

*The Botany of Desire*

**Study Guide**

Chapter 3

Desire: Intoxication // Plant: Marijuana

Pre-Reading

1. Read the article on the U.S. Drug War (“Marijuana becomes focus of drug war”). You can find a link to this article on my website. Be able to summarize the important points in this article.
2. Look up and be able to explain the following words:
  - a) intoxication, intoxicant, to intoxicate
  - b) toxin, toxic
  - c) hallucination, to hallucinate
  - d) taboo
  - e) to get high, to be high (“... to change the subjective experience of reality we call consciousness.” p.114)
  - f) counterculture
  - g) the sixties
3. Scan the chapter, finding and underlining the following words: obscures, prevailed, universal, yielded, to activate, to endure, destiny, domestication, underrated, banal, profound, suspending, induce

Comprehension (*Answer twenty*)

1. What do you think Pollan means, on p.113, by “. . . yet drawing a bright line through the middle of the garden, as the God of Genesis found, doesn’t always work?” Why not (Why doesn’t it always work?)
2. On p. 116, the bottom paragraph includes many examples of different animal behaviors. What do these examples show? Explain the main idea of this paragraph, in your own words.
3. The section that runs from p.118 – p.120 is primarily concerned with
  - a. how pretty plants are
  - b. the history of gardens
  - c. witches
  - d. biblical references to gardens
4. Summarize in 2-3 sentences Pollan’s “marijuana-growing story” (p.124)
5. Explain the “sea change” Pollan refers to on p.125. What changed? From what to what?
6. In the main paragraph on p.126 (“The swiftness of this change . . . ,” the topic sentence is *not* the first one. Which sentence in this paragraph expresses the author’s main idea here?
7. What changed for marijuana growers in the early 1980s, and why? What were the results of this change?
8. Find the following sentence on the bottom of p.135: “Whether cloning is such a *boon* for the species as a whole is, as the story of the apple suggest, much less certain.” From this context, what do you think ‘boon’ means? What is the uncertainty referred to? Explain.
9. Why was it hard for Pollan to find a marijuana grower who would show him his (or her) garden? (p.136)
10. Describe in your own words the indoor garden Pollan visits.
11. p.139: “What this suggests is that the desire to alter one’s experience of consciousness may be universal. Do you agree? Why or why not?”
12. Discuss the role of intoxication, or consciousness-changing, in your culture.
13. p.142: “All these plants are . . . better than those who don’t.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
14. Explain the connection Pollan discusses between religion and psychoactive (consciousness-changing) drugs.
15. In your own words, explain what the research of Mechoulam and Howlett has showed us about the brain and how it functions.
16. Why does Pollan describe the Chinese character for ‘hemp’ (p.157)?
17. On p.157, Pollan states that “hemp was one of humankind’s main sources of paper and cloth” *until the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Why is it no longer one of our primary sources? What changed?
18. What does Pollan mean when he says, on p.160, that “forgetting is vastly underrated?” How is this related to his point here?
19. On pp.160-161 Pollan catalogs (or tries to) *all* of his sensory input at a given moment. Write your own catalog of sensory input. (About 150 words. Freewrite.)
20. On pp.165-168, Pollan’s main point is that
  - a. he is not good at noticing details, and smoking marijuana makes him worse.
  - b. the things people talk about when they are high are usually silly, and that’s why people make jokes about them.
  - c. the things people talk about when they are high may seem silly, but they may also lead to some profound and significant ideas.
21. Give an example (your own, or Pollan’s – in your own words) of an instance where “thoughts can also induce chemical reactions.” (p.171)
22. When and why did cannabis begin to be considered, or discussed as, medicine?
23. Pollan pulls his ideas together in the final paragraph of this chapter. What is his main point?

