

# Ella Minnow Pea



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARK DUNN

Mark Dunn was born in Memphis Tennessee. He studied film at Memphis State University and then pursued a post-graduate degree in screenwriting at the University of Texas. He moved to New York in 1987, working at the New York Public Library while writing plays. Since then, Dunn has written five novels and over 30 plays, including *Belles* and *Five Tellers Dancing in the Rain*. *Ella Minnow Pea*, published in 2001, was Dunn's debut novel. Dunn now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dunn draws on the history of many totalitarian and theocratic regimes for his book, such as the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong, and North Korea under the Kim dynasty. Countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, whose governments are under the control of religious leaders, also fall under the category of theocratic totalitarianism like the Council on the island of Nollop in Dunn's novel. These regimes are characterized by dictatorship and tyranny, where all political institutions are in service of one particular goal while any obstacles to that goal are swept aside regardless of the cost. Thus, individual freedoms are often curtailed and governments are granted wide latitude to enforce their goals. Dissent is often branded as evil and internal political differences are not permitted. In *Ella Minnow Pea*, the Council serves as this same kind of totalitarian government, taking any action necessary in order to carry out the goal of following Nollop's wishes. The S.S. of Nazi Germany are also correlated with the Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B.) on Nollop.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Ella Minnow Pea* is a novel concerned with censorship, a theme that's heavily explored in Ray Bradbury's [Fahrenheit 451](#), which portrays a future American society in which books are outlawed. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's [Haroun and the Sea of Stories](#) was written in response to the censorship that Rushdie experienced following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Other books that examine betrayal and mistrust under totalitarian governments include Margaret Atwood's [The Handmaid's Tale](#), Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," and George Orwell's [1984](#) and [Animal Farm](#). Other books that are written as lipograms (i.e., without using certain letters) include Ernest Vincent Wright's novel *Gadsby*, which is written without any use of the letter "E." Additionally, Christian Bök's *Eunoia*

includes five chapters, each of which is dedicated to one vowel, "A," "E," "I," "O," or "U," and uses words that contain only that vowel. Finally, Dunn has written another language-centric novel, *Ibid*, which is written exclusively in footnotes.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Ella Minnow Pea: A Progressively Lipogrammatic Epistolary Fable*
- **When Written:** 2001
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2001
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Epistolary Novel; Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** The fictional island of Nollop, off the coast of South Carolina
- **Climax:** Ella discovers a pangram consisting of 32 letters, prompting Nollop's High Island Council to rescind their restrictions on language.
- **Antagonist:** High Island Council; totalitarianism
- **Point of View:** First person from various perspectives: the book is written as a series of letters from citizens of Nollop to one another.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Title Change.** The paperback version of *Ella Minnow Pea* has a different subtitle, "A Novel in Letters," which refers both to the letters of the alphabet and to the letters that the citizens of Nollop send to one another.

**A Fitting Review.** A review of *Ella Minnow Pea* by the *Dallas Morning Herald* included the sentence, "This exceptional, zany book will quickly make you laugh," which is itself a pangram (a sentence containing all 26 letters of the alphabet) like one that's central to the story.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*Ella Minnow Pea* lives on the fictional island of Nollop, located off the coast of South Carolina. The island is named after a man named Nevin Nollop, who is credited with the pangram, "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." The citizens of Nollop pride themselves on their extensive vocabulary and their creative use of language.

The story is told through a series of letters to and from different citizens on the island, beginning in July and ending just a few months later in November. When the novel begins,

Ella (who lives in the busy town of Nollopton) writes to her cousin Tassie (who lives in the more rural village of Nollopville) explaining that something odd has happened. There is a statue commemorating Nollop in the center of Nollopton, with each letter of the pangram inscribed on a tile at its base. One day, the tile bearing the letter “Z” falls from the statue. The island’s governing body, the High Island Council, determines that this is a sign from Nollop beyond the grave that citizens should no longer use the letter “Z” in speech or writing. They decree that the first offense will result in an oral reprimand, the second will incur a choice of flogging or headstock, and the third will result in banishment from the island. Ella decides to cautiously obey the decrees for the time being, but Tassie is outraged in Ella’s response, pointing out that already books are being banned from the library. Ella recognizes the problem with not being able to use the letter “Z”: they cannot accurately write about this incident in the history books without using the letter.

Nollopians quickly rack up first and second offenses in the days following the “Z” ban. People become fearful of others as neighbors turn one another in, “perpetuating old grudges and grievances.” One young man, Willy Creevy, is banished after flouting the rules and garnering three offenses. Soon, a second letter falls: “Q,” which is banned quickly thereafter. People begin to stage rebellions, including one family, the Rasmussens, who protest at an open Council meeting by wearing cartoon masks and quacking. The whole family, including two nine-year-old girls, is publicly flogged while the rest of the town watches and does nothing. After this, Ella and her family begin to host underground resistance meetings. Meanwhile, Tassie’s mother, Mittie, who is a math teacher, garners a first offense for saying the word “dozen” in class. One of her students, Timmy, tells his mother, Georgeanne Towgate, who reports Mittie for the violation.

As the weeks wear on, an American scholar named Nate Warren writes to Tassie and Mittie, asking to stay in their home and meet with the Council. He is interested in Nollop and he hopes to write an article about what is happening on the island so that the Council’s tyranny might come under public scrutiny. He also reports that chemists have analyzed the **glue** from the tiles and he explains that the tiles are falling simply because the glue has worn out—not because Nollop is a deity. He asks if they can try to set up a meeting with the Council to display these findings. Tassie and Mittie agree to help him.

When a third tile, “J,” falls, the Council explains that it is basing its actions on the will of Nollop and that any other interpretation will be considered punishable heresy. They write that Nollop was “omniscient” because of his ability to create his 35-letter pangram—a feat like that cannot be replicated or beaten, they declare.

After “J” is banned, “D” falls soon after. Ella laments that they will have a lot of difficulty expressing the past tense without “D” and the Nollopians will thus be deprived of their own historical

record. The Council also sends out a directive, providing alternative names for the days of the week.

Nate arrives in Nollop, and he and Tassie quickly develop a romantic relationship. Mittie resigns from her teaching position, saying it is impossible to communicate without the word “and.” Meanwhile, Ella’s mother, Gwenette, gains two offenses for using the word “diminished” in a letter to Mittie, as the Council reveals that they are now checking letters for illegal words. Additionally, the United States stops trade with Nollop, which is difficult for Ella’s father, Amos, because he exports jugs of moonshine.

Nate and Tassie meet with the Council, reporting the chemists’ findings. Rederick Lyttle, one of the Council members, argues that Nollop is actually working “through the science” and he made the glue from the tiles fail. Nate argues that if they can come up with a shorter pangram than Nollop, the Council will admit that he was not worthy of idolizing and it will rescind the statutes. Lyttle agrees but he says that they only have six weeks to complete the challenge and must come up with a pangram of 32 letters. All Nollopians begin to work on this challenge, which they dub “Enterprise Thirty-Two,” though by this point many people have been banished from the island or they have moved due to the hostile environment. The Council also declares that anyone who has been banished or has left the island will lose their property.

The letters “F” and “B” both fall soon after, and Mittie gains a second offense—again reported by Georgeanne Towgate. The Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B.) also starts to do home searches, looking for illegal letters. A professor named Professor Mannheim comes up with a 44-letter pangram, the shortest they have so far. Additionally, Tassie, starts to send anonymous threats to the Council.

Georgeanne Towgate then writes to Mittie, asking for her help. Children under eight are exempt from the statutes, but the school is saying that her son Timmy turned eight prior to when she believes he will actually turn eight, and therefore Timmy has technically been breaking the statutes. Mittie attempts to help Georgeanne, searching for something that will prove Timmy is still seven, but to no avail. Timmy is banished while Georgeanne remains on Nollop.

Soon after, the government takes Tassie into L.E.B. custody, believing that she wrote the anonymous threats. Amos, Ella’s father, also gains a third offense, and in his farewell letter he asks if Ella and her mother can do a favor for him: “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs?” The same day, the letter “C” falls, and soon after, “V” falls as well.

Nate rescues Tassie from the island’s prison, and both of them escape with Mittie to the U.S. Gwenette gains a third offense and so she is also banished, leaving Ella entirely alone on Nollop. Georgeanne comes to Ella’s door looking for Mittie, wondering if she has moved in with her sister, but Ella greets

her and shares her company. Additionally, Ella meets another woman, Tanya, who is one of the other few remaining people on Nollop, as well as Professor Mannheim and his assistant Tom. Working on Enterprise Thirty-two together and they manage to find a 43-letter pangram.

With 11 days left in the challenge, “U” falls, the first vowel to be banned. The Council then provides a decree that citizens may use letters to substitute others, but only in writing. The letter “X” falls soon after, and while Mannheim and Tom are trying to work on Enterprise Thirty-two, the L.E.B. interrogates them and Mannheim uses an illegal letter during a police interview. He refuses to be exiled to the United States, however, and when he tries to run away he is shot and killed. His young daughter Paula, having no other relatives left on Nollop, is sent to Ella. Tom also goes into hiding following Mannheim’s death, leaving Enterprise Thirty-two entirely to Ella.

Georgeanne becomes more and more lonely with so few people left on the island, and she takes to **painting** her own body. She uses toxic paint to do so however, and she dies of lead poisoning. Tanya also leaves Nollop and takes Paula with her, feeling that Nollop is now a wasteland. Only 14 letters remain, with four days left to complete the Council’s challenge, and “G” has just fallen. Ella stops writing to her family in America, finding it too tiring to try to express herself with so few letters.

With one day left in the challenge, eight tiles fall, leaving only five remaining: L, M, N, O, and P. Ella writes a final letter of rebellion, declaring, “No mo Nollop pomp! No mo Nollop poo poo!” She then discovers the final letter from her father, which ended with the sentence, “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs.” Ella realizes that this sentence is, by chance, a 32-letter pangram. Ella sends this sentence to Lyttle and the statutes are immediately rescinded; all of the Council members except Lyttle resign. Tom is able to come out of hiding and he helps Ella destroy the statue of Nollop. In its place, Ella asks that they erect a sculpture of a large box filled with sixty moonshine jugs: “disorder to match the clutter and chaos of our marvelous language.”

through divine will), Ella is initially complacent, much like the rest of the citizens in the town. But, like Ella’s indignant cousin Tassie with whom she corresponds, Ella gradually recognizes the need to resist the curtailing of freedoms that is occurring on the island—she sees the issues of the government’s harsh punishments and she notes the fear and betrayal that has sprung up among neighbors. Ella and her parents begin to host resistance meetings for members of the town, and Ella also joins in the effort of Enterprise Thirty-two: a challenge to create a pangram shorter than Nollop’s legendary 35-letter one and thereby discredit the Council’s deification of him. Ella outlasts the rest of her family members as they’re exiled to the U.S. and so she bonds with some remaining citizens: Georgeanne Towgate, Professor Mannheim, and Tom. Together, they make progress on Enterprise Thirty-two. However, by the end of the novel, Ella is almost entirely alone on Nollop and she feels hopeless until she finds the final letter that Amos wrote to her before he left. This letter incidentally includes a 32-letter pangram, which forces the Council to recognize that Nollop is not a deity and to rescind its statutes. Ella and Tom subsequently demolish Nollop’s statue, and in its place Ella insists on a statue that will pay tribute to the glory of language, emphasizing the need for freedom of speech in order to have a functioning society.

**Tassie Purcy** – Ella’s cousin and Mittie’s daughter. Ella, who’s from the main city of Nollopton, exchanges letters with Tassie, who lives in the more rural area of Nollopville. When the High Island Council begins banning the use of letters that fall from Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue, Tassie (unlike Ella) immediately recognizes the danger of the Council’s statutes—she predicts the destruction of all of the books and many of the cultural staples in Nollop. Tassie sees through the hypocrisy of the Council: the Council members are claiming to follow Nollop’s wishes, yet Nollopians have always been very proud of their language and Nollop would not have wanted to see it curtailed in any way. Tassie becomes one of the first people to dedicate herself to the resistance effort. She and Mittie host an American scholar named Nate Warren in the hopes that he can help change the Council’s mind about their interpretation of the tiles, and she quickly develops a romantic relationship with him. She and Nate then travel to Nollopton to present Councilman Rederick Lyttle and the rest of the Council with a scientific reason as to why the tiles are falling. Following this meeting, in which the Council refuses to accept their evidence, Tassie contributes diligently to Enterprise Thirty-two, a collaborative project that aims to dismantle the Council’s view of Nollop as a deity by coming up with a pangram shorter than Nollop’s legendary 35-letter sentence. Tassie also begins sending the Council anonymous threats, which leads to her arrest and imprisonment on the island despite the fact that she hasn’t used a banned letter once. Nate ends up rescuing Tassie and the two escape to the United States, leaving only Ella to carry on Enterprise Thirty-two.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Ella Minnow Pea** – The novel’s protagonist. Ella is from the island of Nollop, named after Nevin Nollop, who is credited with creating the 35-letter pangram “the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” Ella lives in the busy city of Nollopton with her mother, Gwenette, and her father, Amos. She is an 18-year-old launderess whose life is relatively simple prior to the High Island Council’s language restrictions. When the Council starts to ban the spoken or written use of letters that are falling from the island’s commemorative statue of Nevin Nollop (which the Council believes Nollop is making happen

**High Island Council** – The governing body on the island of Nollop. The island’s namesake, Nevin Nollop, is revered for coming up with the 35-letter pangram “the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog” and he is commemorated with a statue in the island’s main square. When lettered tiles denoting this sentence begin to fall from the statue, the superstitious High Island Council takes this as a sign from Nollop from beyond the grave that he doesn’t want Nollopians to speak or write words containing those fallen letters. As such, the Council begins to institute statutes banning the use of letters as more and more of them fall off the statue, instituting a totalitarian regime wherein citizens are violently punished or exiled for uttering the banned letters. This not only limits the Nollopians’ free speech—it denigrates their very culture. The citizens’ books and artistic outlets are censored, their communication is stilted, and their relationships are destroyed through the paranoia and betrayal encouraged by the Council’s harsh laws. Although an American scholar named Nate gathers scientific evidence that the letters are falling simply because the **glue** on the tiles has worn away, Councilman Lyttle argues that Nollop is actually making the glue disintegrate through divine will. The Council thus remains steadfast in its beliefs and it begins to deify and worship Nollop. Ultimately, the Nollopians are only able to overthrow the Council through Enterprise Thirty-two, a challenge in which they must come up with a shorter pangram than Nollop’s in order to dismantle the Council’s fundamental belief that Nollop is superior and thus worthy of their deference. It is Ella’s father, Amos, who achieves this feat when he accidentally creates a shorter pangram in a letter to Ella and Gwenette. After this, the Council’s statutes are rescinded and all of its members except for Lyttle resign.

**Nevin Nollop** – The island of Nollop’s namesake, who is credited with creating the pangram “the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” When tiles begin to fall off of Nollop’s commemorative statue in the island’s main square, the island’s governing body (the High Island Council) interprets this as a sign that Nollopians should not use the letters that have fallen. As a result, the Council bans citizens from writing or speaking words that contain these letters and it enforces strict punishments for those who slip up. Gradually, Nollop’s importance and intelligence begins to take on that of a deity in the eyes of the Council, he’s referred to as “omnipotent,” “omniscient,” “Almighty,” and “Supreme.” The Council believes Nollop is superior because no one has been able to come up with a shorter pangram, and this fact is what brings about their faith in him. The Council uses this idea as justification for a lot of corruption as they carry out punishments against those who use banned letters in Nollop’s name, annex people’s property for churches to worship Nollop, and increasingly violate citizens’ freedom of speech. What is actually known about Nollop becomes somewhat complicated by other people: Mittie says that Nollop was actually an imbecile, and by the end of the novel, Councilman Lyttle reveals that Nollop may not have

actually come up with the pangram for which he is credited. All of these facts serve to show how powerful a hold the Council has on the town, since these facts were all available to them and yet they still used his achievement as a justification for their statutes.

**Mittie Purcy** – Tassie’s mother, Ella’s aunt, and Mittie’s sister. Mittie is a second-grade math teacher and she initially finds it very difficult to adapt to the Council’s ban on using any of the letters that fall from Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue. After the letter “Z” is prohibited, Mittie has a first slip-up when she uses the word “dozen” in class, and a student named Timmy tells his parents, Georgeanne and Nash, who then report Mittie to the L.E.B. Mittie gains a second violation, also at the hands of Georgeanne, when Georgeanne witnesses Mittie call a woman named Xenia by her first name—before Mittie realizes that Xenia actually spells her name with a “Z.” Mittie is outraged at Georgeanne’s actions, particularly as she had never done anything to hurt Georgeanne. Mittie becomes depressed and she is forced to resign her teaching post after “D” is banned because she does not know how to teach without the word “and.” Mittie finds some solace in beginning a relationship with Rory Cummels, but that comfort quickly goes away when Rory is banished from the island. However, Mittie proves the importance of solidarity and support among the Nollopians when Georgeanne asks for Mittie’s help in proving that her son Timmy is still seven (and therefore not subject to the Council’s statutes). Despite Georgeanne’s previous betrayals, Mittie agrees to try to help her—though she fails in her efforts. Mittie eventually escapes to the United States with Tassie following Tassie’s arrest and subsequent escape from prison.

