

Comprehension Questions for Day 1 of “The Colour Out of Space”

Check your comprehension of the following expressions.

The story mentions “the blasted heath” many times. **What does “blasted” mean in this context?** Choose one or more answers from the words below:

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. ruined | 3. annoying |
| 2. afflicted | 4. dirty |
| | 5. launched into space |

When Mrs. Gardner is affected by the meteorite, the narrator tells us, **“Things moved and changed and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds,”** the final clause of the sentence means:

1. Mrs. Gardner’s ears were tingling because of bad feelings.
2. Mrs. Gardner suddenly had very sensitive hearing.
3. Mrs. Gardner was making sounds nobody could hear.
4. Mrs. Gardner was responding to “sounds” that did seem to not exist.
5. Mrs. Gardner seemed to be “hearing” things that were not quite sounds.

The sentence, **“There are things which cannot be mentioned, and what is done in common humanity is sometimes cruelly judged by the law,”** means...

1. There are things too horrible to mention, because the law is unfair to monsters.
2. I will not explain what happened next, because you might judge me for it even though I’m human.
3. I don’t want to mention what happened next because Mrs. Gardner would be too embarrassed by it, even though it’s not her fault.
4. I cannot mention what happened next because while it was a humane action, it was illegal.
5. I’m not sure what happened next, but I think Ammi is not guilty because he was insane.

Near the end of the story, one sentence ends, **“... it is because of the thing which every man of that party agreed in whispering later on that the strange days are never talked about in Arkham.”** What does this mean?

1. Nobody in Arkham talks about what happened on the Gardner farm because the men agreed not to talk about it.
2. Everyone in the group started telling rumors about what happened that night, but nobody believed them.
3. All of the men in that group went to Arkham to report what happened, but nobody believed them.
4. Everyone in the group secretly agreed to come back in the future to fight the evil that had taken over the area.
5. All of the men in the group were too scared to talk, and quickly forgot what happened that night.

Discussion Questions for Week 3, Day 1: “The Colour Out of Space”

1. “The Colour out of Space” features the most enigmatic alien in SF history: it is a colour unknown to humanity, which makes sounds which cannot be heard and which extends a bizarre influence on everything near it. How does the impossibility of describing the colour (and the sounds and flavours and other sensory information linked to it) affect the way you read the story?
2. Is “the colour” a metaphor, and if so, for what? Should we read “the colour” as metaphorical, or take it literally? What could the “cosmic horror” in the tale represent?
3. The city of Arkham appears in many of Lovecraft’s works, but it does not appear on any real-world maps of New England. What do you make of Lovecraft’s invention of an entire American city?
4. Lovecraft starts out by telling us how native New Englanders (by which he means white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants) fled the area around the Gardner’s farm, but that even immigrants could not live there:

The old folk have gone away, and foreigners do not like to live there. French-Canadians have tried it, Italians have tried it, and the Poles have come and departed. It is not because of anything that can be seen or heard or handled, but because of something that is imagined.

What do you make of this brief passage?

5. Do you think our narrator is reliable? Do you think our narrators’ sources of information are reliable? How does this affect the way we read the story?

6. At the end of the story, we are assured that the evil that killed the Gardners remains:

There were other globules—depend upon that. One must have fed itself and escaped, and probably there was another which was too late. No doubt it is still down the well—I know there was something wrong with the sunlight I saw above that miasmal brink. The rustics say the blight creeps an inch a year, so perhaps there is a kind of growth or nourishment even now. But whatever daemon hatchling is there, it must be tethered to something or else it would quickly spread. Is it fastened to the roots of those trees that claw the air? One of the current Arkham tales is about fat oaks that shine and move as they ought not to do at night.

Does the fact that some of the horrible “colour” remains affect how we read the story?

Whatever questions you don’t answer as a group—and also, the questions you *do* answer as a group—continue to think and ruminate on them. Please see also my brief “reading” of the story, which should be available in the **Week 7** folder. (It is an example of a “reading” of the kind I’m hoping to see from you for your Midterm Paper.)