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READER'S GUIDE

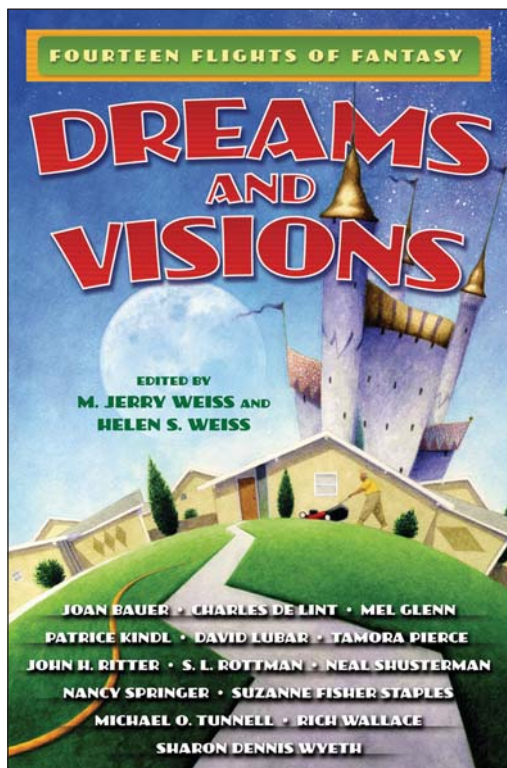
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Edited by
**M. Jerry Weiss and
Helen S. Weiss**

Dreams and Visions

Fourteen Flights of Fantasy



“A strong collection that surprises and delights with every turn of the page.”

—VOYA

ABOUT THE EDITORS

M. Jerry Weiss is an accomplished author, playwright, and Distinguished Service Professor of Communications Emeritus at New Jersey City University, who counts among his many honors the 1997 International Reading Association Special Service Award and the National Council of Teachers of English Distinguished Service Award. An extensively published children's book author and scholar of humor, **Helen Weiss** is coeditor, with husband Jerry, of several story anthologies including *From One Experience to the Other*, *Lost and Found*, and *Big City Cool*. They live in Montclair, New Jersey.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The information, activities, and discussion questions which follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Dreams and Visions*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. SHORT STORIES & NOVELS

A. Find definitions for the literary terms “short story” and “novel,” including a list of the main literary characteristics (and, if desired, key subcategories, such as the “gothic novel” and “graphic novel”) in your research. Name at least one notable author from each genre, such as short story writer Katherine Mansfield or Pulitzer Prize-winning comic/graphic novelist Art Spiegelman. Go to the library or online to find comments and quotations by authors discussing the challenges of short story writing. Organize the results of your research by creating an informative poster for your home or classroom.

B. Use information from exercise IA, above to study the stories in *Dreams and Visions*. Which tale is most traditional in its structure? Which least satisfies your definition of short story, or is most unusual in its form? How might you categorize, or group, the fourteen stories in this collection—by theme, setting, writing style? Which story had the most impact for you? Can you explain this impact in terms of the story's structure?

C. Imagine you are going to develop one of the short stories from *Dreams and Visions* into a novel. Write an essay explaining why you think your chosen story could evolve into an interesting novel. Create an outline for expanding this story into novel form, noting new characters, settings, or events you would add and how they build upon the original work.

D. Read a novel by the author of your favorite short story from this collection. Then write an essay comparing his or her two works. What, if any, similarities did you find between the story and novel? What might you identify as a “trademark” of this author?

II. COLLECTIONS

A. Find a definition for the term “anthology.” Make a brainstorm list of anthologies of art, music, or literature of which you are aware. With friends or classmates, discuss why you think people create literary anthologies.

B. Write a paragraph describing your thoughts on the organizing principle(s) of *Dreams and Visions*. Note whether you might have made other organizational choices or suggested the inclusion of one or more additional short stories and why.

C. Collecting is a fascinating human activity. From words and stories to coins and stamps, people find meaning and satisfaction in putting together like objects and ideas. Write a short story or essay about something you collect or about a collection or collector that you know. If desired, present a collection of your own to friends or classmates, describing how and why you began (and, if applicable, stopped) making this collection and its value to you today. Afterward, discuss whether you feel there is a relationship between the collection of stories or ideas and the collection of objects.