**Nate Warren** – A young American scholar at the University of Georgia who publishes *Nollopiana*, an academic journal about the island of Nollop. He is therefore very interested in the violations against citizens’ freedom of speech that are happening on Nollop, which he hears about through the banished Nollopian Willy Creevy. Nate connects with Tassie and Mittie for a visit so that he can write an article about what is happening. He also plans to meet with Lyttle and the rest of the High Island Council to provide findings from some American chemists, which show that the tiles on Nevin Nollop’s statue are falling simply because the **glue** is failing—not because Nollop is sending them a sign from beyond the grave not to write or speak the letters on the tiles, as the Council assumes. However, when Lyttle argues that Nollop is actually using science to send a message, Nate changes his tactic: he understands that his only path to make an argument against the Council’s blind faith in Nollop as a deity is to prove that their faith is baseless, so he and the Nollopians plan to come up with a shorter pangram than Nollop’s famous one (this sentence is what elevates him to deity status in the eyes of the Council). Nate and the Nollopians thus form Enterprise Thirty-two, a challenge to come up with a 32-letter pangram and thus

thwart the Council. Nate and Tassie also begin a romantic relationship while Nate is on the island, and he eventually rescues Tassie from the island prison when she is arrested; the two of them flee to the U.S, leaving only Ella to complete Enterprise Thirty-two.

**Georganne Towgate** – Timmy’s mother and Nash’s wife. Georganne lives in Nollopville (where Tassie and Mittie live) and she is the one who reports Mittie’s first two violations of using banned words. Georganne, like the High Island Council, believes that Nevin Nollop is causing the tiles from his commemorative statue to fall and that he is truly sending them a message from beyond the grave not to use those letters. She therefore feels righteous in reporting Mittie for accidentally uttering them. However, the tables turn when the school asserts that Georganne’s son, Timmy, is not exempt from the statutes because he has turned eight (only children seven or younger are exempt), whereas Georganne believes that Timmy does not turn eight for another month. She begs Mittie to help her find evidence that Timmy is indeed seven, and Mittie does so—though to no avail. Timmy is ultimately exiled to the U.S. and Nash goes with him, leaving Georganne alone in Nollopville. Georganne realizes the error of her ways as she feels more and more isolated on Nollop and she understands the consequences of her betrayal. Georganne then travels to Nollopton and befriends Ella and Tanya in an attempt to remedy that isolation. She also tries to find some solace in **painting** and she gradually starts to paint her own body, leading to her death by lead poisoning. Thus, Dunn uses Georganne’s tragic fate to demonstrate how the Nollopians need one another to survive, even though the Council encourages them to betray one another.

**Rederick Lyttle** – One of the five members of the High Island Council, the island of Nollop’s governing body. When lettered tiles begin to fall from the commemorative statue of Nevin Nollop (the island’s namesake), the Council bans the written or spoken use of these letters because they believe Nollop is sending them a message from beyond the grave. Tassie and Ella both agree that Lyttle is the sanest of the five, though initially he, too, carries out these absurd acts. When Nate and Tassie try to approach Lyttle with their scientific evidence about why the tiles are falling, he argues that Nollop may actually be using the science to send a message, thus rendering their argument invalid. However, by the end of the book, Lyttle sees the madness being wrought upon the island and he even tries to aid the effort of Enterprise Thirty-two. He is unable to stop the Council’s actions entirely, however, thus demonstrating how completely totalitarianism takes hold over the island such that even resistance by a member of the governing body has little effect after so much initial complacency.

**Amos Minnow Pea** – Ella’s father and Gwenette’s husband. Amos is a carpenter, and at the outset of the novel, he begins to sell moonshine jugs. Amos quickly gains two violations after the

High Island Council begins banning the use of any letters on the tiles that fall from Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue. Amos’s second violation occurs when he slips up during a game of poker by saying “Jack” after “J” is banned, and a friend tries to extort him for money in exchange for not reporting him, which Amos refuses. Amos tries to help in Enterprise Thirty-two, an effort to disprove the Council’s reverence for Nollop by creating a pangram shorter than Nollop’s legendary 35-letter one, but Amos is expelled from the island shortly after. In his farewell letter, he asks Ella and Gwenette, “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs?” which happens to be a 32-letter pangram. It is this sentence that Ella later finds and which forces the Council to rescind its statutes and return the island of Nollop to its former glory.

**Gwenette Minnow Pea** – Ella’s mother and Amos’s wife. When the High Island Council begins banning the use of any letters on the tiles that fall from Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue, Gwenette is initially able to avoid using receiving offenses, unlike her sister Mittie. Gwenette is supportive of Ella and Amos and she joins in their efforts to set up resistance meetings with other citizens. Gwenette’s first problems arise when she intentionally uses the word “diminished” after the letter “D” has been banned and she receives two offenses immediately. Gwenette is later expelled from the island when L.E.B. officers come to interrogate her at the Minnow Peas’ home and she slips up and uses an illegal letter.

**Tom** – Professor Mannheim’s assistant and a key figure in pursuing Enterprise Thirty-Two. He and the Professor are the only ones remaining from the university to aid in the efforts to come up with a shorter pangram than Nevin Nollop’s and thus thwart the High Island Council’s deification of Nollop. Tom befriends Ella when there are very few people left in Nollop, and they quickly strike up a romantic relationship until Tom is forced to go into hiding following Mannheim’s death at the hands of the L.E.B. At the end of the novel, once the Council’s statutes have been rescinded, Tom helps Ella demolish the statue of Nollop.

**Professor Mannheim** – A university professor who lives in Nollopton. He becomes a key figure in pursuing Enterprise Thirty-Two and he is able to come up with a 37-letter pangram. However, when he and his assistant, Tom, try to break into the university one day, they are interrogated by the L.E.B. and Mannheim lets an illegal letter slip. He refuses to be evicted from the island, and when he tries to run away, the police shoot and kill him. Mannheim’s daughter Paula is then sent to live with Ella, as she has no other relatives on the island.

**Rory Cummels** – A market owner in Nollopville whose wife and daughters leave him to go to the United States. He then becomes romantically involved with Mittie and he helps with Enterprise Thirty-two. Eventually, however, the Council comes to his home, confiscates his property, and exiles him to the United States. Rory instructs Mittie to look after his store,

provided the Council doesn't decide to use it as yet another church for worshipping Nollop.

**Agnes** – Mittie's friend who has a difficult time with the Council's ban on writing or speaking any letters that fall from Nevin Nollop's statue. Agnes confesses to Mittie that all she can do is bake, because when she bakes she does not have to speak. Gradually, however, the bans take up so much mental energy that Agnes stops baking and she considers not speaking so that she can remain on the island. Unfortunately, this is foiled by the fact that she incurs a third offense in a letter that she writes to Mittie, and she is sent to the United States.

**Tanya** – Another woman living in Nolloptown whom Ella befriends after all her family members have left Nollop. Ella's friendship with Tanya illustrates her need to connect with others in order to fight or staunch the oppression she feels from the Council. By the book's final chapters, however, Tanya also leaves for the United States along with Paula, calling Nollop a "wasteland."

**Timmy Towgate** – A student in Mittie's second-grade class, and Georgeanne and Nash's son. Timmy tells his parents about Mittie's accidental use of the word "dozen" after the High Island Council bans the use of the letter "Z", and his parents subsequently report Mittie. Later, however, the school finds that Timmy turned eight earlier than his parents believed and he was therefore subject to the statutes banning the use of various letters (only children seven and under are exempt). Timmy is subsequently banished to the U.S. when Mittie cannot find anything in the school to prove that he is still seven.

**Nash Towgate** – Georgeanne's husband and Timmy's father. When Tassie reaches out to the Towgates as to why they reported her mother, Mittie, for using banned letters, Nash writes back harshly. He asserts that they intended no malice toward Mittie, they simply believe Nollop is speaking from beyond the grave and that they should follow his directives. When Timmy is eventually banished to the U.S. for using banned letters as well, Nash goes with his son, leaving Georgeanne alone on Nollop.

**Harton Mangrove** – One of the High Island Council's five members. Harton is shown to be particularly corrupt, as he usurps the estate of a Nollopian whose family has been banished. At the end of the novel, when Ella is able to find the 32-letter pangram and the Council's statutes are rescinded, Mangrove resigns and he subsequently attempts suicide.

**Willy Creevy** – A young man who lives in Nollopville and who quickly gains two offenses after the Council's statutes banning the use of different letters begin. Tassie describes Willy as a "riotous, rule-flouting young man," and she admires his lack of regard for the Council's laws. After Willy is flogged as punishment for using banned letters, he immediately curses at the Council using illegal letters and he becomes the first person banished from Nollop. Willy then meets Nate in the United

States and he directs Nate to contact Tassie and Mittie.

**Mr. Kleeman** – The editor of the *Island Tribune*, the island of Nollop's only newspaper. Mr. Kleeman quickly gains two offenses after the High Island Council bans the use of the letter "Z", and Kleeman decides to run a story in the newspaper entitled "The Bees' Lament" in protest which contains several thousand uses of "Z." Ella admires the act of protest but she also calls it a cowardly action because it results in the paper being shut down and it thus leaves the citizens without any kind of news source. This emphasizes the need for large-scale resistance against the Council instead of one-off symbolic acts of rebellion.

**Charles Rasmussen** – The head of the Rasmussen family, whose members stage a demonstration during a Council meeting by wearing cartoon duck masks and quacking after the letter "Q" is banned. Charles and his entire family are then publicly flogged—a haunting visual for the citizens, particularly due to the fact that this includes two nine-year-old girls. The Rasmussens subsequently leave Nollop, seeing that no one else stands up in protest of their abuse.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Paula Mannheim** – Professor Mannheim's daughter, who becomes an orphan following his death and who stays with Ella for a time because there are no other relatives for her to live with on Nollop. Paula then leaves for the United States with Tanya.

**Marigold Shropshire** – One of the last remaining people on Nollop, who becomes a foster parent to the many children left behind. After Mannheim dies, Marigold sends Paula to live with Ella because she cannot take care of any more children.

**Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B.)** The police corps on Nollop that enforces the High Island Council's increasingly strict statutes. Over the course of the novel, the L.E.B. becomes more and more corrupt and oppressive toward the island's citizens, ultimately shooting and killing Professor Mannheim for attempting to evade exile.

## TERMS

**Pangram** – A sentence that uses all 26 letters of the English language. In *Ella Minnow Pea*, **Nevin Nollop** is credited with thinking up the 35-letter pangram "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog," a feat that leads to an island, Nollop, being named after him. The island's governing body, the **High Island Council**, believes that Nevin Nollop's ability to make this pangram means he's a deity, and so the citizens of Nollop are challenged with having to create a 32-letter pangram if they want to disprove the Council's religious beliefs.

**Enterprise Thirty-Two** – The challenge that the **High Island**

**Council** sets for Nollop's citizens to prove that **Nevin Nollop** was not a supreme being. They must create a pangram of 32-letters or fewer in order to refute the Council's beliefs.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### TOTALITARIANISM, COMPLACENCY, AND RESISTANCE

*Ella Minnow Pea* takes place on Nollop, a fictional island off the coast of South Carolina. The island is named after Nevin Nollop, the creator of the famous pangram (a sentence containing every letter of the alphabet), "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." A statue in the island's main square commemorates Nollop's achievement, with each letter of the pangram inscribed upon a tile at the statue's base. When tiles of certain letters begin fall off of the statue, the governing body of the island (called the High Island Council) interprets this event as a sign from the late Nollop and they declare that each fallen letter will be outlawed in writing and in speech. With each successive tile, the Council's statutes become more oppressive, and the punishments more severe. The story thus becomes an allegory for the gradual rise of totalitarian regimes. At first, it is easy for the citizens of Nollop to adapt to these laws and they don't protest very much. But as more and more tiles fall off the statue, communication becomes nearly impossible. Thus, Dunn argues that complacency in the face of unfair laws allows for the rise of totalitarian regimes like that of the Council—and that accepting such regimes enables a gradual erosion of freedoms that later becomes much more difficult to resist.

Ella Minnow Pea, the story's protagonist and a resident of the island's main city of Nollopton, writes to her cousin Tassie (who lives in the more rural town of Nollopville) about the government's actions. However, in Ella's many letters, she also hints at the way she and others enable the government through complacency. When the first tile, "Z," falls, the Council concludes that there may be some kind of divine intent behind its falling. This surprises Ella—she and other citizens thought that the glue holding the tiles might just have given out. She writes, however, that she and others "have kept [their] public speculation to a minimum for fear of government reprisal, so charged with distrust and suspicion have the esteemed island elders (and elderess) become following last year's unfortunate visit by that predatory armada of land speculators from the States." Ella believes that accepting what the Council says is the

right thing to do in order to avoid punishment, but this complacency imbues the Council with even more power—which ultimately leads to harsher punishment. This punishment is swift: after "Z" falls, the Council proclaims that anyone who speaks or writes a word containing the letter "Z" will incur punishment for each offense. For the first offense, one will receive a "public oral reprimand." The second will result in a choice of "body flogging" or being subjected to a headstock. The third will result in banishment from the island—or, if one refuses to leave, death. Ella is shocked by these edicts, but she allows for the possibility that it may actually be Nollop's will that they find creative ways to avoid the letter "Z," and writes that she will give the edicts "the benefit of cautious initial fealty." This fealty, which the town gives as a whole, enables the Council to continue enacting ever-increasing punishments as more letters fall. This illustrates again the danger of complacency: even though a single letter is easy to avoid, it becomes much more difficult when only 18, 13, or 5 letters remain and the laws have been sanctioned by the citizens.

The citizens' attempts at resistance are also quickly fettered out or disregarded as isolated incidents, emphasizing how when the majority of a society is complacent, it is difficult for resistance to take hold. By the time that most of the island has been banished, it is too late for any large-scale protest to take place, and people are too afraid to even try. Because the citizens view the Council's first edict as a creative challenge, many try to follow it—though some quickly receive their first violations. One young man, William Creevy (described as "riotous" and "rule-flouting"), explicitly refuses to follow it and he quickly gains two offenses. Ella admits that while she shares William's "contempt for the island authorities, [she does] not at present own his dangerous desire for insurrection." Thus, the fear of punishment prevents them from acting up, which only enables more people to fall victim to the same fate. There are other attempts at protest: Mr. Kleeman, the editor of a local paper, prints an article that contains 5,000 uses of the letter "Z." Ella, however, notes that this is a "cowardly exit," because the newspaper is shut down afterward, leaving a huge communication gap among the townspeople. Thus, not only is resistance necessary, but it is necessary in a way that aids the people who remain in the town—a symbolic gesture like Mr. Kleeman's only hurts them in the long run. The same is true of an entire family who, after "Q" is banned, marches into an open session of the Council wearing cartoon duck masks and making quacking sounds, whereupon they are immediately whipped. Again, while this is well-intentioned, small-scale resistance is nearly as ineffectual as complacency.

As the Council's tyranny continues, Ella describes the horrors of watching friends and neighbors receive punishments: Ella's cousin Tassie is imprisoned; Ella's father, Amos, and mother, Gwenette, are exiled; and a friend named Mannheim is shot and killed. The majority of the citizens are exiled from Nollop as a

result of their complacency in the book's first chapters, yet Ella remains on the island to resist the Council. When only half of the letters survive, she writes, "I will learn to tawg in noomerals. I will learn sign language—anee-ting to stae in Nollop." Ella will take drastic measures to communicate and thus restore the island to what it used to be. But the fact that Ella is alone—most other Nollopians have been exiled and society has all but collapsed—shows the dire consequences of the initial complacency that she and others displayed, and the need for widespread resistance to overthrow totalitarianism.



## FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Limitation of the freedom of speech is central to *Ella Minnow Pea's* plot. On the island of Nollop, a statue in the main square commemorates the

island's namesake, Nevin Nollop, with each letter of the pangram (a sentence that uses every letter of the alphabet), "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" inscribed on tiles. When tiles of certain letters begin fall off of the statue, the governing body of Nollop (called the High Island Council) interprets this event as a sign from the late Nollop and it declares that each fallen letter will be outlawed in writing and in speech. At first, the limitations on language are surmountable obstacles for the citizens of Nollop. This is, in part, because the first three tiles to fall—"Z," "Q," and "J"—are relatively uncommon in English words. Yet as each successive tile falls, avoiding illegal words becomes more and more difficult and citizens are more and more in danger of breaking the Council's statutes. Avoiding the banned letters leads to other fundamental shifts in how the Nollopians communicate and in and their society as a whole. With these changes, Dunn illustrates why freedom of speech is a necessary human right: language is a fundamental means of communication, an integral facet of culture, and perhaps the most important **glue** that holds modern society together.

Language is vital to Nollop's collective identity, as the citizens take pride in their intellect and their creative uses of language. But as more and more letters are banned, the literal devolution of language becomes an illustration of how society itself is collapsing with its language. Ella's cousin Tassie writes to Ella about her fear of the statutes, given the fact that language is so integral to the island's identity: "[Nollopians] are a well-educated, well-versed, and well-spoken people whom Mr. Nollop has taught to elevate language to a certain preeminence unmatched by our vocabu-lazy American neighbors across the sound." Language is a point of pride and a way of distinguishing them from other societies, and Tassie illustrates how their language usage is unique by inventing a word to describe them. By establishing the unique way in which Nollopians use words, the language's eventual deterioration becomes even more stark.

Soon, the loss of several letters causes a noticeable

degradation in language. When "D" falls, the characters must use replacements for the days of the week, and find a way to accommodate past tense without the form "-ed." They also start to make up words as substitutions or they use archaic language. When "C" falls, they use "learny-house" instead of "school"; when "U" falls, they use "thee" instead of "you." All of these alterations gradually add up, as readers can visibly see the degradation of language in sentences like, "This is, permit me to relate, why it was important that she exit thy hamlet so hastily." Even by the time the fourth letter, "D," falls, the citizens recognize how difficult it is to follow the Council's statutes. Ella's mother, Gwenette, describes this phenomenon: "All over town people hesitate, stammer, fumble for ways to express themselves, gripgrasping about for linguistic concoctions to serve the simplest of purposes." Thus, losing letters robs the citizens of a fundamental means of communication. Ella's aunt Mittie, a math teacher, feels helpless without the use of the word "and." She says, "I cannot teach. Without that grammatical unifier. It is impossible. I plan to resign tomorrow." Others similarly stop communicating entirely, finding it too exhausting. Thus, limitations on the freedom of speech ultimately prevent people from performing the crucial roles upon which society is built—or from engaging with others entirely. By the end of the novel, only five letters remain (L, M, N, O, and P), and Ella can hardly even express her horror at what has happened. In a final letter of protest to the Council, she writes, "No mo Nollop pomp! No mo Nollop poo poo! No mo 4 pop/1 moll Nollop looloo poop" This barely intelligible message shows the true cost of losing one's fundamental rights: the citizens are left unable to freely express themselves through language or be understood by other people. Without the freedom of speech, people become isolated and society inevitably collapses due to a lack of communication.

