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Close Reading Organizer - Chapter 23 **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
Back in the present time, Offred muses about how all of her memories are “reconstructions.” If she ever manages to escape and tell her story, that too will be a reconstruction, even further separated from the original events. Offred thinks about the impossibility of remembering and telling anything perfectly. She thinks that maybe her biggest concern isn’t who has control, but who can do terrible things and still be forgiven for them. At the end of all these thoughts, Offred tells us	1	2	3	4	5	6	This is a crucial passage for understanding the role of memory in the novel. Offred links memory and forgiveness. When you can’t remember the horrible specifics, you’re more likely to forgive—and when you forgive atrocities, you allow others to have power. Perhaps all of her memories of Aunt Lydia aren’t brainwashing, but an obsessive desire <i>not</i> to forget and forgive.

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that the Commander asked her to kiss him.							
Offred backs up into an explanatory flashback. Still on the day that Janine gave birth, Offred wakes from her nap when Cora brings dinner. Cora is happy about the healthy baby and hopeful that Offred will have one too. Offred wishes that Cora were disapproving instead.	1	2	3	4	5	6	Offred both longs for connection and longs to be put in her place. She's worried about disappointing others, but she was afraid to take the doctor's offer.
At nine pm, Offred goes to meet the Commander in his office, as Nick previously instructed her. Offred is powerfully aware of the illegality of this action, and how Serena Joy would punish her. Still, Offred knows that she now has some amount of power over the Commander.	1	2	3	4	5	6	Offred is more willing to rebel when someone instructs her to do so—she's risk averse. The Commander can't turn her in without implicating himself.
The Commander's study is filled with books. The Commander has posed himself impressively in front of the fireplace. When he says hello to Offred , she feels she might cry. The Commander is friendly and sits across from her, showing that he's not going to take physical advantage of her. The Commander finally says that he wants to play Scrabble with Offred.	1	2	3	4	5	6	The Commander's posing is a reminder of pre-Gilead masculinity and courtship. In a funny twist, the Commander rebels not by taking advantage of Offred, but by being more gentlemanly and friendly than Gilead would allow. It appears that nearly all the people in Gilead, even those in power, wish for a degree of human connection that Gilead's rules won't allow.
Offred finds this hysterical, but she keeps herself expressionless. She understands that this once	1	2	3	4	5	6	Offred's fusing of two wonderful things, reading and delicious candy, is a positive version of her

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<p>innocent game is now illegal, as risky as a drug. And she knows that the Commander can't play with Serena Joy. They play two games—she wins the first, then lets him win. Offred loves the feeling of freedom and of using the letters, which she imagines as tasting delicious.</p>							<p>previous, more tragic fusing of Nick and Luke or tulips and blood. She categorizes the world based on highly personal emotion.</p>
<p>At the end, the Commander thanks Offred and asks her to kiss him. Offred considers following Moira's lead and making a weapon out of the toilet mechanism and killing the Commander next time. Then Offred confesses that she only pictured such violence afterwards, during her reconstruction. At the time, she gives the Commander a close-mouthed kiss, and he asks for one that seems more meaningful, and looks sad. But then Offred says again that this is just a reconstruction.</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	<p>Why does Offred want to tell the story in a way that suggests she's more violent and the Commander's more emotional than they really are? Maybe because she's ashamed of her obedience. Maybe because she doesn't want to think that the kiss meant nothing. The passage shows how Offred creates the experience she wants later, through memory.</p>