

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In his 1973 stage adaptation of the Sweeney Todd legend, Christopher Bond attempted to make Sweeney more “human.” Do you think he succeeded? Do you find the Sweeney Todd of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler’s musical to be a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
2. Sondheim has said that he wanted the music to immediately set the scene for a horror story. Does it do so? How? Does the music of *Sweeney Todd* remind you of any horror movies you have seen?
3. What function do the songs serve in *Sweeney Todd*? Do they reveal characters or comment on the action? Do they move the story forward? How? How is *Sweeney Todd* like and unlike other musicals you have seen or heard?
4. How and why does Sweeney’s character change over the course of the story?
5. Is one form of murder (revenge for a specific, personal act) more justifiable than another (serial killing)?
6. Do you think *Sweeney Todd* makes a statement about class, social politics, and/or political corruption? If so, what?
7. Director John Doyle’s production takes place in an insane asylum and is seen through the eyes of an inmate, represented by the actor who plays Tobias. What do you think of Doyle’s choice of setting? How does the setting change or enhance the story? How do the lights, costumes, and props affect your perception of the play? Would you design the production differently? How?
8. How does having the actors double as the orchestra affect your experience of the story?
9. Why do you think Mrs. Lovett lies to Sweeney about his wife? Do you think she is at all justified? In her position, would you do the same?
10. In many early versions of the Sweeney Todd story, Johanna is a strong female heroine. Do you consider Sondheim’s Johanna to be a feminist character? Why or why not?
11. Why do you think Tobias kills Sweeney? Does the fact that it is Tobias who kills Sweeney thematically affect the story? What role does Tobias’s madness play in his actions? How does his madness thematically alter the ending? Is it a satisfying ending?

12. What does each of the characters desire most? Does he or she achieve that desire? If not, why not? If so, how?

13. In traditional melodrama, the moral characters are rewarded and the immoral characters are punished. Do you think this is true in *Sweeney Todd*? Who are the moral characters in *Sweeney Todd*? On what criteria do you base your judgment?

14. Why do you think the story of Sweeney Todd has remained so popular over the centuries?

15. What is the “moral” of *Sweeney Todd*?