Dunn also explores the cultural, artistic, and historical ramifications of citizens losing their freedom of speech. When the first letter, "Z," falls, the library in Nollop shuts down because every book has the letter printed within it. The same thing happens with the radio stations: they begin to play only music without words, due to the fear that a song lyric will contain the illicit letter. Thus, mainstays of society start to collapse alongside the collapse of language. Additionally, the loss of free speech means reports of the island's history are called into question, showing how limitations of language can effectively erase a society's past as well as threaten its future. When "Z" falls, Ella notes the problem of trying to describe what has happened in future history books. She explains to Tassie that they "cannot even write of its history. Because to write *of it*, is to *write* it. And as of midnight, it becomes ineffable." The society's past has become indescribable, and without a historical record, the letters (and the freedoms) that once existed will inevitably be forgotten. This becomes true in a broader sense when "D" falls. Ella writes once more to Tassie, saying that "In taking 'ed' away (Goodbye, Ed!), the most useful



tool to express the past tense in the English language, [they] are being robbed of great chunks of [their] very history." Not being able to communicate the past suggests that that past will soon be lost.

The Nollopians' loss of free speech makes it clear that language is crucial to the individual expression and communication that form the bedrock of a free society. When the freedom of speech is taken away, society itself collapses.



### BETRAYAL VS. SOLIDARITY

On the island of Nollop, the High Island Council bans the use of any letters inscribed on the tiles that fall from the commemorative statue of Nevin Nollop (the island's namesake). The Council forbids citizens to speak or write words containing these letters, using statutes that are enforced by the L.E.B.—but also by the citizens themselves. As a result, the Nollopians are constantly on alert, afraid of each other and of being reported, showing how the regime infiltrates people's relationships with one another. In a totalitarian state, in which citizens are expected to hold each other accountable for unjust laws, these regimes empower people to betray one another, in the hopes that they can outlast their neighbors and avoid being caught. However, as the story wears on, living under the island's regime becomes harder and fewer people remain in Nollop. Dunn thus illustrates how solidarity actually becomes more important than this eat-or-be-eaten mentality when living in an oppressive state, as citizens ultimately need each other to survive.

When the Council's statutes are first passed, citizens describe how fear and betrayal become ingrained in Nollop's social fabric because the Council empowers people to hold each other accountable for mistakes. Only three days after the letter "Z" is banned, Ella describes how 58 people were charged with a first offence. She writes to her cousin Tassie, "All were speakers of banned words—words overheard upon the lanes, in schoolyards and church pews, and on the common greens. Neighbor turning in neighbor, perpetuating old grudges and grievances with this new weapon unleashed upon us by the High Island Council." Her description implies how fear and oppression can bring out the worst in people and lead them to betray one another. Tassie confirms the vigilant surveillance and constant fear of being turned in among the people of Nollop. She admits that she's occasionally slipped in using banned letters but that she is "lucky in that when such a misspoken took place, there were no ears pressing themselves against the portals or fenesters to overhear." Nollopians actively look to report one another, perhaps in the hope of not being reported themselves—betrayal becomes a measure of security for them. Amos, Ella's father, falls victim to these types of betrayals. He uses an illicit letter during a poker game, and a friend named Morton with whom he's playing (who owes Amos a significant amount money) says he won't report it if Amos

clears the financial obligation. Amos refuses to go along with this, so Morton turns him in for a second offense. Amos recognizes the toxic distortion of what it means to be a neighbor and how the desperation that comes with living under an oppressive regime can potentially destroy old relationships.

Yet as the story goes on, characters gradually recognize the importance of love, neighborly bonds, and solidarity amid this fear and mistrust. Georgeanne Towgate is a woman who lives in Nollopville, where Tassie and her mother Mittie live. Georgeanne reports Mittie twice for violations—once because she uses the word "dozen" while teaching math to Georgeanne's son Timmy. But by the time eight letters have been outlawed, and Timmy himself is taken away upon his third violation, Georgeanne apologizes to Mittie. She writes, "I'm so sorry that I was to learn what is truly important in our lives too, too late," and she offers to go with Mittie to Nollopton if she is thinking of moving. There are more people in the city, and making connections with others becomes increasingly important as fewer and fewer people are left on the island. Like Georgeanne, Ella is left quite alone in the village after many of her family members are forced to flee Nollop for the United States. When Ella sees a woman she does not know on the street, she writes a note and leaves it on her door: "We who are still here will help one another. I want to meet you. See me tonight? I use to possess relations—my mother, my papa, my Aunt Mittie, her she-heir Tassie. Gone now. All those near to me, gone." The woman, Tanya, is eager to receive Ella's letter and responds immediately. She, too, emphasizes the need for kindness and human connection. She says that Wally (the owner of the store where Ella saw Tanya) is a humane man. She says, "He is helping us in this trying time. We must all help one another." Despite the trying times and betrayal they've both witnessed, Ella and the Tanya understand the importance of forming bonds and helping one another through difficult times in order to survive. By the end of the story, there are so few people left in Nollop that Ella becomes a foster mother to a young girl named Paula because, as she explains, "Apparently, there are no other relatiphs 4 her to go to. It is a strange worlt we resite in, is it not? I am mate a phoster mother at eighteen! I will try to giph her a goot home. Poor little raggamophin!" Ella understands the importance of being kind and providing support to a girl who has nowhere else to go. Although fear is still prevalent among the remaining citizens, they recognize that they must fight against the betrayals that they and others have perpetrated, and instead honor their intrinsic human need to connect with and support one another.



### BLIND FAITH, REASON, AND LOGIC

The Council that oversees the island of Nollop determines that the island's namesake, Nevin Nollop, is somehow intervening from beyond the grave and causing tiles from his commemorative statue to fall.

The Council interprets this supposed divine intervention to mean that Nollopian citizens should no longer use the letters on the tiles that fall. As others try to argue for more logical reasons as to why the tiles are falling—and therefore why the letters should not be banned from the island—the Council refuses to hear this logic and simply continues to deify Nollop. Ella and the other citizens of Nollop are fed up with the Council's limitations on language, however, and they are ultimately able to make the Council see the error of their ways by disproving the basis of their faith: that only Nollop was supreme and almighty enough to create a 35-letter pangram (a sentence that uses every letter of the alphabet). When Ella's father, Amos, accidentally creates a pangram using only 32 letters, then, the Council acknowledges the baselessness of their faith and they rescind their edicts. Thus, Dunn suggests that in order to make a logical argument in the face of blind faith, one must dismantle the fundamentals of the belief system from the ground up rather than trying to refute its individual claims.

When the tiles begin to fall, the Council immediately assesses that this is the divine will of Nevin Nollop. However, Ella and the other citizens recognize that the Council is acting on blind faith rather than logic. Ella writes to her cousin Tassie about the first tile's fall and about what the Council decides to do: "Most Senior Council Member Willingham and his four fellow counciliteurs left themselves scant room for the possibility that the tile fell simply because, after one hundred years, whatever **fixant** had been holding it in place, could simply no longer perform its function. This explanation seemed quite the logical one to me." Thus, Ella establishes that the Council is a body which opposes logic, as they instead view this rather unremarkable occurrence as a purposeful "manifestation of Mr. Nollop's wishes" from beyond the grave. They have little evidence for this supposition, instead relying on faith for their assessment. The Council's faith is further emphasized in a later chapter, after three tiles have fallen. They call Nollop the "Almighty" and they provide 10 pronouncements as an explanation for banning the use of the letters. These include: "His will be done," "There is no room for alternative interpretation," "Interpretation of events in any other way represents heresy," and "Heretics will be punished." This religious language emphasizes the faith-based nature of these edicts and the fact that the Council is simply viewing the events as Nevin Nollop's will. Because of this, members of the Council are unreceptive to logic, as they emphasize that any other interpretations will be denied and punished. The irony of their actions is that during Nevin Nollop's life, he taught the citizens of the island to revere language and extend its boundaries—now, despite claiming to worship Nollop, the Council limits and degrades the very language he loved. Thus, the Council establishes itself as an inherently illogical entity. Ella and others, particularly a visiting American man named

Nate Warren, at first try to fight the Council's edicts with logic: they attempt to prove that the falling letters are not an act of divine will, but instead that the glue holding them on the statue simply gave out. Still, the Council refuses to hear this logic, and the situation becomes an allegory for religious fanaticism and a refusal to listen to scientific fact. Nate has chemists analyze the tiles and the glue, and these scientists find that the glue had "calcified to the point of ineffectual granule and powder." Nate takes the report to the Council in hopes of reasoning with them that there is a scientific basis for what's happening. Tassie writes to Ella that their findings "prove beyond doubt and wanton denial that the tiles are falling for the simple reason that they can no longer hold themselves to the bandiford. It is as elementary as that. Nollop is not God." Ella, too, argues that logic should be placed above the Council's faith. The Council, however, circumvents this logic. When Nate presents the findings, one of the Council members, Rederick Lyttle, says, "You've given me the scientific reason for why the tiles are falling, Mr. Warren. But might not Nollop be working *through* the science? Have you ever thought of this? The science, in point of fact, actually serving his specific purposes." Rederick asserts that the science is helping Nollop, rather than the science being entirely outside Nollop's control. They argue that Nate's scientific explanation actually proves their own theory, again ignoring logic and superimposing faith onto fact. Thus, the Council's faith can be used to make any argument—and even to explain away facts that disprove their beliefs.

Since the Council refuses to acknowledge logical explanations about what's making the tiles fall, the only way of refuting them is to disprove the root of their faith rather than their individual claims. The Council tells its citizens that Nollop's famous 35-letter pangram ("the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog") makes him "Omnipotent. Omniscient. Omniglorious" and that coming up with a shorter pangram "simply cannot be done," which is what justifies them in limiting the letters the citizens are free to use. They state that if any citizen can come up with a pangram of 32 letters (five fewer than Nollop's) in six weeks' time, the bans will be lifted. Their faith provides them with their own sense of reasoning: that Nollop is worthy of worship because his accomplishments are not attainable by anyone else. Ella and the other citizens thus immediately get to work on what they dub "Enterprise Thirty-two" to try and find a 32-letter pangram and thus disprove the Council. In a farewell letter to Ella, Amos unknowingly pens such a sentence: "pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs." With this shorter pangram, they demonstrate that anyone can achieve what he achieved, and only then does the Council agree that their faith in Nollop is baseless. Ella only recognizes the sentence as a pangram in the final hours before the Council's deadline. In her letter to the Council, she acknowledges that the accidental nature of the sentence's creation proves that "it is not a miracle." Ella and the other citizens thus demonstrate that while the Council thought their stance was impervious to logic, they were ultimately

thwarted by their own terms and the baselessness of their faith. As such, the novel makes the case that in order to disprove a person or entity operating on blind faith, one must fundamentally deconstruct the belief system in question.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### GLUE

The glue that holds the tiles to Nevin Nollop's commemorative statue represents the tendency for blind faith to obscure logic and reason. When the tiles begin to fall off of the statue of Nollop, Nate uses analyses from American chemists to show that the tiles are falling solely because the glue is failing. However, the High Island Council ignores this scientific evidence, arguing that Nollop is somehow causing the glue to fail as a sign from beyond the grave. This allows the Council to subsume scientific fact into their own faith-based arguments that Nollop is a supreme deity. In this way, the dissolved glue represents how religion can allow individuals and entities to deny the truth—even proven scientific phenomena. Additionally, the glue's dissolution parallels how society itself is slowly dissolving, relying less on facts with each new tile that falls and instead increasingly falling under the influence of the Council and their deification of Nollop.



### PAINT

Paint represents the destructive forces of isolation and betrayal. When the High Island Council first sets out its edicts banning the written or spoken use of letters that fall from Nevin Nollop's commemorative statue, Georgeanne does not hesitate to report another woman, Mittie, for two violations. Rather than finding solidarity with neighbors as the Council's regime grows more oppressive, Georgeanne takes solace in painting—an activity that does not require talking and can be done alone. But ultimately, when few people are left in Nollopville, Georgeanne recognizes the consequences of what she has done. She finds any paint she can and starts to paint her own body in her depression, which ultimately leads her to die of lead poisoning. Thus, the physical destruction caused by the lethal paint represents the emotional destruction caused by isolation and betrayal—not on upon others, but on oneself.


Anchor edition of *Ella Minnow Pea* published in 2002.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ In so doing Most Senior Council Member Willingham and his four fellow counciliteurs left themselves scant room for the possibility that the tile fell simply because, after one hundred years, whatever fixant had been holding it in place, could simply no longer perform its function. This explanation seemed quite the logical one to me, as well as to my fellow laundresses.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Nevin Nollop

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 4

### Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Dunn establishes that the island of Nollop, where the story is set, is named for Nevin Nollop, who is credited with creating the pangram (a sentence that contains all 26 letters of the alphabet) “the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” In the town's center, there is a statue to Nollop with tiles containing the letters of the pangram. When the letter “Z” falls off of the statue, the island's government interprets this as a sign from Nollop from beyond the grave that they should no longer use the letter “Z.”

But as Ella describes here, she believes that the glue holding the tile in place simply failed. Ella's declaration immediately places the Council's superstitious beliefs in opposition to the logical reasoning that she and the other laundresses display. As becomes apparent in the ensuing chapters, the Council's faith in the idea that Nollop is somehow speaking to them supernaturally makes them blind to the more reasoned ideas of the other citizens. This faith, as Ella and the other people in opposition to the Council discover, cannot be reasoned with—instead, they must disprove the Council's faith in its entirety.



☞ I have, in scanning the text of my epistle to you thus far, discovered only three merest of uses: in the words “gaze,” “immortalized,” and “snooze.” Would you have lost my meaning should I have chosen to make the substitutions, “looked,” “posteritified,” and “sleep”?



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Tassie Purcy

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 7

### Explanation and Analysis


In Ella's first letter to her cousin Tassie, she writes about the Council's determination to excise "Z" from the Nollopians' vocabulary and the increasingly harsh punishments that will be meted out to the citizens who use the illegal letter. Ella realizes that she hasn't used many instances of the letter "Z" in her correspondence, a fact she uses to justify the initial fealty that she displays for the Council. Yet this willingness to comply with the statutes ultimately proves to be a mistake: even though "Z" seems at the outset to be an uncommon and therefore relatively unimportant letter, it paves the way for later key letters to disappear, making it almost impossible to speak or write. In essence, agreeing to forfeit even one letter of the English language matters a great deal in principle, since it signals that citizens are willing to compromise on their freedom of speech. Ella's initial acceptance of the Council's limitation of the Nollopians' freedom of speech, no matter how small, is therefore a harmful act of complacency that thwarts acts of rebellion when they ultimately become necessary.

☛ The books have all disappeared. You were right about the books.

We will have to write new ones now. But what will we say? Without the whizz that waz.

For we cannot even write of its history. Because to write of it, is to write it. And as of midnight, it becomes ineffable.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Tassie Purcy

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

Just before the High Island Council bans the use of the letter "Z" on the island of Nollop, Ella relays to her cousin Tassie that, as Tassie predicted, all the books containing "Z" (which is to say, all of the books on the island) have been banned. This is the first significant example Dunn provides of how freedom of speech serves as the foundation for a free and functioning society: without that freedom of

speech, even when only a single letter is limited, integral parts of culture and society—like literature—begin to disappear.

The banned books represent not only culture, but also the society's historical record. Without the ability to use the letter "Z," any past that Nollop had prior to the statutes, as Ella realizes, essentially ceases to exist because it cannot be recorded and passed down to future generations. Thus, limitations on the freedom of speech lead to the deterioration of many other staples of society.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☛ Today *The Tribune* published the names of fifty-eight of the sixty men, women, and children charged this week with first offense. (Two names were unpublishable due to the presence of a particular letter within.) All were speakers of banned words—words overheard upon the lanes, in schoolyards and church pews, and on the common greens. Neighbor turning in neighbor, perpetuating old grudges and grievances with this new weapon unleashed upon us by the High Island Council.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B.), High Island Council, Georgeanne Towgate, Mittie Purcy, Tassie Purcy

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 21


### Explanation and Analysis

After the High Island Council bans the use of the letter "Z," Ella notes how citizens quickly rack up offenses for illegally using the letter. But they are not only being policed by the L.E.B., the island's law enforcement— instead, they are being policed and betrayed by neighbors and fellow Nollopians. With this, Dunn explores how totalitarian states enable people to betray one another as the laws play on the fears and anxieties of citizens. Although the Council is the one mandating the statutes banning various letters and the L.E.B. enforces these laws, fellow citizens pose the greatest threat to one another as they tattle on others for fear of being targeted and punished themselves. This becomes true of Mittie and Georgeanne's interactions, where Mittie becomes confused and ultimately devastated by Georgeanne's continual reporting of her slip-ups. Yet Georgeanne ultimately realizes the error of her ways, tries to make amends with Mittie, and ultimately needs human connection in order to survive. As such, Dunn emphasizes how betrayal ultimately hurts the betrayer in the long run,

and solidarity is more important than self-interest.

