

Discussion Questions

1. The world portrayed in *Patternmaster* is bound by rigid hierarchies. What are some of those hierarchies? How are they similar to or different from ones that exist in our own world?
2. When Teray asks Iray to escape Coransee's household with him, she responds: "I knew you'd rather be dead than controlled. You did what you had to do. Then you told me what I had to do. And you were right both times. Well, now I've done what I had to do. And it was good, and I'm home. I'm going to stay here" (page 93). How do Teray, Amber, and Iray each balance survival with independence? What differences do they have that might account for their distinct values and reactions when their freedom is threatened?
3. "Patternists and Clayarks stared at each other across a gulf of disease and physical difference and comfortably told themselves the same lie about each other. The lie that Teray's Clarark had tried to get away with: 'Not people'" (112). What similar examples of cognitive dissonance can you find in our own world.
4. How does the Patternists' relationship with Clayarks compare to their relationship with the mutes?
5. What basic rights are Patternists said to have, and how are their laws and accepted practiced used to subvert these rights? How are our own laws used to reinforce social and racial hierarchies?
6. Patternists are able to absorb decades' worth of memories and knowledge from other humans. How do you think our own society might change—or not—if we could do this?
7. "And meanwhile, mutes had been building a society more intricate, more mechanized, than anything that had existed since their downfall. Some Patternists refused to believe this segment of history. They said it was like believing that horses and cattle once had mechanized societies" (112). How and why do you think some Patternists reject this face? Do you see any parallels to this type of denial in our own world?
8. When Teray asks Amber to be his lead wife, she refuses and says, "I want what I want. I could have given my life for you back there if we had had to fight. But I could never give my life to you" (123). How are Amber and Teray similar? What do you make of Amber's ultimate decision to stay in Forsyth with Teray?
9. When Teray severs his mental link with Amber, he reflects on how he suddenly feels devastatingly alone. "Solitude had never seemed terrible before. He had come to depend on the link more than he had realized" (130). In what ways does telepathy shape Patternist life, and what practical and emotional roles does it fill?

10. Patternist women have the same psychic potential as men, yet most of the female characters—Iray, Amber, Jansee—are still pressured to accept positions like “lead wife.” Discuss sex and sexuality in the novel. How do they interact with power and social hierarchy?
11. “Mutes were ceremony-making creatures. Patternists had left such things to them for so long that there were almost no Patternist ceremonies left. For a funeral, ancient words would have been said, and the body consigned to the earth with quiet dignity. Even Patternists who thought no more of mutes than they did of draft animals attended such ceremonies with respect. They had become the due of any Patternist or mute who died—a time for friends, husbands, and wives to pay last respects” (178-179). What other roles do common ceremonies play in society? Why do you think that the importance of these ceremonies diminished for Patternists over time?
12. If you, the reader, were transported into this story, you would be considered a mute by the Patternist community. How does that knowledge affect your reading of the narrative?