

The Botany of Desire  
**Study Guide**

Chapter 2

Desire: Beauty // Plant: The Tulip

Pre-reading

- 1) Scan through the chapter and find
  - a. the origin of the name 'tulip'
  - b. the following vocabulary words: indifference, hypothesis, speculation, daunting, after a while, irresistible, to pin down, to afford, principle, symmetry, distinction, exploit, glamour, mad, perversion, to astonish, perverse, turmoil, expire, perversities, prone to
- 2) What does it mean to domesticate a species? Give examples (not from the book) and explain the benefits and drawbacks (to the different parties). (81)
- 3) What is a 'mania,' or a 'frenzy?'
- 4) Explain the idea of 'financial speculation.' What is a 'speculative bubble?' What was the speculative bubble in the Bay Area housing market, and how does this relate to the current economic crisis?

Comprehension (*Answer ten. You must answer #2, 6, 7, and 14*)

- 1) According to p.64, why might a psychiatrist show her patient a beautiful bouquet of flowers?
- 2) Write an outline for the point Pollan makes in the last paragraph on p.67 and the first paragraph on p.68: "According to Jack Goody, . . . for the duration of the dry season."
- 3) Rephrase the question that Pollan asks at the bottom of p.67. Speculate on what the answer might be . . . . What do you think??
- 4) On p.69, Pollan mentions the pitcher plant as an example of *what?* Find another example (in the text) of the same idea.
- 5) On p.71, in the first full paragraph, which word means "having sex?"
- 6) Using the references on my website, and/or some of your own research, write a paragraph explaining the difference between 'natural' and 'artificial' selection.
- 7) Based on your explanation in #6, explain Pollan's point about Chinese peonies (p.73).
- 8) "A fabulous tail is a metabolic extravagance only the healthy can afford." (p.74) Paraphrase Pollan's point, by completing the following conditional sentence: *If an animal doesn't have \_\_\_\_\_, that animal can't \_\_\_\_\_.*
- 9) Explain in your own words: "Of course, their willingness to take part in the moving game of human culture has proven [to be] a brilliant strategy for their success . . ." (p.78). In your explanation, be sure to clarify what "their" refers to.
- 10) As Pollan asks on p.85, "How can the mad embrace of these particular people [the Dutch] and this particular flower be explained?" Give the answer in your own words, after reading the rest of this section.
- 11) What was "tulipomania?" Write a definition paragraph that answers this question.
- 12) Explain the contrast expressed on pp.97-98. Be sure to read until the end of the chapter, to learn more about Dionysus and Apollo.
- 13) Why is it significant that, in 1635, "the trade in actual bulbs gave way to the trade in promissory notes?" (p.101)
- 14) Explain in several sentences Pollan's main point in this chapter?