☛ While we still receive the weak signal of the limited island radio broadcasts, music is almost all that is sent up to us these days. Music without words. The station management, I assume, does not wish to examine song lyrics for words containing the outlawed letter. Besides making us all fearful, this edict has turned some among us into shameful indolents.

**Related Characters:** Tassie Purcy (speaker), High Island Council

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 27-28


### Explanation and Analysis

Nollop's High Island Council bans the written or spoken use of the letter "Z," which means that all of the island's books are removed. Additionally, once the statute goes into effect, music is largely taken away as well because—as Tassie notes, the station manager does not want to scan lyrics for the letter "Z" and so only music without lyrics is played on the radio. Thus, another bastion of Nollopian culture disappears.

Freedom of speech, therefore, is essential to many other kinds of freedom of expression and the cultural wellbeing of any society, because so many ways in which people communicate or create art is based upon words. Dunn thus, once again, emphasizes how freedom of speech is integral to the formation of any advanced society. And Tassie's final statement illustrates how the edicts not only make people fearful, but ultimately less mentally stimulated as the government eradicates anything that could possibly have an illicit letter. The society is therefore less rich in art and its citizens also become discouraged and passive. As such, Dunn demonstrates how limitations on the freedom of speech make communication less nuanced due to the diminished number of words and forms of media with which people can express themselves.

☛ I do respect Mr. Kleeman for his protest, yet am disappointed by the cowardly exit. He has left this town with a yawning communicational chasm—a great lacuna which I see no one stepping forward to fill.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Mr. Kleeman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 30

### Explanation and Analysis

After the High Island Council bans the use of the letter "Z," Mr. Kleeman, the editor of the Nollop's only newspaper, quickly receives two offenses for using the forbidden letter. Knowing a third is imminent, in a final act of protest Kleeman publishes a story called "The Bees' Lament" which uses the letter "Z" several thousand times. Ella recognizes the fact that while Mr. Kleeman's act of resistance is admirable, it results in him being exiled from the island. Kleeman's absence means that the *Tribune* no longer exists, which makes the gesture largely symbolic and ultimately more harmful for the citizens who now lack a news source. Ella's criticism of Mr. Kleeman's act highlights Dunn's argument that isolated acts of resistance are largely futile—large-scale resistance is necessary to fight totalitarianism. Additionally, like the books and the music, the newspaper is another staple of Nollop's culture that falls victim to a lack of freedom of speech. Without it, society is once again reversing its course and becoming less and less sophisticated with each letter that falls.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ And so Mum and Pop and I stood and watched the harrowing and loathsome sight of children being ritually beaten, and the commensurately disturbing picture of frightened onlookers—"the town baa-baas," as Pop has taken to calling our dear neighbors—doing what they do oh so very well, and that is: absolutely nothing.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Charles Rasmussen, Gwenette Minnow Pea, Amos Minnow Pea

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 49

### Explanation and Analysis


After the letter "Q" is banned in Nollop, the Rasmussen family stages a protest in an open High Island Council meeting by wearing cartoon duck masks and quacking. All members of the family, including two nine year old girls, are then publicly flogged for using the forbidden letter. Ella describes her family and the rest of the town watching this horrific act yet doing nothing to stop it. Dunn uses this

incident as yet another example of how isolated acts of resistance are often futile in the wake of widespread complacency. Even as Ella and her family make fun of the rest of the town, they too are complacent and essentially do nothing as they watch the beating of the family—likely because they fear being reprimanded and beaten themselves. However, Ella does seem to recognize the hypocrisy of her own actions, as the next day she and her family organize an underground resistance meeting among the town’s citizens. Thus, Dunn posits that the only way to counteract totalitarianism is through a large-scale resistance movement.

☞ Nollop is not God. Nollop is silent. We must respect that silence and make our decisions and judgments based upon science and fact and simple old-fashioned common sense—a commodity absent for too long from those in governmental elevatia, where its employ would do us all much good.

**Related Characters:** Tassie Purcy (speaker), High Island Council, Ella Minnow Pea, Nate Warren, Nevin Nollop

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

A young American man named Nate Warren becomes interested in the oppression overtaking Nollop, as the High Island Council begins banning the use of letters that fall from Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue because they believe the fallen tiles are a sign Nollop is sending from beyond the grave. Nate sends the glue from the tiles to be examined by chemists and then he stays with Tassie so he can present his findings to the Council in hopes that they’ll realize the glue is simply dissolving and therefore abandon their notion that Nollop is some kind of deity figure. But the argument of science versus faith is not resolved simply by logic: when Nate ultimately goes to the Council, they argue that Nollop is working through the science—he is causing the glue to fail. Instead, the Nollopians’ only means of arguing against the Council lies in Tassie’s first statement: proving that Nollop is not God and therefore that the Council’s faith in him is baseless.

- ☞ 7. The falling tiles can represent only one thing: a challenge—a summons to bettering our lot in the face of such deleterious complacency, and in the concomitant presence of false contentment and rank self-indulgence.
8. There is no room for alternative interpretation.
9. Interpretation of events in any other way represents heresy.
10. Heretics will be punished, as was, for example, Mr. Nollop’s saucy stenographer, who was cashiered for flippantly announcing to her employer the ease with which she could, herself, create such a sentence as his.

**Related Characters:** High Island Council, Nate Warren, Tassie Purcy, Nevin Nollop

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 55

### Explanation and Analysis



Once the letters “Z,” “Q,” and “J” have fallen from Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue, the High Island Council sends out an order clarifying why they are putting forth their statutes to ban citizens from speaking or writing words that contain the fallen letters. The language that they use in these 10 declarations is notably religious bent—particularly their declaration of “heresy”—which emphasizes how the Council’s adoration of Nollop is taking on the scale of a deity, which is in turn fueling their certainty and their justification for the oppression that they are forcing on the citizens. Their harsh declarations make it clear that the Council members are impervious to Tassie and Nate’s attempts at a logical explanation as to why the tiles are falling.

However, in this language can be found the avenue that ultimately allows Tassie and Nate to effectively refute the Council members’ beliefs. The Council elevates Nollop and they punish those who do not follow his example because they believe that Nollop is superior in his ability to create a 35-letter pangram and he is therefore deserving of worship. As such, when the Nollopians are able to show that can come up with a pangram even shorter than Nollop’s, they able to undo the faith that the Council has placed in him.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ When I bake, I do not have to speak. When I bake, I do not have to make sense of anything except the ingredients summoned by memory that I have laid out in front of me. Sometimes the children offer to help, but I do not accept. This is something best done alone. Something I do well. One of the few things I can actually *do*.

**Related Characters:** Agnes (speaker), High Island Council, Nevin Nollop, Mittie Purcy

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 62

### Explanation and Analysis

After the third letter, “J,” falls from Nevin Nollop’s statue and the High Island Council subsequently bans the use of the letter, many people begin to have a very difficult time communicating with one another. Mittie’s friend Agnes writes to her, explaining that she is exhausted by communicating and she has taken to baking whenever she can so that there is no opportunity to misspeak. Agnes’s story demonstrates how society itself dissolves when freedom of speech is inhibited. Later on, after more tiles have fallen, Agnes explains that she cannot even bake because speaking is so exhausting. This is a sentiment shared by many others, including Mittie, who believes that speaking is so difficult that she can no longer continue teaching. Thus, key professions and aspects of the society are quickly disappearing with each letter that the Council bans. The amount of energy they have to spend in order to communicate also makes resistance efforts more and more difficult as the oppression wears on, because people have so little energy to spend on the movement. This, Dunn implies, is why early, large-scale resistance is necessary to challenge totalitarian regimes.

☝ In taking “ed” away (Goodbye, Ed!), the most useful tool to express the past tense in the English language, we are being robbed of great chunks of our very history.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), Nevin Nollop, High Island Council, Tassie Purcy

**Page Number:** 69

### Explanation and Analysis

After the letter “D” fall from Nevin Nollop’s statue, Ella writes to Tassie about one of the consequences of losing

this letter. Without the suffix “-ed,” it becomes exceptionally difficult to express past tense. Like losing the history recorded in books that were banned after the first letter fell, this is another way in which Nollopians can no longer discuss what has happened to them in the past—in essence, the Council is eradicating the Nollopians’ history while also threatening the society’s future.

This point also counters an earlier point that Ella made in declaring that certain nouns and verbs could be easily substituted for one another. Here, Dunn shows that communication does not only lie in nouns and verbs. Instead, words carry substance, and without a large amount of words or particular forms of words, it becomes impossible to communicate certain concepts and ideas. This becomes evident soon after when, also due to the lack of the letter “D,” the Council must release new names for days of the week. Without a common linguistic structure or indicator, all communication breaks down and society subsequently breaks down as well.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ But we were lucky in that when such a misspake took place, there were no ears pressing themselves against the portals or fenesters to overhear.

**Related Characters:** Tassie Purcy (speaker), Georgeanne Towgate, Ella Minnow Pea, Nate Warren

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

In a letter to Ella, Tassie explains that she and Nate had a wine-filled evening in which she and Nate both misspoke an illegal letter. However, she writes that thankfully no one was listening. This is a reminder of how betrayal has become the norm among neighbors in Nollop, to the point where citizens are actively going after others to try and report their missteps—perhaps out of an eat-or-be-eaten mentality.

Yet ultimately this backfires on certain citizens of Nollop, like Georgeanne, who recognize that the isolation they experience as the result of their betrayal ultimately becomes their own undoing. Instead, solidarity is necessary to survive. This quote also touches on complacency and the necessity of particular words: whereas Ella initially feels that she can substitute certain words for others, it is clear

that by this point, when enough letters are removed, that it's a challenge to find precise substitutes for basic objects like "door" or "window." Thus, as more and more letters are banned, the cost of initial complacency becomes higher and higher.

☛ A little not-so-positive news: Amos has been caught in offense number two. In last night's poker game. It was such a foolish mistake. It might have gone without report except that Morton who owes him money chose to employ outright extortion against poor, hapless Amos. Amos's preference was for not playing along. Imagine the effrontery: Morton attempting to ignore the offense in exchange for clearance of a rather large financial obligation. Amos thought, of course, that Morton was bluffing. Unfortunately, in this particular game, it turns out, Morton was not.

**Related Characters:** Gwenette Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Amos Minnow Pea

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 89


### Explanation and Analysis

Once four letters have been banned in Nollop, more and more people rack up second violations—including Ella's father, Amos, during his poker game. This is yet another instance in which Dunn demonstrates how the Council's rulings enable people to betray one another. Even though Amos and Morton are friends, Morton uses Amos's slip-up for his own benefit, as holding the violation over Amos's head allows Morton to potentially extort money out of his supposed friend. This illustrates how the society's oppressive statutes sow fear among the citizens and provide additional opportunities for threats and extortions. Amos makes a more righteous choice here, opting to keep his own honor even though the alternative is bodily harm or possibly of losing his home or life. Yet it is the Council's oppression that makes these decisions so fraught and which makes each person vulnerable and fearful of being caught.

☛ You've given me the scientific reason for why the tiles are falling, Mr. Warren. But might not Nollop be working *through* the science? Have you ever thought of this? The science, in point of fact, actually serving his specific purposes. Therefore, that of which I must have positive proof—the single fact that I must know for certain is that the Great Nollop isn't working *at all!*

**Related Characters:** Rederick Lyttle (speaker), Nevin Nollop, High Island Council, Nate Warren

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 94



### Explanation and Analysis

Nate approaches the High Island Council with findings from American chemists demonstrating how the tiles on Nevin Nollop's commemorative statue are falling simply because the glue has become too old to fix the tiles to the statue. Up until this point, the Council has asserted its belief that Nollop, whom they see as something of a deity figure, is somehow willing them to fall. Yet the Council does not Nate's logical explanation as in conflict with their own. Instead, as Councilman Lyttle argues here, they believe that Nollop can use science to carry out his will. This serves to illustrate how the citizens are unable to craft an argument that counters the individual points of the Council's blind faith—instead, they have to refute their faith in its entirety. This is what provides the source of Enterprise Thirty-Two, an attempt to disprove the idea that Nollop is particularly supreme, and therefore unworthy of being deified. Through this, Dunn suggests that when pitting reason against faith, one must dismantle the fundamentals of the belief system in question rather than trying to refute individual arguments.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☛ The prospect of actually being able to control the outcome of this ghastly assault on our collective spirit, let alone our very humanity, by turning this offensive upon its cephalus, has sent some among our subterra movement to heights of unencompassable ecstasy.

**Related Characters:** Tassie Purcy (speaker), High Island Council, Nevin Nollop, Nate Warren, Mittie Purcy

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 99

### Explanation and Analysis

When Nate meets with the High Island Council, they agree to his challenge: if someone can come up with a 32-letter pangram (three letters shorter than Nevin Nollop's legendary 35-letter one) in six weeks, they will accept that anyone can reach Nollop's supremacy and they will rescind




their statutes banning the use of certain letters. Subsequently, as Tassie describes to Mittie, the citizens of Nollop are immediately buoyed by this challenge (dubbed Enterprise Thirty-Two), for two reasons: first, it provides an opportunity for a kind of widespread resistance that they had previously lacked in combatting the totalitarian Council, and which Nollopians now resolve to work on together. It also provides the citizens—at least in their minds, if not aloud or written down—the ability to regain the freedom of speech they’ve lost. This mental freedom gives them the additional energy and stimulation that has been slowly disappearing with each new letter the Council bans. In this way, collective resistance proves beneficial for the Nollopians’ mental health and wellbeing in addition to being a more effective tactic for opposing the Council.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☞☞ The Council representative—his voice: even, treacly polite—gave his response again, with slight elaboration: “Mr. Cummels, it is the Council’s earnest conviction that there is no other Supreme Being but Almighty Nollop. None whatsoever. Praise Nollop. Nollop eternal.”

**Related Characters:** Mittie Purcy, High Island Council (speaker), Nevin Nollop, Rory Cummels

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 121-122

### Explanation and Analysis

While Tassie is addressing the Council alongside Nate in Nollopton, Mittie writes to her, explaining that Rory has been sent to the United States. The Council declared that it was confiscating his property for a church to worship Nevin Nollop, and when Rory protested that he believed in God rather than Nollop, the Council representative gave this answer. In response, Rory let out a series of expletives laden with illicit letters and he was subsequently exiled.

The argument made by the Council representative is unsettling for several reasons: first, it demonstrates how the Council is using its blind faith as justification for its oppressive actions as its totalitarian hold over the citizens and their property only grows with each new letter they ban. The Council has already confiscated so much property from people who were banished that it then becomes even easier to annex property even from those who still live in Nollop. Second, this response illustrates how difficult it is to disprove faith, particularly as Nollop becomes an even more important deity to the Council than God. This faith makes

them essentially impervious to counterargument, until that faith is fundamentally challenged and refuted at the end of the novel.


## Chapter 9 Quotes

☞☞ I value, nonetheless, your going to the learny-house to help my son. Little Timmy values it as well.

He is gone now. Timmy. This morning. With Nash, my spouse. I must remain. I must remain, as I am without violation.

Please exonerate me. In your heart. I am so sorry that I was the one to report your violations. I’m so sorry that I was to learn what is truly important in our lives too, too late.

**Related Characters:** Georgeanne Towgate (speaker), High Island Council, Nash Towgate, Timmy Towgate, Tassie Purcy, Mittie Purcy

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 139

### Explanation and Analysis

Mittie tries to help Georgeanne prove that Timmy is still seven and therefore he is not subject to the Council’s statutes banning the use of different letters, since children under eight are exempt. Mittie’s efforts ultimately fail and Timmy is exiled for violating the ban, and yet Georgeanne sends this note of thanks and an apology to Mittie for reporting her violations. It is here that Georgeanne reaches a turning point, as do many of Nollop’s citizens. Prior to this, fear, mistrust, and betrayal were pervasive in the society as citizens reported each other to the government for fear of being reported themselves—and Georgeanne helped to sow that fear and betrayal. But now that so many letters have been banned and so many people have been forced off or have chosen to leave the island, people like Georgeanne and Ella are recognizing the value and the necessity in supporting one another. Without that support, isolation threatens their very existence.

Additionally, the degradation in language is becoming more and more evident, as can be seen in this quote. Without the word “school,” Georgeanne must resort to the compound “learny-house” as a substitute. The more letters that are banned, the more that citizens have to work to communicate with one another, which also adds to their sense of isolation.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☞☞ This is to inphorm ewe oph Statoot 28-63 past this morning with implorment phrom high elter R. Lyttle. Hensephorth, sitisens may—in graphy only—espress themselfs when warrant, threw yoose oph proxy letters, yet only as hear-twins.

**Related Characters:** High Island Council (speaker), Rederick Lyttle

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 165

### Explanation and Analysis

With 10 letters now banned and communication exceptionally difficult for the Nollopians, the Council passes a statute that allows for substitute sounds in writing (like in this notice itself, where the Council uses “ph” for “f,” for example). This shows just how deleterious the situation has become: the further words careen toward gibberish and unintelligibility, the closer Nollopian society gets to dissolving entirely as communication becomes a laborious effort. Thus, Dunn once again argues how freedom of speech is integral to a healthy and functioning society.



The quote also reveals that Lyttle was the only person who argued for this statute to be passed, which reveals that Lyttle is trying to alleviate some of the Council’s edicts. Even though he is a part of the governing body, he cannot overturn the statutes completely, which shows how totalitarianism can even overcome those who are enacting it. Lyttle’s initial complacency and conformity with the rest of the Council members is what now prevents him from stopping the madness.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞☞ How it happen is not easy to tell: he yoose an illegal letter in interphew aphter poleese see him ant Tom going threw wintow into yew-niphersity hall— trespassing. He yoose the letter, then when the poleese go to tie his hants to transport him to Pier 7, he ant Tom try to phlee so teportation will not happen. The poleese shoot him. They shoot him in the het. He is immetiately tet. I am, again, sorry to tell yew this. I most say, tween we two, that I helt high hopes phor his sassess.

