

Chapter 1

Hidden Within Technology's Empire, a Republic of Letters

Saul Bellow

Answers to Questions about the Facts

1. Bellow discusses the popularity of “art forms as technologies,” or film production, over books. Although evidence supports that movies are more popular and have a great impact on today’s society, Bellow emphasizes that literature still has a place in the modern world. He has so much faith in the existence of a literate minority that he has helped create a place for this minority to convene: in the pages of *The Republic of Letters*.
2. Allow for open discussion. Students may discuss the importance of watching movies and television versus the importance of reading books.
3. Bellow quotes Terry Teachout: “‘For Americans under the age of 30, film has replaced the novel as the dominant mode of artistic expression.’ To this Teachout adds that popular novelists like Tom Clancy and Stephen King ‘top out at around a million copies per book,’ and notes, ‘The final episode of NBC’s *Cheers*, by contrast, was seen by 42 million people.’” Allow students to discuss their opinions.
4. An empire is huge and consists of nations, territories, and peoples ruled by a single authority. A republic is a smaller unit within an empire. The title suggests that although technology’s popularity is as vast as a political empire, a smaller faction of literati exist within the empire. He describes the smaller faction as a

- republic, which implies that this group is a democratic one, whereas in the empire, the majority blindly follows their leader, technology.
5. Bellow discovered Proust, Joyce, T. E. Lawrence, Pasternak, and Kafka as a young man. These European or Russian writers represent a high literary cultural minority. Allow students to discuss their experiences with these writers.
 6. Bellow says, “On majoritarian grounds, the movies win.” Allow students to discuss their answers.

Answers to Questions about the Strategies

1. Bellow begins his essay by describing his childhood discovery of literature and his desire to share it with others. The opening paragraph effectively grabs the audiences’ attention.
2. Allow for individual responses. Readers may cite paragraph 3 as evidence that Bellow is a literary person. Students may also cite the author’s vocabulary, his references to scholars and writers, and his use of allusion as evidence that he is a literate man.
3. Bellow offers Teachout’s evidence in support of “art as technology” in paragraphs 8 and 9. Allow students to discuss Bellow’s argument.
4. Allow for open discussion. Students may interpret the brief paragraph as a concession to the power of movies. Other students may see it as a transition to demonstrate that viewing can inspire reading.
5. The final sentence functions as Bellow’s thesis. The essay ends by stating that technology has failed readers of literature. Allow students to discuss the effectiveness of this ending.

Answers to Questions about the Issues

1. Bellow states that people tend to follow the majority; however, large groups of minorities do exist, and their needs and interests must be met. Students' opinion of Bellow's view will vary.
2. Bellow cites his early visits to Midwestern libraries as proof that a literate minority had long existed, even in unlikely places.
3. Allow for individual responses. Students may discuss the book's use of stereotypes and its melodramatic style as reasons why books of this type are no longer influential. Television and the Internet now provide insight and commentary on our society's social conscious.
4. Allow for individual responses.
5. Allow for individual responses. Students may discuss the irony of "minorities of millions" and the need for the members of a minority to group to have a connection with each other and an outlet for their interests.