D. Is there a literary form, political position, or other notion about which you are particularly interested? Create your own anthology exploring this idea. You might create a list of graphic novels about girls, rock songs celebrating small towns, or twentieth century paintings of horses. Using graphic design or publishing software, create an illustrated brochure for your anthology, including bibliographic information and illustrations or graphics. Write an introductory paragraph explaining the value of this anthology and how you hope it will be used. Share your completed brochure with friends or classmates.

III. FANTASTIC MOMENTS

A. Write your own definition of the term “fantasy” on a large index card. Then, go to the library or online to find a definition for this literary genre. Compare your original definition with the research-based definition. Invite classmates or friends to share their definitions and discuss the results of this exercise.

B. Identify the magical or other supernatural image(s) in one or more of the stories in *Dreams and Visions*. Write a paragraph explaining which of these images most speaks to you and why. And/or write a poem or short story in which you use this same image differently than the author from this collection.

C. Create a painting, manga-style illustration, clay or fabric sculpture or other visual arts rendering of a fantastical object, character or scene from one of the stories in *Dreams and Visions*. Present your artwork to friends or classmates, explaining how you translated your object or scene from words to image.

D. Write yourself into a story. Imagine you are a secondary character in one of the stories in this collection, such as a track team member in “Allegro” or a neighborhood child in “Depressing Acres.” Write several paragraphs in which you describe your actions and reactions to the events of the story.

E. What can we learn from stories based on ancient myths, fantastical worlds, magic, and the supernatural? How can such literary motifs inform modern-day readers? Answer these questions in a draft essay for your school newspaper, a literary magazine, or a fantasy literature website. Cite examples from the stories in *Dreams and Visions*, or other works of fantasy you have read, in your essay.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the opening sentence of the opening story of *Dreams and Visions*, the author laments that her “princess isn’t working.” What are at least two ways to define the “princess” of this quotation? Why do you think the editors chose to begin their fantasy story collection with this notion—and this story?

2. What is the significance of the change of the main character’s name from “Jimmy” to “Jameel” in “Jameel and the House of Djinn”? How might this change be related to his experience of the djinni and the maulvi’s observation that “We value truth the most when it comes through difficult experience”? Is this observation true for you?

3. Compare and contrast the romantic imagery in “Dharma” and “Allegro.” What fantastical objects center the plots of each of these stories? Does the narrator “get the girl” at the end of either story? What might be the significance of these results?

4. Describe Martin’s shifting notions of good and evil magic, enemies and friends, as he struggles to come to terms with the death of his mother and sister. Have you ever had to face an unpleasant truth about someone close to you—or someone about whom you thought highly? How might this experience help you understand Martin’s emotional journey?

5. How do Mrs. Duck of “Depressing Acres” and Warty in “The Youngest One” call to mind characters from folklore? Compare and contrast Mona’s and Jessie’s interactions with these characters in their respective stories. How do both of these old women help the protagonists discover their own “powers”?

6. How is running used as a very different metaphor in “Red Sky” and “Allegro”? Do you see other similarities—in imagery or structure—shared by these narratives or would you argue that they are basically unrelated tales?

7. How do “Abra-ca-deborah” and “The Hidden Girl” deal with gender discrimination? How do Deborah and Teky each serve as vehicles for empowerment of their gender? Which story do you find to be more “realistic” in its setting and tone? What other stories in this collection might also be included in an exploration of gender relationships and stereotypes? Explain.

8. Early in the story “Ryan and Angel in the Green Room,” the question is posed “What is your idea of what lies Beyond? What is your vision, your fantasy, your destiny?” Make the case for this quotation as the unifying theme of this collection.

9. Both “Ryan and Angel in the Green Room” and “Baseball in Iraq” explore notions of the afterlife. Why do you think both authors chose to incorporate passages of poetry or free verse into their stories? Compare and contrast other elements of these similarly themed tales, including the outcomes for the two protagonists.

10. In “An Interview with the Actress Celeste,” the narrator observes that “an actor must be a dreamer of sorts, giving shape to theatrical shadows.” Is this also true for writers? Define the term “dream” in terms of this story and in terms of the idea of creativity.

11. In “Majority Rules,” an angel explains that “reality is a fluid thing, always changing.” What does the angel mean by this? Do you agree? Do you think the actions or beliefs of individuals can have an effect on the world? Explain your answer.

12. In “The Hidden Girl,” Teky finally answers the Gods correctly when she explains that in her visions she sees “power.” Who wields power in the stories of *Dreams and Visions*? How is imagination a source of power?

13. Does your imagination—or “flights of fantasy”—affect the way you make decisions in your “real” life? Explain your answer.