Fiddler on the Roof Responses

Sample student paper

1) What Tevye means by his statement on tradition is that without tradition we would have no identity. He sings that they have kept their patterns of life for many, many years and how they sleep, eat, work, and wear their clothes tells something about who they are. The prayer shawl that the men wear is a reminder of their constant devotion to God. Without tradition no one would know who he is and what God expects him to do.

2) Yente was the "matchmaker". She would try to find husbands for young ladies. In the small Jewish communities within Russia, the survival of the Jewish heritage and traditions was at stake. There was the danger of being wiped out and so having children would help to keep the culture alive. Also, there was the influence of the majority Russians, and they wanted to keep their Jewish sense of morality intact.

3) The Jews felt that the worst husband was better than no husband at all. Because of the close-knit communities, marriage usually meant a marriage between the families and not necessarily the couple. So, it was preferable for a young women to marry a learned husband of wealth and importance. It was also difficult to find a husband of that caliber if the family was poor with no dowry to be offered. The position of matchmaker was important to women in society because there wasn't much interaction between young women and men, and so it was hard to find a mate on their own. Also, falling in love before marriage was not a cultural expectation factor. Learning to love each other came over time after two people were married.

4) Tevye's dream was very funny. I thought it was comical the way he manipulated Golde into believing that her mother came to him in a dream telling him that Tzeitel should marry Motel. Obviously dreams are something of great influence and superstition in the lives of Jews or Golde would have just dismissed it as hogwash. The dream was taken so seriously that it took precedence over the Jewish traditions of whom a young woman should marry. The appearance of the butcher's dead wife threatening to kill Tzeitel if she married him was significant in influencing Golde's mindset.

5) There were several customs that I noticed during the wedding ceremony, but I didn't have a clue as to what they meant so I did a little research about them on the Internet. The bride circling the groom seven times harks back to the world being built in seven days and it is the building of the walls of the new couple's home. The ring is placed on the woman's right index finger instead of the left ring finger. The Jews believe that the index finger is the closest finger to the heart and that is why it is placed there. The two cups of wine signify their betrothal to each other and the second cup is drunk after seven specific blessings are placed upon it. Getting married under a canopy -- which is what Hodel promises her papa will happen when she marries Perchik -- is a symbol of the new couple's home and it is open on all sides to symbolize the openness of their home for friends and relatives. The stomping of a drinking glass is a remembrance of
Jewish sadness at the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. That act also recognizes the couple's spiritual and national future as part of the Jewish people.

6) It seems that religion was the foundation for all of the traditions and customs of the Jewish people at that time. Tevye was constantly in conversation and prayer with God and although he didn't understand why awful things were happening to him, he carried on with great faith. That is shown by his statement of, "we will leave it in his hands" and also by his perseverance. Tevye mentions during one of his conversations with God that God is the matchmaker for one of his daughters. The weekly Sabbath meal was apparently a big deal as Golde insisted that Tevye be on time. There were also some prayers and other traditions shared at the table during that meal.

7) I would describe the hierarchy as follows: Tevye was head of the household, but before that, God was his consult. Golde was second in line under Tevye and she submitted to his decisions. The oldest daughter, Tzeitel, was next in line and the other daughters could not marry until after she did. When the children got married, the sons-in-law became part of the family and were treated like a son.

8) The significance of the discussion between Tevye and Golde is that they did not love one another before they got married. That was very different than the situations with all three of the older daughters. I think they were trying to figure out if the tradition of learning to love each other was really legitimate. In twenty-five years they had never even thought about it. They just learned to live with each other. Even after the conversation (song) was over, I'm not sure they really believed that they were in love. I don't think they knew what love was supposed to feel like.

9) For Tevye, marrying outside the faith meant that his daughter was dead. She was disowned and disgraced by the family. That parallels in some way my own experience with my father when I married as a Nazarene instead of a Catholic. He felt like I was living in sin because he did not even recognize that I was married. He never did get over my decision about leaving the Catholic Church and took it with him to his death, actually leaving me a letter explaining his disgust. He just had to have the last word. He disowned me just like Tevye disowned Chava. I noticed that when Chava came to say goodbye, her mother was overjoyed to see her, but when Tevye made his appearance, she quickly backed down and showed no emotion towards her daughter. This happened to me in a very similar way. My mother stood behind my father in his decision to disown me, but I could tell she was doing it to please him and not because she wanted to. When he died, my mother was set free and our relationship has made a complete turn around.

10) Through the struggle that Tevye encountered, I also realize better the struggles my dad had with my decisions. My marriage went against everything that he believed in and so he had no other choice than to deny me his blessing. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. If Tevye accepted his daughter, then his community would have gone against him. Even when the Constable told the people of his village they had to leave, he gave Tevye the option of staying since Chava had married a Gentile. He would in no way deny his faith and heritage by doing that.
Personal Responses

1) My community has changed over the years and so the community I speak of as a youth is described much differently then the community I experience now. My community as a youth was of a Catholic background. I attended parochial (Catholic) school as well as the Catholic Church. I participated in all of the sacraments recognized by the Catholics up to and including Confirmation. My community as a child was something that was forced upon me although at the time I didn't know any better. I accepted it as a way of life without asking any questions. There was an empty ritualism about it to me since I really didn't know why being Catholic was so important. I just went through the motions that were required of me. Even so, it did impact me in what I feel is a positive way, as I have very high moral standards and values that will likely always be a part of my life. Now in my adult years, and from the time I was nineteen, I have a set of Christian values that are much different then that of my youth. That is not to say that Catholics can't be Christians, I am just saying that I was not a Christian when a Catholic because I didn't know what being a Christian was all about; namely a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a reliance on God. I still hold the values that I grew up with, but my perception of Christianity has changed.

2) When I was married I was barely a Christian, but because of my Catholic upbringing I knew that divorce was not an option. Both my husband and I had the same idea that we were in it for the long haul. After 23 years -- although not all of them easy -- we are still happily married. I still believe in the sanctity of marriage and that a couple should save themselves for each other until the wedding day. This is rather ironic since my Catholic nieces and nephews are sleeping with their single partners. It's been dismissed as a generational thing, but I don't understand what happened to a commitment of following Roman Catholic and biblical traditions and principles.

3) I don't know if this is a superstition, but the Catholics believe that if you are not a Catholic you are going to hell. In fact my mother once told me to my face that I was going to hell for marrying outside the Catholic faith. When I miscarried my first baby, my father told me that God didn't want me to have any children because I was living in sin and had renounced my Catholic faith. If that was a superstition, then it was broken when I had two healthy babies (now 18 and 12). I am not superstitious about anything, although I do knock on wood occasionally when I don't want something to come true.

4) The main religious influence of my culture is Jesus Christ who came to this earth to redeem me from my sin. There are many religious influences of our culture in general. TV evangelists can be either a good or a bad influence. There is one in particular that I like to listen to very much because he talks about real life situations
and how we should live as Christians. His name is Joel Osteen. I'm not sure what it is, but he just mesmerizes me with his messages. Other people, like my pastor and fellow churchgoers, have had an influence on my culture. My place of employment is another religious influence in my life. SNU definitely has an impact on my life in that it enables me to use my God given abilities to help students and parents. Working in a Christian environment is a huge blessing in my life.

5) The extent of our family hierarchy is my husband and then myself, although you could say, by the way we treat our dog, that she is highest in the ranking. When I was growing up, it was always my father and then my mother. The children were of equal standing with each other. My mother's parents were not influential in decisions that were made by my mom and dad. It was pretty much each nuclear family for themselves once they got married. I did not know my father’s parents, but from what I’ve been told it was basically the same.