**Related Characters:** Rederick Lyttle (speaker), Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B.), Tom, Professor Mannheim,

Ella Minnow Pea

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 169

### Explanation and Analysis

With very little time left in the Enterprise Thirty-two challenge, Lyttle sends a letter to Ella informing her of bad news: Professor Mannheim, one of Ella’s collaborators on the project, was shot and killed by the island’s Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B) for trying to evade arrest. This horrific event illustrates the true cost of Ella and other citizens’ initial complacency in the face of the Council’s limitations on free speech. As totalitarianism tightened its grip and fewer and fewer people remained on Nollop to protest, the government became empowered to take any action it saw fit to enforce its own laws—including taking the life of a citizen that it is meant to protect. Dunn therefore highlights the necessity for early and widespread rebellion in the face of injustice rather than waiting for the situation to worsen.

Additionally, the gibberish language used in this letter to Ella shows how much substance has been lost within the Nollopians’ communication, to the point where the letter is difficult to follow. There is no past tense, the language is halting, and some words are almost unrecognizable (like “sassess” for “success”). All of this reiterates the cost of the language that’s been lost, and how that lack of effective communication translates to an ineffective society.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☞☞ Alto I no tat Nollop isn’t trewlee going awae. Tee reason: I am not going awae. I will learn to tawg in noomerals. I will learn sign language—anee-ting to stae in Nollop.

[...]

Insidentaltee, ewe are propaplee reating mie last letter to ewe. It is now simplee too tiring to write. To sae watt I most sae in language one mae onterstant.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Nate Warren, Nevin Nollop

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 187-188

### Explanation and Analysis

With only two days left to complete Enterprise Thirty-two,



Ella writes to Nate in the hopes that he can get word to her family, to affirm the fact that she refuses to give up on returning Nollop to its former glory. Ella’s letter is yet another example of the cost of the Nollopians’ initial complacency with the High Island Council’s limitations on free speech. While Ella remains to try and resist the government, the fact that there are so few others to join her in her efforts makes her attempts almost fruitless, because alone she has little chance of returning the island to its prior state. And, because she no longer has the energy or mental capacity to continue to write letters, Nollop will theoretically cease to exist because there will no longer be any communication or sense of unity among Ella and the Nollopians who’ve fled or been exiled to the United States. Ella ultimately *does* find the 32-letter pangram that enables her to refute the High Island Council’s beliefs, and thus the Council rescind the statutes—but the fact that she comes across the pangram by chance (and she could just as easily have failed to do so) emphasizes how vital it is for citizens to form a large-scale resistance early on in a totalitarian regime.

ceased to exist and a desire for the pain brought about by Nollop’s theoretical wishes to end. But even these statements are difficult to follow and others are nearly uninterpretable. What was initially the simple loss of the letter “Z” has, over a period of months, become a complete restriction of speech and inescapable oppression. With this final outcry, Dunn illustrates how close society will come to total collapse without its most basic communicational tool: words.

### Chapter 16 Quotes

🗨️ No mo Nollop pomp!  
 No mo Nollop poo poo!  
 No mo 4 pop/1 moll Nollop looloo poop!  
 No no no mo plop, plop, plop, plomp!  
 No mo Nollop!  
 No, mon, no! O Noooooooooo!  
 OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
 OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!  
 – “LMNOP”

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Nevin Nollop

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 197

#### Explanation and Analysis

When only five letters remain on Nevin Nollop’s commemorative statue, Ella writes a final note of protest, still adhering to the Council’s absurd edicts. It seems that here she makes every attempt she can to be intelligible and to create a semblance of words with meaning. Parts of it can be interpreted: the “pomp” perhaps refers to the Council’s haughtiness and elitism, the “poo poo” refers to her disgust with the edicts, the “plop” refers to the tiles falling, and “No mo Nollop” is both a lament that the island’s society has

### Chapter 17 Quotes

🗨️ All the Council members save Lyttle have tendered their resignations. Immediately thereafter Harton Mangrove attempted suicide with his necktie. It was a clumsy attempt and quickly foiled. Following our excursion to the vault, Lyttle, Tom and I proceeded to the cenotaph, climbed to the top, and with sledgehammers in hand, initiated, in earnest, an act of destructive revisionism.

**Related Characters:** Ella Minnow Pea (speaker), High Island Council, Harton Mangrove, Nevin Nollop, Tom, Rederick Lyttle

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 205

#### Explanation and Analysis

In the book’s final chapter, Ella has discovered a 32-letter pangram her father, Amos, inadvertently wrote in his farewell letter to her. This effectively refutes the High Island Council’s belief that Nevin Nollop’s ability to write a 35-letter pangram makes him a supreme deity, and they rescind their laws banning the use of the letters that have fallen from Nollop’s statue. The aftermath of this action demonstrates the successful path that was used to counter the arguments of the Council. They had asserted, all along, that Nollop was supreme because his pangram was superior to all others—and this fact is what justified their faith in him and subsequently the interpretation of what the fallen tiles meant (they believed that the tiles were a message from Nollop from beyond the grave). But with Ella’s ability to prove another person more superior (especially when the person *unintentionally* created their pangram), she is able to dismantle the Council’s premise and therefore prove it to be baseless.

Ella’s act of “destructive revisionism” is also a symbolic one, given the fact that these statutes robbed Nollop of so much of its history and nearly destroyed the society entirely. In destroying Nollop’s statue and replacing it with a statue

meant to glorify language, then, Ella hopes to ensure that this part of Nollopian history will not repeat itself. This is a final way in which Dunn ties the wellbeing of a society's

language to the well-being of the society itself, proving how integral free speech is to any civilization.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

Ella Minnow Pea, a young woman living in Nollopton on the island of Nollop, writes a letter to her cousin Tassie, who lives in the more rural town of Nollopville. Ella explains that a few days prior, something interesting happened to the statue in the center of town. The statue is of Nevin Nollop, the man for whom the island is named, and who is credited with the pangram “the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” Each letter of the pangram is inscribed on a tile on the monument, and one of them fell to the ground and shattered.

Ella notes that the High Island Council immediately called an emergency meeting when learning of the fallen tile. Ella was surprised by this, as she and her fellow laundresses believed that the tile fell because after 100 years, the **glue** holding it onto the statue simply failed. She notes, however, that her logic was ignored and that public speculation has been kept to a minimum for fear of being reprimanded by the government.

Ella affirms that the citizens of Nollop take pride in Nevin Nollop and his legacy, and she notes that the world would be very different without his brilliant sentence. Ella explains that Nollop hasn't received much recognition elsewhere but that he receives much acclaim on the island, where the citizens take a great deal of pride in their language.

After the Council convened, they announced that they believed the fallen tile was some kind of sign sent from Nollop from beyond the grave. They released a verdict saying that because the tile bore the letter “Z,” they took this to mean that Nollop wanted the letter “Z” to be excised from the island's vocabulary. Thus, from now on, penalties will be issued to anyone who uses “Z” in speech or in writing.

Ella outlines the punishments the Council decided upon: for the first offence, a person will receive a public oral reprimand from the Law Enforcement Brigade (L.E.B.). For the second, offenders will be offered the option of flogging or headstock. Third offenses will result in banishment from the island; if this is refused, the person will be put to death.

*Ella's first letter to Tassie sets the scene of the society in which she and Tassie live. The fact that the island is named because of a man's achievement in language sets up the idea that language is integral to their society—indeed, Tassie goes on to say how the citizens' use of language sets them apart from all other societies.*



*Ella immediately places the Council outside the realm of logic, as they jump straight to the conclusion that there must be some kind of hidden meaning behind the tile's falling rather than assuming the statue is simply worn-down. Yet Ella also demonstrates her and others' tendency towards complacency, as they passively worry about the punishment of the government rather than openly speculating about what's going on.*



*Ella again emphasizes how important language is to the society and its culture. Given that Ella has just implied how afraid the Nollopians are to speculate about the statue, then, it's clear that there is an ideological gap between the citizens' values and the Council's censorship of ideas.*



*The actions of the Council are ironic, as Nollop prized speech and the expansion of its boundaries, while the Council interprets the tile's falling to mean that Nollop wants to limit the citizens' speech. Thus, Dunn demonstrates that the basis of the Council's actions is illogical, purely concocted by their own superstitious beliefs.*



*The Council's punishments establish it as a totalitarian regime, as there is seemingly little democracy and no tolerance for disobeying the laws. Yet the fact that the first offense is relatively light, and that for now only one uncommon letter is affected, makes it easier for citizens to accept the edicts put forth.*



Ella is shocked at the developments that have taken place, but she considers that the Council could be right about Nollop's will. She scans her letter and she finds that she has only used the word "Z" three times, and she writes that he could have easily found alternate words to use in these instances. Ella wonders if this edict will make them more deliberate in their choices of language. She closes her letter to Tassie by explaining that the edict will go into effect in two weeks' time, and that she will, for the time being, cautiously give it the benefit of the doubt.

Tassie replies to Ella, explaining that edicts like this only make the island more medieval. She is shocked by the developments in Nollopton and she brings up some of the consequences of losing the letter "Z": all books containing the letter "Z" will be outlawed, meaning that most books on the island will be destroyed.

Tassie is outraged at the fact that no one is protesting the edict, deeply worried that this will rob citizens of the ability to communicate freely. She argues that Nollopians are "well-educated, well-versed, and well-spoken," unlike their "vocabu-lazy American neighbors." Tassie wonders if Nollop would want to see language so diminished, and she comes to the conclusion that the Council is wrong.

Tassie closes her letter by noting that she, like Ella, only used the letter "Z" in three unnecessary circumstances, including "vocabu-lazy." But she argues that choosing to use the letter or not is her right, and it should not be "eradicated by stroke of High Council Pen."

One day prior to the eradication of "Z," Ella's father Amos writes a note to Ella, saying that he is out picking up some ceramic mix—he has decided to start molding moonshine jugs to sell. Afterward, he writes, he will pick up mixed nuts and assorted beverages for their party the following evening, to say goodbye to the letter "Z." He thanks God for the abundance of bread and fish on the island during these restrictive times.

*In showing the edict the benefit of the doubt, Ella and the other citizens on the island demonstrate the issue with complacency in the face of the limitations on freedom of speech. Though the edicts may not seem too bad at first, allowing for even a minor restriction of rights such as this gives the Council leeway to further censor the Nollopians in the future.*



*Not only will speech be limited, but Tassie also suggests that the island's cultural institutions will be torn apart by the edicts, thus destroying the bedrock of the society itself.*



*Tassie notes the hypocrisy and illogical nature of the Council's edicts, noting that Nollop wouldn't want their language to be so limited. Even though Tassie is more resistant to the Council's edicts than Ella is, her letter still highlights the fact that she, too, is only venting her frustrations via letter. Neither of the girls are taking action against the Council, making Tassie's internal resistance rather moot.*



*Tassie affirms the necessity of maintaining the freedom of speech, even if the use of certain words is only symbolic, because of the larger implications that limiting speech could (and will) have on the island.*



*Amos's letter to Ella further reveals just how complacent the citizens initially are—they are not only accepting the Council's edict, they are actually celebrating the removal of one of the letters of the alphabet. Additionally, Amos's gratitude to God hints that the citizens' religious freedom, too, might be challenged by the Council's edicts.*



On the night before the “Z” ban goes into effect, Ella writes Tassie a few minutes before midnight. She instructs Tassie to burn it as soon as she receives it, so that Tassie and her mother are not punished for possessing writing that contains the banned letter “Z.” Ella explains a few developments in the city, including the fact children under eight are exempt from the laws and that Ella’s Uncle Zachary will now go by his middle name, Isaac.

In Ella’s letter, she uses several of the many words that will be eradicated, lamenting how many will be banished from their vocabulary. She also confirms that in Nollopton, the books have all disappeared. She notes that they’ll have to write new ones but that they won’t be able to talk about what has happened in history books, “Because to write of it, is to write it.”

*Ella’s reports examine the ramifications of the Council’s actions. Exempting children under eight from the law in some ways makes sense, but in others seems completely arbitrary, again displaying how the Council is acting purely on its own beliefs. Additionally, Ella’s uncle’s name change emphasizes how people are not only being stripped of speech, but of identity—foreshadowing the other fundamental rights that are soon to break down.*



*Ella confirms Tassie’s prediction, demonstrating how the bedrocks of society are disappearing even after only a single letter is banned. In addition to the books, Ella also realizes that the island’s history itself is now in danger, because they can never describe what exactly has happened without using the illicit letter. In this way, losing even one tiny component of the freedom of speech proves to be incredibly detrimental for Nollop’s past, present, and future.*



## CHAPTER 2

The day after the “Z” ban goes into effect, Tassie writes to Ella. She says that the library has been shut down and that her mother, Mittie (a second grade math teacher), spent the day halting and stammering, fearing she would use the illicit letter. Tassie says that many of Mittie’s students are not permitted to discuss the ban by their parents, but that Mittie is “angry and rebellious.”

Tassie wonders if eventually the words they have lost will completely fade from their memory, as if they never existed. Tassie writes that offenses are already mounting: even the tiny village of Nollopville, 17 people have a first offense and two have reached a second offense. One of those with two offenses is a beekeeper, who is struggling to describe the bees without using the letter “Z.” He now sits in a headstock on the village commons. His livelihood will soon be destroyed, Tassie writes, because the bees “speak the offending letter.”

The second person who has a second offense is Willy Creevy, “a riotous, rule-flouting young man.” He says that he “does not believe in obeying laws written by madmen,” and after gaining two offenses, he chose to be whipped. Tassie writes that she commends Willy’s disdain for the High Island Council but she does not share his rebelliousness. She says that at present, it’s easier for people to tolerate the Council’s injustice and wait to resist until the problem gets worse.

*Dunn begins to introduce the limitations on freedom that pervade the society as a result of the “Z” ban. It is not simply a prohibition on the letter, but on all words in which it is included. It therefore inherently leads to a limitation on various freedoms of expression, as Mittie and her students are forced to avoid talking about the ban for fear that they may slip up.*



*Tassie’s story illustrates how rapidly the Council’s totalitarianism escalates. People gain more and more offenses, whose punishments grow harsher and harsher as they progress. It also highlights the Council’s absurdity: not only do they feel the need to regulate the humans on the island, but even the bees, who are theoretically using the letter “Z” by making their natural buzzing sound.*



*Even Tassie, who has a more rebellious streak than Ella and who seems to understand the gravity of the situation, becomes similarly complacent. Even though she admires the rebellion, she, too, fears what government punishment might mean for her and so she puts her personal safety over the well-being of the society.*



Ella returns Tassie's letter, writing that 60 people were charged with a first offense in the first week in Nollopton. She writes that about "neighbor turning in neighbor, perpetuating old grudges and grievances." Thirteen people were also charged with a second offense—one of whom has now taped his mouth shut to prevent a further violation.

Ella notes that the editor of the *Island Tribune*, Mr. Kleeman, also has two offenses. He is contemplating a suspension of the publication, so as not to be banished after a third. Ella worries, however, that this would mean losing Nollopton's only news source.

Ella tells Tassie how, the day before, she, her mother Gwenette, and her father Amos took a walk together and spoke freely with one another. Ella worried that people might be hiding in the bushes to report them. She notes that Tassie was right about the law: it not only prevents people from communicating on a practical level, it also prevents them from making meaningful connections with each other.

In a note left on the Minnow Peas' kitchen table, Amos writes to Gwenette that he has gone to the town center to do a bit of work for the local construction company, which is a few carpenters short this week due to fallout from the "Z" ban. Gwenette returns Amos's note later, saying that she isn't fooled—she knows he is out getting something for their anniversary. She tells him she will be out buying some hens for dinner that evening.

Two days later, Tassie writes to Ella, informing her that Willy has been banished. After he was flogged, he let out a tirade that included many words with the letter "Z." Within an hour, he was on a boat to the United States. Tassie writes, "what have those fools on the Council wrought?" She notes that the next day, the PTA at the school will have a meeting day to vent their anger and frustration.

The next day, Ella writes to Tassie asking how the meeting went. She is frustrated that they can't speak on the phone, as phone service has been disrupted (which she believes the Council is responsible for). Ella writes that she hopes the ban will be lifted soon, however, because the letter "Q" has now fallen from the statue as well.

*Ella's letter introduces the theme of betrayal among neighbors, which is becoming more commonplace under the ban. Citizens take advantage of totalitarianism in this aspect, hoping to turn each other in before they themselves fall victim to slipping up.*



*Again, Dunn emphasizes how even seemingly minor limitations on free speech begin to limit other mainstays of society, like losing the town newspaper.*



*Ella recognizes how the ban instigates betrayal among neighbors and friends, even to the point where people actively start to target one another and look for slip-ups by fellow neighbors. In this way, the Council's totalitarian regime is self-perpetuating, as citizens police one another.*



*Amos and Gwenette's letters to each other demonstrate two ideas: first, their loving relationship contrasts with Ella's worries about people betraying one another, as described in her most recent letter. But they also show how people can adapt even under oppressive conditions. Even in the midst of losing their fundamental rights, Ella's parents try to go on and live their lives normally.*



*Willy's protest is commendable in the face of the rest of the citizens' complacency, but it also shows how futile rebellion can be when done by individuals. Making real change requires action on a much more widespread scale, and the Nollopians seem to avoid putting themselves at risk in this way for fear of incurring even harsher punishments.*



*Though it is never proven, Ella's acknowledgement that the Council is likely behind the phone service disruption suggests that the Council's limitation on speech allows them to start violating other fundamental rights as well.*





The next day, Tassie returns Ella's letter, saying that she'd heard about "Q." She tells Ella that at the PTA meeting, Willy's mother described the incident as "naked martial tyranny." Tassie notes that she is filled with rage, but now she is also growing fearful.

