

Writing About the Essays

On a separate sheet of paper, write the answers to each of the following.

Extending the Essays

1. Choose one of the essay titles, and write your own observations and questions on that topic.

Thinking About Assumptions

2. Does the fact that these essays were written over twenty years ago make the ideas outdated? If some theories have been disputed or disproved, does that diminish the thoughts expressed and questions asked? Explain the reasoning behind your answer.

Responding To a Review

3. Joyce Carol Oates said of this book “. . .*The Lives of a Cell* anticipates the kind of writing that will appear more and more frequently, as scientists take on the language of poetry in order to communicate human truths too mysterious for old-fashioned common sense . . .” Do you think that the understandings of science that Thomas is trying to share could be communicated as well if they were in a less poetic, more prosaic fashion? Why, or why not?

Evaluating a Character

4. Bach shows up in four of these essays. What is it about this particular composer that makes him so prominent in a book of science essays?

Writing a Journal Entry

5. You are the extraterrestrial Visitor mentioned in *The Music of This Sphere*. Write a journal entry explaining how this book of essays has helped you to better understand the human population.

Analyzing the Style

6. Is an essay the appropriate form for the thoughts and ideas Thomas is trying to convey? Would a different form, such as the novel, short story, or journal article, be more effective?

Testing on the Book

On a separate sheet of paper, write the answers to each of the following.

Critical Thinking and Writing

1. In 1972 and 1973 the Pioneer probes were sent into space with information about us. Included were pictures of a man and woman, a diagram of our solar system, and a diagram showing the placement of our solar system in the galaxy. In 1977 the Voyager probes were sent into space with more information. Included were, among other things, recordings of Bach's music. Would knowledge of this have changed Thomas's essay "Ceti"? In what way?
2. In the essay "Organelles as Organisms," Thomas talks about our symbiosis with mitochondria. What kind of "natural law" could you draw from the "sense of life alluded to by chloroplasts and mitochondria"?
3. In his essay "Information," Thomas ends by stating, "The great thing about human language is that it prevents us from sticking to the matter at hand." What does he mean by this?
4. Is there a common thread running through all of Thomas's essays? What is it? Give examples from different essays.
5. Write your own review of Thomas's book. Include examples of new information you have learned and ideas that intrigued you, as well as examples and discussions of things you disagreed with and why.

