



# *The Silver Blonde*

Written by Elizabeth Ross

Grades 9-12

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## Questions

1. From Chapter 25: “Nature was always close in Los Angeles. It threatened to take over: bougainvillea rambling over buildings, warping fence posts; Ficus roots cracking asphalt; avocado trees littering sidewalks with overripe fruit. The perfect weather - it emboldened nature, made it reckless, disrespectful of the man-made world” (209-210). Noir films are notable for the way the setting frequently functions like a character. Describe the characterization of Ross’ view of Los Angeles and its role in the narrative.
2. How do architecture and cityscapes compare and contrast in Los Angeles, Silver Pacific Studios, and Palm Springs? What makes each primary location distinctive? Why are these details important?
3. Max remarks, “Hollywood wants you or it doesn’t, and you don’t have a say. It’s not such a nice business.” Clara often feels tension as an outsider at Silver Pacific Studios. She also actively conceals her immigration status, careful not to reveal too much about where she comes from. What motivates and reinforces this hesitation? Which events are particularly pivotal in helping her find place and belonging? How does this compare or contrast with other female characters in *The Silver Blonde*, such as Connie, Bannon, and Leni Riefenstahl?
4. Consider this segment from the closing scenes of the novel: “Film has an almost magic capacity to transform. There is a weight and a dazzle to it...a glitter that augments real life into something else; something wonderful. The spell of cinema. The grandeur and scope of a wide shot; or the breath and intimacy of the closeup. You watch the actors as you would your own reflection. The film is happening to you, not just the character. You are not a bystander simply watching. You feel: you are” (370).



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How does Ross, a former film editor herself, use cinematic techniques to establish and compose the novel’s scenes and sequences? How does her naming of L.A. places and film techniques as chapter titles contribute to the cinematic feel of the book?

5. Discuss ways in which past/present and history/memory contribute to *The Silver Blonde*’s storyline, Southern California setting, and crime solving.

### Activities

1. Research and view one of the films mentioned in *The Silver Blonde*. What new insights do you have about Los Angeles culture, film noir, or Hollywood history after studying this supplemental cinema? Possible films to consider include:

*Casablanca* (1942)

*Double Indemnity* (1944)

*Gilda* (1946)

*His Girl Friday* (1940)

*Laura* (1944)

*Mrs. Miniver* (1942)

*Notorious* (1946)

*The Philadelphia Story* (1940)

*Rebecca* (1940)

*To Have and Have Not* (1944)

2. Using the film glossary in the back of the book, create a storyboard or film a short scene based on *The Silver Blonde*. Pitch your ideas to a “studio” of classmates or friends, explaining your stylistic choices and paying careful attention to the preservation of authentic Los Angeles locations presented in *The Silver Blonde*.