*The statements made at the PTA meeting illustrate that the citizens know how tyrannical and oppressive the government is being. But rather than channeling their rage to fight this oppression, the "terrible fear" dissuades them from acting up.*



Tassie worries that the fallen "Q" will make the Council feel more justified in their earlier decree rather than forcing them to rescind it. Tassie makes one final note: that the radio broadcasts are now only playing music without words, because the station manager does not want to search through the lyrics to root out those with the illicit letter.

*Like the destruction of all of the books in the library, the radio broadcasts serve as yet another way in which the lack of freedom of speech is eradicating the cultural mainstays of society, like music and the arts.*



Ella's next letter informs Tassie that in a week, "Q" will be banned from the Nollopians' vocabulary just as "Z" was. Ella says that there are whispers of a Council recall or a military coup, but no one knows how to instigate such actions—and thus, they must simply "mind [their] p's and bury [their] q's."

*Ella again demonstrates how, even among the talk of rebellion, fear and uncertainty causes the citizens to be complacent and accepting of the edicts that the Council has wrought.*



Ella notes another development: Mr. Kleeman printed a final edition of the *Tribune*, entitled "The Bees' Lament," which printed "Z" nearly four or five thousand times. Ella writes that she respects Mr. Kleeman for the protest but she is disappointed by his "cowardly exit," as now the paper is shut down and the rest of the citizens no longer have access to the news. She also tells Tassie that Nollopton's library remains open, though only with musical albums and some picture books. She invites Tassie to visit.

*Ella emphasizes, too, the way in which even outright rebellion can be ineffectual when it is on an individual level. Not only does Mr. Kleeman's act of insurgence allow the Council to easily dismiss him, but acting out in this manner also led to the discontinuation of the *Tribune*—his actions have left society in a worse state, as the Nollopians are now even more limited in their communication.*



Tassie returns Ella's letter, saying that she hopes to visit soon. She confesses that the previous day, she carved three slashes into a tree (to make a "Z") and she laughed at this small act of resistance. Tassie thinks about leaving the island to live with her father in America but she doesn't want to abandon Mittie.

*Again, even though acts of resistance are necessary, when done on this small scale, they are insignificant. What is required, Dunn continues to imply, is a more extensive upheaval.*



Tassie also writes that Mittie received a first offense for speaking the letter in her math class, and one of her students, Timmy, told his parents about her slip. Mittie was brought before a faculty assembly and reprimanded for trying to use the word "dozen" while teaching. Mittie was humiliated. Tassie says that she may write to Timmy's parents to find out why they reported Mittie.

*Dunn also demonstrates how totalitarian regimes enable betrayal among their citizens, as in this example of Mittie being reported by her students' parents. Despite the fact that Mittie meant no harm and was actively trying to improve Timmy's education, they only saw an opportunity to report an illicit action and thus to avoid suspicion themselves.*



Gwenette writes back to Tassie, noting that Mittie has to be very careful about what she says in front of her students, especially when the “Q” ban goes into effect. Ella adds a post-script, noting that she is working longer hours at the launderette because so many people want their clothes cleaned before emigrating to the United States.

*Ella’s post-script in this letter demonstrates a different kind of complacency as the Council’s oppression becomes worse and worse: leaving society altogether. However, given what’s transpired so far, it’s clear that remaining and resisting (as Ella tries to do) is the only way society may become free again.*



## CHAPTER 3

The letter “Q” is now banned. Tassie writes to Georgeanne and Nash Towgate, the parents of Timmy, asking why they reported Mittie despite the fact that she’s never done anything to wrong their family and she has always tried to help Timmy as his teacher. Tassie notes that she believes latitude should be extended to those whose work requires them to speak for long periods of time.

*Tassie’s plea for the Towgates to recognize that Mittie hasn’t done anything to harm their family highlights the betrayal that citizens are taking upon each other. The laws allow them to turn on one another and to take revenge for long-held grudges or perceived crimes.*



Nash Towgate responds to Tassie, arguing that they believe that Nollop is demonstrating his will, that they did their “civic duty” in reporting Mittie, and that Tassie’s position is “blasphemous.” Nash says that they are glad the Council, whom he calls the “most sage among [them],” are divining the will of Nollop. He argues that without Nollop, the island would be a “shallow shell,” and the world would never have been given the “foxy-dog” sentence (which, he notes, they cherish but can no longer speak or write in its entirety).

*Nash exhibits some of the same logical fallacies as the Council itself: like the Council, because the Towgates believe that they are just and wise, they assume that they are infallible. Thus, anyone going against their conclusion that Nollop is expressing his will from the grave must therefore be incorrect and “blasphemous.” Yet Dunn highlights the irony of what Nash believes: that the world is better for Nollop’s pangram, yet that gift cannot be spoken or written freely.*



Georgeanne Towgate adds a note to Nash’s letter, saying that she completely agrees with her husband. She says that many people have joined her in talk sessions and they believe that Nollop is “attempting to pry [them] away from [their] traditional heavipendence on linguistic orthodoxy.” She emphasizes that there is no ill will between her family and Tassie’s family. She also asks if Tassie and Mittie want to join her in a **painting** group.

*Georgeanne Towgate’s note, like her husband’s, is also paradoxical: even in arguing that Nollopians shouldn’t be so dependent on linguistic orthodoxy, she holds a staunch belief that all Nollopians should follow Nollop’s divine will in limiting their language. Thus, Georgeanne’s argument is illogical: she decries orthodoxy, yet she’s merely adhering to orthodoxy in a different form.*



Mittie writes to her sister Gwenette that without two letters, she now chooses to “overuuuse the twenty-four which remaaaaain.” She says that she hasn’t been feeling like herself lately and that Tassie worries about her, although she shouldn’t.

*Mittie’s letter demonstrates how the ban is affecting not only the words Nollopians can use, but also their ability to express themselves, and in some ways, their very wellbeing. Thus, the lack of freedom of speech results in the feeling of one’s own identity or even one’s happiness being oppressed.*



A man named Nate Warren writes to Mittie from Savannah, Georgia. Nate explains that he is a master's candidate in history and sociology at the University of Georgia and that he publishes an academic journal devoted to the island called *Nollopiana*. He writes that he was contacted by Willy Creevy to write about what is happening on Nollop.

Nate explains that he would like to come to Nollop to investigate this "odd, unprecedented political and social crisis." He asks if he can pose as a friend of the family, particularly because Mittie and Tassie have remained in Council favor. He writes that he understands if they have reservations but he hopes that they might feel that the actions of the Council should be made known to the public.

Mittie discusses Nate's letter with Tassie and she writes back that they would like to welcome Nate to their home if his visa to Nollop is approved. Tassie then writes to Ella, explaining her excitement that Nate is coming to write an article about what is happening on the island and how the prospect of his arrival has brightened Mittie's spirits.

Ella writes back to Tassie, glad to hear of the development with Nate. Ella then tells her of another incident in Nollopton: all six members of the Rasmussen family marched into an open session of the High Island Council wearing cartoon masks and making loud duck sounds, which are obviously forbidden. The head of the household, Charles, explained that the family was fond of "Q" and they wanted to protest its removal by quacking.

Charles continued to explain that he wanted the family—including his nine year-old twin daughters—to be flogged in front of as many people as possible, and if this did not produce an outcry, they wanted to leave the island as quickly as possible. And so Ella, Gwenette, and Amos watched the horrifying sight of the Rasmussen children being beaten, and yet no one did anything.

Ella tells Tassie that she, Amos, and Gwenette plan to hold a secret meeting to begin a "nascent underground movement" to restore the alphabet. Ella closes with a final note: that that morning, a man was found trying to replace a newly fallen tile—"J." Ella explains that the man was arrested and he is being held without bond for trying to circumvent this "all-holy decree from the great and omniscient Nollop."

*Dunn illustrates how, once outside of Nollop, Nollopians like Willy are attempting to draw attention to the island and the totalitarianism that is taking hold there—perhaps to inspire rebellion among those watching from America and from those still living in Nollop.*



*Nate's offer to make this situation public reminds readers that what is happening on Nollop is not normal—neither to the Nollopians nor to the world as a whole. In lending the Nollopians outside support, Nate may give the citizens the motivation they need to rebel.*



*Nate's impending visit serves not only as a boon to a potential mounting rebellion, but it also provides Mittie and Tassie with hope. This shows the power of unity and solidarity, as a simple letter reassuring the Nollopians that they're not alone is enough to encourage them.*



*Like Willy or Mr. Kleeman's rebellions, the Rasmussen family's act of resistance is important but ultimately fruitless because it is treated as an isolated incident. Even an entire family's resistance does not provoke change or reassessment by the Council: instead, it simply highlights the rest of the society's complacency.*



*This incident shows the ease with which societies can slide into complacency in the face of oppression and totalitarianism. Their freedoms have been so curtailed and their fear of punishment has become so great that they are unable to stand up against the clear injustice of children being beaten by the state.*



*The outcome of the incident with the Rasmussens is not instant outcry or uprising, but it at least begins to spur whispers of resistance among its citizens. This becomes particularly important in the face of the unwavering blind faith of the Council as more and more letters disappear.*



Nate writes to Mittie, letting her know that his visa has been approved and that he will arrive in 10 days. He also informs her that chemists in Georgia have obtained smuggled chips from the fallen tiles: their assessment is that the **glue** holding the tiles has calcified and that within months, all of the tiles will become similarly loosened. They doubt that within a year, there will be a single tile left. Nate says that he would like to reach the Council member who might be most open to reading the chemists' report to make a case for a reversal of these "apocalyptic directives."

*Nate believes that the chemists' findings will help the Council see the error of their ways. Given the Council's staunch superstitions, however, it remains doubtful as to whether they'll be open to a logical, scientific explanation for the glue.*



Two days later, Tassie writes to Ella about Nate's findings on the **glue**, explaining that his analyses "prove beyond doubt and wanton denial that the tiles are falling for the simple reason that they can no longer hold themselves to the bandiford." She notes that "Nollop is not God," and that they have to make their "decisions and judgments based on science and fact." She asks Ella to advise her on which Council member will be most open to reading Nate's report—positing that she thinks it would be Rederick Lyttle.

*Tassie's letter reveals the logical assumptions that she herself makes: she, like Nate, believes that if they can prove the glue is dissolving based upon scientific fact, that they will thus prove that Nollop is not willing the tiles down and therefore is not God. This opposition situates the struggle between the Council and the citizens as one of science versus faith.*



A directive from the Office of High Council is sent out to clarify the reasons for their edicts. They write that "Nollop was a man of words. We are a people of words. All that we are, we owe to Nollop. His will be done." The Council writes that they have been complacent in their language usage, and that the fallen tiles are a challenge to that complacency. They write that "there is no room for alternative interpretation," which would be heresy. They conclude by saying that "Heretics will be punished," like Nollop's stenographer, who was dismissed because she believed that she could create a better pangram than Nollop's.

*The Council's letter shows both how unreasonable its members are and how much they are motivated by faith. Even though Nollop was not technically a religious figure prior to the letters falling, the Council now worships him above all else. The religious word choice of "heresy" implies that their analysis of the events is based not on any kind of logical, reasoned argument, but is instead based on their own superstitious interpretation. Even the word "interpretation" here implies that their argument is not necessarily based on fact, but opinion.*



The Council adds three more points: that those who obey Nollop's commandments shouldn't fear punishment; that there are no accidents or misspoken words, only a lack of rigor in following Nollop's directive; and that the severity of punishment is irrelevant, given the fact that punishment can be avoided altogether.

*Again, the Council emphasizes their blind faith in the religious language of "commandments." They also use Nollop as a justification for their curtailing of freedoms and execution of punishment, without any room for leniency as in a totalitarian regime.*



The Council returns to the point of Nollop's secretary, who couldn't fulfill Nollop's challenge of coming up a sentence that contained all 26 letters of the alphabet but that measured 35 letters or less. The Council argues that she was not able to create such a pangram because "it simply cannot be done," and that "this is what has given Nollop his preeminence. Omnipotent. Omniscient. Omniglorious." They conclude that they honor Nollop's wishes "by removing 'J' with jubilation."

*Here Dunn reveals the basis of the Council's faith: that no one else could create a pangram as short or shorter than Nollop's ("the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog"), and that this is the justification to deify him. This fundamental idea, it seems, is what the Nollopians will ultimately have to disprove, rather than trying to refute individual points that the Council makes.*



## CHAPTER 4

“J” joins “Q” and “Z” on the list of banned letters. Amos receives a letter from a man in North Carolina to order some of his “moonshine vessels.” The man notes that he does not want to violate the island’s statutes in his writings. That same day, Tassie leaves a note for Mittie on their fridge saying that she worries about her mother, but assuring her that they can all “make do without this new letter.”

The next day, Mittie writes her friend Agnes, thanking her for the cookies she baked for Mittie. Agnes responds saying she is glad to do so; she is baking all the time because when she bakes, she does not have to speak.

A man named Rory Cummels, who owns a local market in Nollopville, writes a letter to Mittie apologizing for his odd behavior the day before when he rang up her food several times over. He notes that his wife left him and she took his daughters to the United States. He says that he refused to go because his life, home, and a swath of property that he owns, are all in Nollop.

Rory writes that his brother Clay believes that the fallen tiles represent Nollop’s way of encouraging citizens to use the letters on the tiles *more*, not less. Additionally, he reports that a customer just came in to report that the letter “D” has just fallen. He closes, “God save this doomsaken little island!” Mittie responds, confirming the news about “D.” She also asks if they meet for coffee because she wants to hear more of his brother’s movement. Rory accepts the invitation.

Ella sends a letter to Tassie, writing that her family’s first underground meeting was a success, as many people attended—so many that they had to turn people away and agree to meet in smaller numbers. She confirms Tassie’s suspicion that Mr. Lyttle is the likeliest person on the Council to listen to the chemist’s report.

*This series of exchanges emphasizes how people are simply continuing their complacency in the face of the Council’s laws, even though their speech is limited (as evidenced by the use of “vessels” instead of “jugs” here). The Council is so fear-inspiring that even people who do not live on the island comply with them, demonstrating the wide reach of their totalitarian regime.*



*Dunn examines how the Council’s statutes limit not only freedom of speech, but the freedom to communicate in general. As speaking becomes more and more exhausting, the society itself begins to break down.*



*Rory’s ex-wife and daughters are not the only ones who are leaving Nollop. Both due to the banishments and due to people wanting to avoid oppression, Ella has implied that many people are exiting Nollop (both voluntarily and involuntarily). In this way, society itself disintegrates under lack of free speech, as people are forced to leave Nollop altogether if they want to live freely and express themselves.*



*Clay’s assertion that Nevin Nollop actually wants citizens to use the letters more and not less reiterates that the Council’s actions are simply based on their own interpretation. Clay does not contradict Nollop’s supremacy but he instead questions the Council’s belief in the reason for the tiles’ falling. Their refusal to listen to this idea again demonstrates the futility of debating their individual points.*



*Ella and her family are finally providing the citizens of Nollop with some kind of resistance. Yet even though they were able to gather a large group, they seemingly made no resolutions and offered no plans to stop the Council, highlighting their continued slowness on trying to rebel. Additionally, the fact that they’ll need to meet in smaller numbers means any potential resistance will be fractioned, which likely means it won’t be as effective in toppling the Council’s regime.*



Ella also writes how much they will miss “D” as of midnight that evening. She notes that the word “God” will be outlawed and that there will be much difficulty in expressing the past tense. She writes, “In taking ‘ed’ away (Goodbye, Ed!), the most useful tool to express the past tense in the English language, we are being robbed of great chunks of our very history.”

Just before “D” is banned, the Council sends out a note advising Nollopians on how to express days of the week without “D.” They suggest these substitutes: Monty, Toes, Wetty, Thurby, Fribs, Satto-gatto, and Sunshine.

## CHAPTER 5

“D” is now banned. Tassie writes to Ella four days later (on “Toes”), informing her of Nate’s arrival. She tells Ella that he is in his mid-twenties, very attractive, and single. She is giddy with a crush on him. She tells Ella that Nate will stay in Nollopville for a week before they travel together to Nollopton to meet with Mr. Lyttle.

Tassie tells Ella that she has had quite a bit of wine, and that as the night wore on, she and Nate each made a mistake and spoke an illicit letter. She writes, however, that they were lucky in that “there were no ears pressing themselves against the portals or fenesters to overhear.” She closes by saying she is glad that her letter will not be intercepted because of Nollop’s dying words: “Love one another, push the perimeter of this glorious language. Lastly, please show proper courtesy; open not your neighbor’s mail.”

Mittie writes to Gwenette saying that she cannot teach without “that grammatical unifier” (the word “and”). She states that she will have to resign the next day. Gwenette responds that in their city, 18 families have been sent away. She writes that everyone is fumbling for ways to express themselves. She says they feel “utterly, wholly diminished.” At the use of this word, she writes that she is happy to enlist in the “first offense club.”

*Ella shows how language not only represents strings of letters and words, but how meaning and the substance of a society can be lost when some words are lost. Without “D,” it is more difficult to express religious sentiments without being able to mention “God.” History is threatened as well, as Ella notes, since the suffix “-ed” will prevent people from referencing anything that’s happened in the past tense. Thus, the Nollopians’ past is threatened—as well as its future.*



*The days of the week serve as another example of how the substance of the language is being completely disrupted, as no longer is it a matter of substituting “tired” with “sleepy,” for example—instead, the edicts are eradicating conventions and reducing the language to gibberish. In this way, English isn’t merely being altered—it’s being gradually destroyed.*



*The budding relationship between Tassie and Nate demonstrates how support and solidarity (and potentially love) are crucial in the face of oppression, as Tassie’s correspondence with him has clearly brightened her spirits despite the dire circumstances in Nollop.*



*Now that the letter “D” has been banned, the degradation of language becomes more and more visible. Unable to use “windows” or “doors,” for which there are no obvious substitutes, Tassie is forced to find alternatives that can convey the word that she really intends to say. Thus, the breakdown of language mirrors the breakdown of society that is occurring.*



*Dunn again emphasizes how society breaks down with a hindrance on freedom of speech: Mittie is unable to teach—an essential job to any society—and entire families are being banished, foreshadowing how soon very few people will remain in Nollop to form the society.*



The Office of the High Council writes to Gwenette, informing her that all letters are being scanned for illicit letters of the alphabet by a man who does not speak English. They add that she has earned not one offense, but two, for the use of two “D”s in the word “diminished.” She will have to choose between “cephalo-stock or public flogging.” They note that the letters are not being scanned for content, only for the alphabet. They maintain that they still have a “free, open society,” without “censures or prosecutions for exercising one’s free speech.”

Two days later, Gwenette writes to Mittie that they should use a different mail service in order to evade the attention of the postal inspectors. She thinks that they have now entered “an official police state.” Gwenette says that she chose “cephalo-stock” for her punishment but that it wasn’t too bad. She writes that some men who were also taken in for second offenses chose lashes instead. These men, she notes, believe that they should *overuse* the fallen letters, not omit them.

Tassie writes to Ella the next day, saying that she woke up screaming from a nightmare in which the letter “I” fell from the statue. Mittie and Nate tried to comfort her, and Mittie offered the sentiment that if Nollop exists, she hopes that the fallen tiles serve some positive purpose. She posits that perhaps these events will ultimately put an end to the “insanity” from the Council.

Nate counters, saying that Nollop’s life and importance is a construct by the Council, which uses Nollop to satiate its lust for power. He concludes, “Nollop has become your Baal.” Nate says that the only reason Nollop is worshipped is because of the pangram, and that given a few weeks, they could come up with a shorter sentence than Nollop. He concludes that this may be their salvation.

Ella responds to Tassie the next day, informing her that one of the “O”s has fallen from the statue but that there are still three remaining “O”s. The Council goes into emergency session to try to figure out what meaning Nollop might be trying to impart.

*Dunn also examines how the enforcement of taking away freedom of speech necessarily leads to oppression and violation of rights in other areas. Even though their letters are not being searched for content, and the Council maintains that they still have a free society, these actions are clear violations of privacy and they only serve to demonstrate the total control the government has over its citizens’ lives.*



*The men’s belief (likely stemming from Clay’s interpretation) serves as another choice of resistance. Yet again, Dunn demonstrates how resistance quickly becomes futile as this group of men simply gains offenses before being evicted from the island. Real change, it seems, would require large-scale effort.*



*Even among those who are hurt by what is happening, like Mittie, the faith in Nollop remains among the citizens of the island. This is yet another example of how people choose to retain faith as a means of reassurance, and how they create arguments to serve that faith. In this instance, it seems that Mittie is willing to buy into the Council’s view of Nollop as a divine figure in order to comfort her daughter and herself, a viewpoint that may keep her complacent and dissuade her from resisting.*



*Nate’s reference to Baal, who is viewed as a kind of false god among the Judeo-Christian religions, highlights the idea that Nollop may not actually be deserving of the faith that Nollopians place in him.*



*The Council is clearly basing its interpretations of what is happening on blind faith. Rather than taking the fact that only one “O” fell as evidence that the glue is simply dissolving, they are eager to come up with an explanation that fits their preconceived belief system.*



Agnes writes to Mittie, saying that she cannot write or speak anymore without “the fourth letter”—it takes too much mental energy. She is so exhausted that she cannot even bake. Agnes says that she has already slipped up twice and so she has chosen to stop talking because “banishment for me would mean my very extermination.” The next day, the Council sends her a note informing her that she’s been banished for the offence found in the final sentence bearing the word “would.” She is given two days to pack.

Gwenette writes to Mittie, saying that the Council has determined that they can continue to use the letter “O” until all of the tiles bearing “O” fall. But they demand that people use the letter 25 percent less. She also writes that Tassie has safely arrived, but that Amos has gotten a second offense. He slipped up at his poker game, and his friend Morton offered to ignore the offense in return for “clearance of a rather large financial obligation.” Amos refused.

The same day, Tassie writes to Mittie that she has arrived and that Nate is preparing for his meeting with Mr. Lyttle. She also informs her mother that the letter “K” has fallen—one they “can easily spare,” and the Council’s ban will go into effect in two days’ time. She also tells her mother that she is falling in love with Nate and she hopes that “V” holds out so that she can continue to write the word “love.”

Mittie responds to Tassie, saying that she recently had coffee with Rory Cummels and she was impressed by his ease with language even without the four letters. Through him, she writes, she also gains a sense of ease. Mittie tells Tassie that Rory’s wife left him and she took his daughters to the States. Mittie says that she believes Rory likes her, and that she in turn wants to continue to see him—“a bright ray in all the murk.”

Tassie responds to Mittie, saying that she is very happy that Mittie is enjoying Rory’s company. She is glad that someone will look out for Mittie. Tassie then relates the results of Nate’s meeting with Mr. Lyttle: Nate provided the chemists’ analyses on the **glue**, but Lyttle countered, “might not Nollop be working through the science?” Nate was dumbfounded by this argument, unsure of how to counteract it.

Nate then got an idea: he posited that if someone could come up with a shorter pangram than Nollop’s famous one, then Nollop would no longer be worthy of worship. Lyttle agreed that if Nate can find a 32-letter pangram before November 16 (Nollop’s “birth anniversary”), which is in six weeks’ time, then the statutes would be lifted. Tassie closes her letter on this hopeful note and she reminds Mittie to throw out the Special K.

*With Agnes’s decision to not only stop talking, but also to stop baking, Dunn emphasizes how lack of freedom of speech—and, in the case of the citizens of Nollop, a burden of thoughts—can rob people of the ability to live happily and pursue their passions. This incident foreshadows the total disintegration of Nollopian society as more and more letters are banned.*



*Dunn again illustrates the way that the Council is enabling betrayal amongst its citizens. Armed with leverage (even over someone whom he considers a friend), Morton uses the fact that he can hold Amos accountable for the laws in order to try and extort money out of him.*



*Tassie’s blasé attitude toward the fact that “K” is disappearing from their alphabet demonstrates how easy the slide into oppression has been: they remain complacent despite the continued limitations on their freedom.*



*Even among all the corruption and betrayal that the government has enacted and condoned, Dunn also explores how the opposite becomes true: people find additional support and love in one another as they attempt to ward against these betrayals.*



*Mr. Lyttle’s argument that Nollop is using the science to do his will shows the futility of Nate’s attempts to refute the points of the Council’s argument because of the faith they have put into Nollop. Instead, as he discovers, it is better to try to counteract the root of their faith.*



*Nate’s proposal demonstrates how the Council is not opposed to logic, but they will only be swayed by a reasonable argument if their entire faith is proven baseless. As such, the Nollopians must show that anyone could be as smart as Nollop, thereby proving that he is not the deity the Council claims he is.*





## CHAPTER 6

The letter “K” is now banned. Tassie writes to Mittie that the citizens are very excited by the challenge of coming up with a shorter pangram than Nollop’s. She says that the possibility of being able to thwart the Council’s oppression of the Nollopians’ “very humanity” has dramatically brightened the spirits of those involved in the movement.

Tassie relates another decree of the Council: that any property that has been vacated by those emigrating from Nollop will be officially annexed by the government. One councilman, Harton Mangrove, is moving onto the estate of Georgie Boonswang, who has been forced to leave. Tassie says that other Council members have contemplated similar moves. Tassie closes her letter quickly due to the fact that she must help with the pangram challenge.

Two days later, Nate writes a love letter to Tassie as he watches her working on the pangram challenge. Rory also writes to Mittie, saying that he appreciates how she is taking care of him while he is sick with the flu. He tells her that he is spending his time in bed working on the pangram challenge, which he does with the aid of a girl named Eugenia, who is seven years old and thus is not subject to the Council’s edicts. Rory has come up with a pangram of 49 letters: “A quick move by the enemy will jeopardize six fine gun boats.” Mittie responds: she marvels at the sentence and she informs him that a professor in Nollopton named Mannheim has created one under 48 letters.

The next day, Tassie tells Mittie that “F” and another “O” fell the previous night. “F” will be excised as of “twelve o’timepiece” the following evening. Still, she says, there is great support for what they are calling “Enterprise Thirty-two.”

Tassie also reveals how Council members laugh at their efforts, watching children running around to write down the sentences the adults try to create them (mostly by miming what they mean). Council members, on the other hand, “gather in reverent, worshipful circle beneath the cenotaph to sing praises to Nollop.” She explains that the recent confiscation of property is a violation of the constitution, but the Council says that they are in an “extraconstitutional crisis.” Tassie writes, however, that they are no longer afraid: they have found courage in their movement.

*To the citizens of Nollop, this mission to come up with a shorter pangram becomes important because it not only represents a means to greater freedom—it actually allows them more mental freedom. Doing so once again enables them to use all 26 letters to make a sentence, even if they can’t be discovered writing that sentence down or speaking it allowed.*



*The annexation of citizens’ personal property is yet another means by which the government is sliding into totalitarianism, while its citizens simply stand by and watch—particularly because those most able to defend their own property have been removed from the island.*



*In the midst of the ongoing betrayal among neighbors, this challenge provides a way in which the citizens can all work together to overthrow the tyranny being perpetuated against them. Additionally, the bonds between these two blooming relationships (Tassie and Nate, Mittie and Rory) highlight the need for love in times of severe political oppression, as the feelings of support for one another help to alleviate their fears and sense of isolation.*



*Even in the face of more and more difficult linguistic restrictions (which result in eschewing familiar phrases like “o’clock”) the citizens of Nollop are finally finding courage and inspiration in a widespread resistance movement.*



*The irony of the Council’s decrees illustrates their own logical fallacy: they have created the constitutional crisis in limiting the linguistic freedom of their citizens. Yet they use this crisis as a justification to limit the citizens’ freedoms even more and to confiscate their property. This demonstrates how the Council is, at its heart, an oppressive government that is using any justification to further their own interests.*



Nate writes to Tassie from the Office of Corrections at Town Center. He says he suspects that the Council has found out about his article on Nollop and that he will likely be kicked off the island. He begs Tassie to stay and fight for Nollop's survival, to work on Enterprise Thirty-Two, so that he might one day return to her. Tassie then writes to Mittie, informing her of Nate's banishment and lamenting that she could not even say goodbye to him.

*The reason for Nate's expulsion demonstrates another hypocrisy on the government's part. In their letter to Gwenette, they argued that no one would be punished for criticizing the government or the content of their letters—which is what enabled them to say that Nollop is still a "free, open society." Yet here, this assertion is proven untrue.*



## CHAPTER 7

Using the letter "F" is now illegal. The High Council (now writing "Ribs" instead of "Fribs" in the date) clarifies another ruling: that citizens will still be able to use the numbers four and five despite the outlawing of the letter "F" because there are no numbers in the "canine-vulpine sentence."

*In this latest clarification, the Council again demonstrates the inherent absurdity of their rulings. Already, the arbitrary names that they instated to replace the days of the week have become moot because of new fallen letters*



That day, Mittie writes to Tassie, saying that she has received a second offense. She was buying shrimp on the pier from a woman named Xenia, but when Mittie said the woman's name and received a shocked stare in return, she realizes that Xenia's name must actually be spelled with a "Z" and not an "X." Georgeanne Towgate was also in line and she reported Mittie for the violation. Mittie is frustrated with herself for the slip and angry at Georgeanne for reporting her twice over.

*Mittie's next slip-up illustrates yet again how neighbors are empowered to betray one another. While saying Xenia's name is a trivial mistake, Georgeanne feels again that it is her civic duty to report this small and inconsequential slip. Although using the letter "Z" obviously doesn't hurt anyone or impact Georgeanne in any way, the fact that she's so eager to turn Mittie in perhaps suggests that Georgeanne is afraid of being caught slipping up herself and she is therefore quick to avert the government's attention elsewhere.*



Ella responds to Mittie for Tassie (who is still heartbroken over Nate's banishment), informing Mittie that Enterprise Thirty-two has hit a wall at 47 letters. Many people in town have given up, believing a 32-letter pangram to be impossible. Many people are also gone from the island—either because of banishment or because they do not want to live in such a "hostile, inhospitable place."

*Here, Dunn implies how leaving Nollop, or being banished from it, can be just as bad as complicity, as there are now so few people left on the island that a resistance movement is difficult to execute.*



Ella gives a few more updates to Mittie: the L.E.B. "thugs" are doing spot home searches, hoping to turn up anything with the illegal letters—including grocery lists. She also notes that the U.S. has stopped business transactions with Nollop, and thus Amos is having a difficult time selling his products. Ella begins to worry again that this crisis may never end.

*Dunn again emphasizes how the enforcement of curtailing speech leaks into the curtailing of other basic freedoms in the society, like the right to privacy in one's home and the right to one's private freedom of expression, even for something as simple as a grocery list.*



Mittie writes to Ella, explaining that Rory is gone: the Council came to his home saying that they had the authority to confiscate his property. The reason given was, “It is the Council’s wish,” which they explained meant Nollop’s wish. The Council representatives said that they wanted to erect a “tabernacle” to worship Nollop. When Rory asked about the “Supreme Being” that they presently choose to worship, they responded that “there is no other Supreme Being but Almighty Nollop.”

Rory then cursed the Council without restraint and he was expelled within the hour. As Rory was shipped off, he left the store to Mittie to run—as long as the Council doesn’t decide to turn it into a church for worshipping Nollop. Mittie assures Ella that they will be able to make a pangram of 32 letters, as she reminds Ella that Nollop could do it and he was “an imbecile.”

Tassie writes to Nate, saying that they have hit a wall at 47 letters and that recently three more tiles (two “E’s” and a “B”) fell. There is one “E” remaining to them, but “B” will be banished in 36 hours. She writes that losing any letter is now “problematic.” She hopes “the cavalry will come to [their] rescue,” before realizing that they have to be their own cavalry. Tassie closes the letter by telling Nate that she misses him and she hopes that he will get her letter and write back to her.

## CHAPTER 8

The letter “B” is banned on “Topsy Turvy, Octavia 19.” Tassie writes again to Nate, telling him that Professor Mannheim has come up with a 44-letter pangram: “six big devils from Japan quickly forgot how to walk.” She also tells him that someone is relaying death threats to the Council and that the Council in turn is putting people who are “not in league with the cult” under house arrest.

Tassie explains to Nate that most of the people in Nollopville are coming to Nollopton or migrating to the States, and that people are wondering whether to abandon their homes and “renounce [their] mother soil.” Tassie finishes her letter with a confession: she wrote the threats to the Council. She acknowledges that if anyone were to learn of this, she could be executed. She closes, writing that she loves him.

*Up until this point, the Council’s faith in Nollop has simply been one of ideological adoration, as they admired his use of language and they wanted to follow his wishes for the direction of their country. But here, their deification of the man hits a turning point, adding another curtailed freedom to the list: freedom of religion.*



*It seems that Rory’s expulsion is a turning point for Mittie: whereas before she was open to the idea of Nollop as a kind of deity figure, now she sees through the Council’s beliefs and she wholly rejects the notion that Nollop should be worshipped or obeyed.*



*Tassie seems to recognize the Nollopians’ complicity in this letter to Nate. She addresses the fact that no one is coming to help them; instead, they have to help themselves. The biggest issue, however, is that there are so few people to help that resistance is almost impossible. Now, it seems, they are bearing the fruit of their earlier complacency.*



*While the Council previously put out a statement on the word replacing Thursday (Thurby), they have not given any such guidance on October now that “B” has been banned, nor a replacement for the word Thurby. Thus, certain accepted terminology is replaced by the chaos of everyone using their own versions of that nomenclature, providing another example of how a mainstay of society is quickly devolving into gibberish.*



*Tassie’s letter to Nate gives insight into how the bonds that form societies are slowly dissolving—that is, the bonds between people are breaking down and they are forced to renounce their former patriotism. Because Nollopville is a small town, losing anyone has a large impact on the way the town can function. Additionally, the bonds that the people share as a group are hard to find in other places, which is what makes their solidarity going forward even more crucial.*



Georgianne Towgate writes to Mittie asking for her help: the school is saying that her son Timmy turned eight last month, when she and Nash believed that Timmy would turn eight on “Novemgroogy 13.” They do not have the papers to prove their claim. Georgianne begs Mittie to go to the school to find something that proves Timmy won’t turn eight until the following month. Mittie responds saying that she searched the school but she could not find anything that would help. She writes that she is truly sorry.

Gwenette writes to Mittie with horrible news, saying that the Council has Tassie in custody and that she is awaiting trial as a suspect in the anonymous threats to the Council. Gwenette writes that the Council has stated “expulsion will not constitute a legal punitive option.”

Amos writes a letter to Ella and Gwenette, saying that he is about to be expelled from the island and that he cannot stand for the loss of language any longer. He writes, “the devils aren’t in Japan! The devils are here.” He begs them to forgive him for gaining a third offense and he says that they don’t have to see him off. But he asks for a small favor: if they do come, he writes, “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs?”

That same day, the Council gives another proclamation: the next day, the letter “C” will cease to exist. The Council also notes that one of the “U”s fell but that another remains intact.

## CHAPTER 9

The day after, Georgianne Towgate writes to Mittie saying that she was grateful that she went to the “learn-y-house” to help Timmy. She explains, however, that Timmy has been expelled from Nollop and that Nash went with him. Georgianne explains that she has stayed to retain their house; she apologizes for reporting Mittie and she asks if Mittie would write to her. She wonders if Mittie is thinking of moving to town, as it is “ghostly silent here.” Two days later, Georgianne writes again, asking where Mittie is—noting that her house seems empty. Georgianne wonders if Mittie has left, leaving her completely alone in town.

