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Close Reading Organizer - Chapter 34 **Sample Answers**

Directions: Read each summary entry and think about which themes listed in the Themes Key apply to it, then color in those themes in the Theme Tracker. Next, write a few sentences of Analysis to explain how the themes you chose apply to each summary section.

Note: There is not always a definitive set of “correct” answers for which themes should appear in the Theme Tracker. Answers that differ from the ones we propose below should therefore not automatically be treated as incorrect, and in fact can serve as great discussion starters.

Themes Key

- 1 Gender Roles
- 2 Religion and Theocracy
- 3 Fertility
- 4 Rebellion
- 5 Love
- 6 Storytelling and Memory

Summary	Theme Tracker						Your Analysis
<p>Back in the present day, the Commander in charge of the Prayvaganza enters, and Offred imagines him having sex with his Handmaid. The Commander gives a speech, and then twenty blue-clad mothers give twenty white-veiled daughters in arranged marriage to twenty Angels, who wear black. Offred thinks that soon, none of the daughters will remember the liberties of the time before Gilead, including reading and wearing comfortable clothes.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>Offred’s musing about how the next generation won’t know what life was like outside or before Gilead is thematically linked to the “Historical Notes” at the book’s end. People forget the past as easily as they lack empathy for one another, and even storytelling is of limited use to preserve experiences.</p>

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<p>Offred flashes back to an evening with the Commander, when he explained that Gilead actually made things better for women. They no longer had to deal with the hardships of finding a husband or fitting a certain beauty standard, and they didn't have to worry about abusive husbands or getting by as single mothers. The Commander then asked Offred what the Gilead authorities left out, and she said love. But the Commander said arranged marriages statistically succeed as well as love-based ones. Offred also remembered Aunt Lydia disdaining love. The Commander asserted that Gilead's way was more traditional and natural.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>Offred thinks that lack of love is the most important issue with Gilead. Though the Commander thinks he's defended Gilead by defending arranged marriages (which in the real world as well may be even more successful than the unarranged ones), Gilead's love problems go deeper. Even within the marriages, the paranoia, strict hierarchy, and lack of freedom make love difficult, if not impossible.</p>
<p>Back at the Prayvaganza, Offred thinks about the women usually celebrate weddings, and the men celebrate military victories. But some women's Prayvaganzas sometime happen when young nuns agree to become Handmaids. (Older nuns go to the Colonies.) The young nuns don't seem to renounce their ways easily, since they all bear signs of torture.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>The nuns' bravery in the face of torture demonstrates the difference between actual religion (which the novel supports) and the rigidity of theocracy. Despite Catholicism's gender rules, the nuns prove themselves to be as rebellious and brave as Moira.</p>
<p>The Commander in charge of the Prayvaganza reads from the bible about how women must be modest,</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>Offred's wry imaginary advice shows the gap between the lofty Biblical passage and the wretched</p>

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<p>silent, and kept under men’s authority, since Eve lead Adam astray. He reads that women will “be saved by childbearing.” The Angels lift off their new brides’ veils, to see their faces for the first time. Offred imagines advice to the young brides in dealing with the boring sex to come.</p>							<p>reality of Gilead. The whole Prayvaganza functions as a counterpoint to the Commander’s assertion that, in Gilead, men can feel again.</p>
<p>Offred goes into a Rachel and Leah Center flashback. She remembers Aunt Lydia explaining that the women must work together, and then Moira making fun of her words in the bathroom, imagining that Aunt Lydia has made Janine into her sex slave. Offred wanted to laugh, but acted serious, and Moira called her a wimp. Back at the Prayvaganza, Offred realizes that Moira was right that it does good to make fun of the powerful. She imagines the embarrassing, unattractive sex between the Angels and their new wives.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>Offred may be wrong to attribute the laughing-at-power idea to Moira— Offred’s been making fun of those in power from the beginning of the book. Offred underestimates her own rebellious instincts, even though, as Moira points out, she wimpily tries to hide it.</p>
<p>After the Prayvaganza, Ofglen whispers to Offred that she knows about Offred’s secret meetings with the Commander. Ofglen is curious if they’re having illicit sex, and Offred doesn’t confess what’s really happening, since the Scrabble doesn’t have “the dignity of coercion.” Ofglen tells</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>Surprisingly, Offred is ashamed of her respectful, almost egalitarian relationship with the Commander, so she gives Ofglen a different impression. She doesn’t want to disappoint her rebellious new friend by seeming to be agreeable to the Commander.</p>

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Offered to use the meetings to learn anything she can, and report back.				
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