangerin describes animals as the keeper of Wyrms, a serpent-like creature who is locked up in the center of the earth. Why has God given the animals the key to Wyrms’ prison? What does it mean that the animals have no knowledge of what lies beneath them? How does Wangerin connect the presence of evil to the Christian story?
7. Nature plays an important part in the novel, particularly water. What does the invading river represent? What role does it serve in Chauntecleer’s important dream in chapter 15? Do you see any connections with Noah’s flood? Were there any other hints at Biblical-type references?
8. What is the role of the Dun Cow? Note the places where she appears (chapters 12, 16, 17, 18, 20 +). Is she a Christ-like figure?
9. Chauntecleer finally meets Cockatrice at the end of chapter 21. Why is it important that Cockatrice is a rooster and that Chauntecleer sees him as a mirror of himself?
10. Why does the battle cause Chauntecleer to lose faith, and what does his vision in chapter 25 give to him? The Dun Cow accuses him of little faith (“modicae fidei”) and asks him why he doubts (“Quare dubitasti”). What is the role of her horn?
11. What is the role of laughter in chapter 26 when Mundo Cani carries the rooster through the land?
12. Why is Mundo Cani and not Chauntecleer responsible for Wyrms being shut up again in his prison? Is the dog a Christ figure? Why is it suggested that he will return?
13. Why must Chauntecleer confess publicly his feelings for Mundo Cani and acknowledge his sin? Why is forgiveness so important?

Questions modified from

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