*Dunn illustrates the sad irony of Georgianne Towgate’s initial mistakes of reporting Mittie, as now the rules have come back to haunt her. Georgianne’s change of heart exemplifies the overall arc of the Nollopians. Whereas at first they were fearful of others and betrayed their neighbors, now they seek each other out in order to find support and rebuild the society that they have helped to destroy.*



*Tassie’s imprisonment, and the exceedingly harsh punishment that Gwenette thinks awaits her, illustrates the Council’s fear of resistance and their worry that others will join. Thus far, they have achieved their power due to the general complacency of Nollopians.*



*Again, Dunn shows how limitations on the freedom of speech not only threaten communication and culture, but the very relationships that people cherish. With Amos’s expulsion, Ella’s family unit has been completely upheaved, thus demonstrating the painful, far-reaching consequences of the Nollopians’ initial complacency toward the Councils’ statutes.*



*The Council’s latest edict demonstrates how, in some ways, the country is past the point of resistance—even from the Council. Losing “C” will be certainly be detrimental to the Council since their very identity as a governing body begins with this letter, yet even they seem unable to stop it as they must uphold the same standard in order to remain consistent in their ruling. Thus, the totalitarianism and oppression has taken hold to the point that the government itself is negatively affected.*



*Dunn illustrates how the language and society continue to dissolve when basic words are taken away: without the word “school,” “learn-y-house” becomes the only way to communicate that noun. Yet in the midst of this oppression, Dunn again uses Georgianne’s storyline to demonstrate how betrayals among neighbors ultimately hurt the betrayer just as much as those who are betrayed. Now, it seems this destructive attitude has given way to mutual support and an attempt at solidarity.*



Mittie writes to Tassie, informing her that she has been waiting all “postnoon” to see Tassie at the prison, and that she has been told nothing. Two days later, Nate writes to Mittie at Gwenette’s house, saying that he has stowed away back to Nollop to come rescue Tassie.

The following day, Gwenette writes to Ella explaining that while Ella was trying to visit Tassie, the L.E.B. was sent to interrogate Gwenette, and she grew nervous and spoke an illegal letter. She says that she is about to be transported to the United States and she begs Ella to “Maintain the struggle. In [their] name. In [their] honor.”

Tassie writes to Ella from prison, saying that she and Mittie must stop waiting to see her—no one is allowed to visit her. She signs off “Love,” but notes she will no longer be able to do so going forward now that “V” has fallen. She writes, “A new letter goes. So what else is new?”

*Tassie’s arrest is emblematic of how corrupt the government is at this point. Any form of resistance to their actions is met with unjust imprisonment, as the regime’s control over its remaining citizens becomes tighter and tighter.*



*Gwenette’s interrogation likewise emphasizes how the government is so corrupt that they are essentially coercing or entrapping their citizens into making mistakes simply so that they can maintain control and assert their power. Even though Gwenette asks Ella to continue to resist, it is clear that this will be a difficult task.*



*Dunn once again points out how the substance of a language is deeply affected by the words society is allowed use. Without “V,” the word love—and thus the ability to fully express one’s love—becomes impossible. Additionally, Tassie’s lack of reaction to this news shows how complacency has enabled the Council’s influence to grow to a point where letting go of this valuable letter is almost a non-event.*



## CHAPTER 10

A man named William P., who is a sentry at the prison, writes to Ella, saying that he let a young Southern man (Nate) take Tassie away along with Mittie. He says that he was whipped for it but that he wanted to make sure Tassie could be released. He tells Ella, therefore, that she does not have to return to the prison. Tassie writes to Ella the same day, informing Ella that Nate rescued her and that she, Nate, and Mittie are on their way to the States. She says that Enterprise Thirty-two is now up to Ella.

Ella writes to “woman in pretty orange hat,” saying that she saw the woman rummaging in the Italian restaurant for food yesterday. She asks to meet the woman and invites her for dinner, saying that everyone else she knows has left. Ella also informs her that Wally, who runs a grocery store in town, is rationing food to citizens. The woman, whose name is Tanya, responds, saying that she was looking for gas for their generator, because no one remains to operate the power plant. She closes, agreeing that Wally is a humane man and saying, “We must all help one another.”

*William P.’s bravery and sacrifice serves as another way to highlight how the members of society have shifted from betraying one another to trying to help one another. The bonds between Tassie and Nate, and Tassie and her mother, also become critical in enabling her rescue as love and solidarity provide a beacon of hope within the oppressive regime.*



*Ella likewise is discovering the need to stick with other citizens and help one another in trying times. This is particularly necessary, as Tanya points out, because there are so few people left that basic societal needs are disappearing—all as a result of the limits on language and the government’s regulations.*



Two days later, Ella thanks Tanya for sharing dinner at Tanya's home the previous night. She was happy to meet Tanya's family, Professor Mannheim, and Mannheim's assistant Tom. At dinner, Tom informed Ella that the state operates now "only to relate the next letters to omit," and that all the "high priests" do is pay homage to Nollop. Ella finishes her letter by asking if Tanya will join for tea the next day, and she exalts in the fact that they found a 43-letter pangram ("My girl wove six dozen plaid jackets before she quit").

Tom writes to Ella, informing her that he and Mannheim are the only ones left to complete Enterprise Thirty-two. He explains that all other students at the university were expelled and that all the other citizens are using their energy to simply keep themselves safe during these hard times. Tom worries over the fact that there are only 11 days left in their challenge and that "U" is now gone, the first "aeiouy" to go. Tom also comments on how pretty Ella is and he asks her to have dinner with him the next evening at the "unilearnity."

## CHAPTER 11

The letter "U" has been banned. Ella writes to yet another stranger, saying that she is trying to write to anyone who is still around. She notes, "It is important that we say something to one another—any little thing. We are not low-tier animals." She gets an anonymous response saying, "Go away. Let us alone."

Georgianne Towgate leaves a letter on Ella's door, hoping that Mittie now lives with Gwenette. Georgianne explains that she has moved to Nollopton and she apologizes again for what she did to Mittie, saying "I am so sorry as I mention earlier, the things that I perpetrate to harm Mittie." She begs Mittie to respond, emphasizing how lonely she is.

Ella responds to Georgianne, saying that Mittie is now in the United States with "her she-heir Tassie." She asks Georgianne to eat with her that evening. Ella also sends word to Tom, explaining that she is helping Georgianne, whom she notes is very lonely. She also thanks Tom for sharing dinner the other night. "I am happy I met thee," she writes. Tom responds, explaining excitedly that they have made progress: a 37-letter pangram. It reads, "Zelda quickly wove eight nubby flax jumpers."

*Tom's stories emphasize how society has essentially collapsed as a result of the combination of the limitations on language and the totalitarian hold that the government has on the society. Again, Dunn shows how blind faith has pushed the Council past the point of wanting what is best for the island—now, they are simply keeping up the rules that they have laid out to maintain power.*



*Tom's letter examines the harm in the citizens' initial complacency and the way that this has hindered future attempts at resistance. Now, with so few people left, there is no way to mount any kind of resistance, particularly as people are preoccupied with simply surviving.*



*Ella continues to try to create solidarity and extend basic common decency among those that are still in Nollop—but the stranger's response illustrates the kind of fear and mistrust that has been sown into the fabric of society as a result of these statutes.*



*As Georgianne continues to search for Mittie in order to apologize, this action represents a clear shift away from the initial betrayal that citizens showed each other and toward a need for solidarity and camaraderie.*



*Ella recognizes the value of finding support both in Georgianne and in Tom, as she continues to try to connect with strangers and look for support. It is these kinds of connections that spur Enterprise Thirty-Two to continue, displaying the necessity of love in feeding their hopes and their attempts to return the island to its former state.*



A “Nollop High Holy Orter” comes through, saying that Nollopians are allowed to use similar-sounding combinations of letters to substitute others (as opposed to coming up with entirely new words)—but only in writing. They say that they are not sure that this is what Nollop would want but they are allowing it until they rule otherwise.

Tanya writes to Ella saying that a man named Mr. M., who was just fired by the Council, told her about how they were drunk with power. Mr. M. believes that two of the five Council members don’t even care about Nollop’s will—they are simply content to exert the undue power they’ve been afforded. Tanya says that it seems Lyttle is the only one who is still sane.

Tanya also describes how her brother-in-law was standing below the statue when the letter “X” fell on him. The “priests” rushed up to get the tile but they left her brother-in-law lying there on the ground unconscious. Tanya tells Ella that a “T,” “R,” and “H” also fell, but that they each have one more tile that remains on the statue.

## CHAPTER 12

Lyttle writes to Ella informing her that Mannheim is dead. He explains that Mannheim used an illegal letter in an interview with the L.E.B. after they saw him and Tom trying to break into the university. When they tried to transport Mannheim to exile, he and Tom fled, and the police shot Mannheim in the head. Lyttle apologizes for having to tell Ella this and he says he doesn’t know what happened to Tom.

Ella thanks Lyttle for the letter and for fighting for the statute that allows them to use “hear-twins.” She asks why he doesn’t fight to overturn all of the statutes so that they can restore the island to how it used to be. Lyttle replies, writing that Ella is asking for the impossible and that their only course is to find a 32-letter pangram.

A woman named Marigold Shropshire writes to Ella, announcing that she has Mannheim’s orphaned daughter Paula with her. She explains that she has too many foster children to look after, and so she is sending Paula to Ella because there are no other relatives for Paula to go to. Tom also writes a note to Ella, explaining that he is alive and well but that he is in hiding. He says Enterprise Thirty-Two is Ella’s responsibility now, with only a week left.

*This statute serves as another turning point on Nollop: language has become so difficult that even the Council understands the need to use letters as substitutes for others. It is here that the degradation of language becomes extremely noticeable, imitating the degradation of society.*



*Here Dunn reveals the other danger of blind faith: not only is it difficult to refute, but because of that difficulty, it is often used as a means of ensuring and maintaining power. Because they believe they can never be disproven, the Council acts as though they, too, have become deified by proxy.*



*Here, Dunn highlights how, for the Council, all basic human decency has been completely eradicated. They display no care for the citizens whom they claim to rule—instead, they’re more interested in policing people’s actions than ensuring their survival.*



*This action by the Council shows its complete descent into totalitarianism: the state is now killing citizens without a trial simply because they refuse to be completely subservient to the government. This, it seems, is the ultimate consequence of not having stood up to the Council in the initial days of the statute.*



*Lyttle’s letter implies that the Council is so powerful and so corrupt that even its members are now essentially victims of its own oppression. Lyttle is only one of five Councilmembers and yet he seems powerless to do anything against its tyranny. Resistance is only possible through Enterprise Thirty-Two, the movement of the people.*



*Ella is once again aware of the need to support others in this oppressive era when she is forced to become a foster mother to Mannheim’s young daughter. Where once the idea of taking in a stranger would have been a fearful prospect, now Ella cannot question it because she knows this young girl needs a home and there are too few people who can take care of her.*



Ella asks Tanya if she has seen Georgeanne, as Ella has not heard from her recently. Georgeanne, learning of Ella's concern, writes to say that she is fine and that she has started to **paint** her own body—she is making herself into a kind of abstract painting. Ella responds saying that it's not healthy to paint her whole body and asks Georgeanne to be careful. The next day, Tanya writes that Georgeanne is in the hospital with lead poisoning—and that “Y” has fallen.

*Painting, which was once a hobby for Georgeanne, painting has ultimately become an obsession as the only means of expressing herself, and this clearly has dangerous consequences for her health. This demonstrates that without freedom of speech, it becomes difficult to find a safe and effective method of expressing oneself.*



## CHAPTER 13

Only 14 letters remain, with four days left to complete Enterprise Thirty-Two. Ella writes to Mr. Lyttle (now spelled “Little”), informing him that Georgeanne has died from lead poisoning. She says her friend Tanya has also decided to take Paula with her family to the States, as Tanya feels Nollop is a wasteland” Ella writes that she feels alone and forgotten and she wonders if Lyttle is leaving as well. Lyttle responds that he will not leave and that he has joined the effort of Enterprise Thirty-Two.

*It is telling that Lyttle is now joining the resistance against the very government to which he belongs, as it serves as a marker of how corrupt and oppressive the government has become, uncontrollable even by those within it. The action also highlights the necessity of this resistance movement, but it implies that it could have been much more effective if it had begun when enough people were around to help in the effort.*



Ella writes to Georgeanne's family, expressing her sympathy for her death. Tanya writes a farewell to Ella, wishing her well with Enterprise Thirty-Two and thanking her for her friendship. She also tells Ella that “H” has fallen.

*Ella's loneliness on Nollop demonstrates how much she needed the friendship and solidarity that she'd found in both Georgeanne and Tanya. Without that, Ella's own isolation and hopelessness grows.*



## CHAPTER 14

Ella writes to Nate with two days left in Enterprise Thirty-two asking him to get word to Gwenette and Amos that she is well and that she is determined to outlast the tyranny. Ella says she will either learn how to speak using numbers or she will learn sign language. She says she misses them all and that she is re-reading old letters for company. Additionally, Ella says that she will no longer write letters because it's too fatiguing to try to get her point across with so few letters to work with. The Council issues another statute that “G” will be outlawed that night at midnight.

*While Ella's final letter displays her determination and her struggle to resist, it is clear that the burden of resistance is taking a toll on her. Like others before her, the lack of speech has made it entirely impossible for her to communicate, and it is doubtful that many people are communicating with the outside world on Nollop. Thus, without that communication, it is as if the society does not exist because no one knows what is happening there.*



## CHAPTER 15

Ella writes a note to herself, horrified that 8 tiles fell with only 24 hours remaining in her challenge. She writes that the end is near and she wonders where she can get some **paint**.

*Ella's note to herself, wondering where the paint might be, displays her utter hopelessness. Georgeanne poisoned herself using lead paint, so Ella's comment suggests that she is contemplating suicide in order to escape her current plight. Ella clearly feels that her freedom of expression is so curtailed that it is almost not worth living.*





## CHAPTER 16

Only five letters remain: L, M, N, O, and P. Ella writes a final letter of outcry and rebellion. She writes, “No mo Nollop pomp! No mo Nollop poo poo! No mo 4 pop/1 moll Nollop looloo poop!” and she ends with a final “OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” Ella then finds the final sentence from Amos’s last letter to her and Gwenette: “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs?” She writes the sentence repeatedly, each time highlighting a different letter of the alphabet: it is a 32-letter pangram.

*Ella’s final note is barely intelligible and it shows the true cost of losing one’s fundamental rights: she is unable to express herself or to be understood by others. Without freedom of speech, people become isolated and society inevitably collapses due to a lack of speech. Ella finds Amos’s accidental 32-letter pangram purely by luck, thereby completing Enterprise Thirty-two, and it is only through this that she’ll be able to save Nollop from disappearing.*



## CHAPTER 17

Ella writes to Rederick Lyttle using the entire alphabet, wherein she provides the 32-letter pangram, “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs?” She says that the credit is due to Amos, but that he created the sentence unintentionally. Thus, she posits, anyone could have come up with a sentence even without knowing so, and thus Nollop need not have been a deity to come up with his own pangram. Lyttle writes back to Ella, accepting the sentence. He explains that all statutes have been rescinded.

*Ella’s letter to Lyttle proves exactly the point that Nate made when they came up with the Enterprise Thirty-two challenge: that Nollop cannot be a deity if they can come up with a better pangram. This refutes the Council’s beliefs in their entirety, allowing Ella to disprove the basis of their blind faith.*



Lyttle invites Ella and Tom for tea with him. Ella then writes to Gwenette, Amos, Mittie, and Tassie, explaining what has happened. She tells them that the Council members declared the pangram a miracle. Ella explains that it was *not* a miracle, though, and that Nollop’s first pangram was not a miracle either. She writes that Mr. Lyttle took her and Tom down to a vault with preserved documents from Nollop’s history that were spared from censorship. He showed Ella and Tom a children’s book wherein a fox jumped over a “lazy dog,” which likely led to the sentence Nollop created. She explains that Nollop might not even have written the sentence for which they credit him.

*It is ironic that Lyttle has this reserve of documents on Nollop’s history—one of which essentially shows that Nollop likely didn’t come up with the pangram on his own. It illustrates, even after the fact, how corrupt the government had been. In trying to erase the island’s history, the Council guaranteed that it could not be challenged—only emphasizing the need for free speech and the ability to have access to one’s own history.*



Ella goes on to say that all Council members except Lyttle resigned, and Harton Mangrove attempted suicide. She and Tom also destroyed Nollop’s statue with sledgehammers. Ella says that some survivors wanted to create a statue of her or Amos, but she suggested instead that they erect a sculpture of a large box filled with sixty moonshine jugs: “disorder to match the clutter and chaos of our marvelous language.” Ella concludes by saying that she cannot wait to see them all again.

*In refusing to have a statue made of her or Amos, and instead glorifying language, Ella attempts to ensure that no one can ever put blind faith into a figure like Nollop again. Instead, faith should be put into the “marvelous language” that was the pride and joy of the island prior to the statutes.*



In a final letter, Nate writes to a computer scientist in America, asking if he could come up with the shortest possible pangram they can create in English, with minimal proper names. The man writes back with four sentences. First, a 26-letter pangram: “J.Q. Vandz struck my big fox whelp.” One of the other three is “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs.”

*The final letter of the novel illustrates the true fortune that Ella found in Amos's sentence—as even a computer could not come up with much better pangrams than they were able to. Thus, Dunn implies how without that lucky find, the island could have easily descended into a state of devastation and oppression, all because no one felt they could stand up to the Council's regime.*





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