Close reading: Virginia Woolf piece

DIRECTIONS: Read the piece and complete the annotation boxes to help you understand the essay excerpt before tackling the multiple-choice questions.

1. Look to context and the highlighted hint about the topic of the passage. Next, look at the publication date and the author. What “situation of women” is Woolf probably going to discuss?

*This passage is adapted from Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas.*

*©1938 by Harcourt, Inc. Here, Woolf considers the situation*

*of women in English society.*

Close at hand is a bridge over the River Thames,  
an admirable vantage ground for us to make a  
survey. The river flows beneath; barges pass, laden  
with timber, bursting with corn; there on one side are  
*5* the domes and spires of the city; on the other,  
Westminster and the Houses of Parliament. It is a  
place to stand on by the hour, dreaming. But not  
now. Now we are pressed for time. Now we are here  
to consider facts; now we must fix our eyes upon the  
*10* procession—the procession of the sons of educated  
men.  
There they go, our brothers who have been  
educated at public schools and universities,  
mounting those steps, passing in and out of those  
*15* doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, teaching,  
administering justice, practicing medicine,  
transacting business, making money. It is a solemn  
sight always—a procession, like a caravanserai  
crossing a desert. . . . But now, for the past twenty  
*20* years or so, it is no longer a sight merely, a  
photograph, or fresco scrawled upon the walls of  
time, at which we can look with merely an esthetic  
appreciation. For there, trapesing along at the tail  
end of the procession, we go ourselves. And that  
*25* makes a difference. We who have looked so long at  
the pageant in books, or from a curtained window  
watched educated men leaving the house at about  
nine-thirty to go to an office, returning to the house  
at about six-thirty from an office, need look passively  
*30* no longer. We too can leave the house, can mount  
those steps, pass in and out of those doors,... make  
money, administer justice. . . . We who now agitate  
these humble pens may in another century or two  
speak from a pulpit. Nobody will dare contradict us  
*35* then; we shall be the mouthpieces of the divine  
spirit—a solemn thought, is it not? Who can say  
whether, as time goes on, we may not dress in  
military uniform, with gold lace on our breasts,  
swords at our sides, and something like the old  
*40* family coal-scuttle on our heads, save that that  
venerable object was never decorated with plumes of  
white horsehair. You laugh—indeed the shadow of  
the private house still makes those dresses look a  
little queer. We have worn private clothes so  
*45* long. . . . But we have not come here to laugh, or to  
talk of fashions—men’s and women’s. We are here,  
on the bridge, to ask ourselves certain questions.  
And they are very important questions; and we have  
very little time in which to answer them. The  
*50* questions that we have to ask and to answer about  
that procession during this moment of transition are  
so important that they may well change the lives of  
all men and women for ever. For we have to ask  
ourselves, here and now, do we wish to join that  
*55* procession, or don’t we? On what terms shall we join  
that procession? Above all, where is it leading us, the  
procession of educated men? The moment is short; it  
may last five years; ten years, or perhaps only a  
matter of a few months longer.... But, you will  
*60* object, you have no time to think; you have your  
battles to fight, your rent to pay, your bazaars to  
organize. That excuse shall not serve you, Madam.  
As you know from your own experience, and there  
are facts that prove it, the daughters of educated men  
*65* have always done their thinking from hand to  
mouth; not under green lamps at study tables in the  
cloisters of secluded colleges. They have thought  
while they stirred the pot, while they rocked the  
cradle. It was thus that they won us the right to our  
*70* brand-new sixpence. It falls to us now to go on  
thinking; how are we to spend that sixpence? Think  
we must. Let us think in offices; in omnibuses; while  
we are standing in the crowd watching Coronations  
and Lord Mayor’s Shows; let us think . . . in the   
*75* gallery of the House of Commons; in the Law Courts;  
let us think at baptisms and marriages and funerals.  
Let us never cease from thinking—what is this  
“civilization” in which we find ourselves? What are  
these ceremonies and why should we take part in  
*80* them? What are these professions and why  
should we make money out of them? Where in  
short is it leading us, the procession of  
the sons of educated men?

2. See the first person collective point of view with “we” and “our.” Why is Woolf using this POV?

A. to suggest that men are to be respected

B. to bring women together to consider their

“situation” in society

C. to express disapproval for women on the bridge

D. to hint that society never changes

4. What is Woolf’s claim about women?

3. Paraphrase Woolf’s revelation in your own words.

5. What, really, is Woolf asking? Put her questions in your words.

6. Here, Woolf anticipates the opposition; she realizes that some will be hesitant to think toward change. Paraphrase why, as Woolf indicates, some women may not embrace change.

7. Look at the highlighted parts:

* Woolf notes common, everyday places in a crowd.
* Woolf notes esteemed, respected places generally reserved for men
* Woolf notes what kind of events? Why? Explain: