Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Act 1
1. What do we learn about George and Martha from their opening exchanges?
2. How seriously should we take Martha’s description of George as ‘a blank, a cipher, a zero’
3. Comment on the timing of the entrance of Nick and Honey.
4. What does George mean by the statement, ‘Martha and I...we’re merely walking what’s left of our wits’?
5. Discuss the importance of the line ‘That’s for me to know and for you to find out’ in the context of the whole play.
6. When does the game ‘Humiliate the host’ begin?
7. What effect does the listing of Nick’s academic and sporting successes have on George and on Martha?
8. Why does George refuse to light Martha’s cigarette?
9. What is the significance of the George-Martha boxing match?
10. What impression do we gain of Honey during George and Martha’s verbal exchanges?
11. Examine the conflict between the disciplines of History and Biology, as formulated by George.
12. How effective is the conclusion to Act One dramatically? (umbrella)

Act 2
1. Why does Nick suddenly reveal his reason for marrying Honey?
2. How should we interpret the conclusion to George’s story: ‘For thirty years he has... not... uttered... one... sound’?
3. Why does George describe his son as a ‘bean bag’?
4. What are the implications of George’s comment ‘We drink a great deal in this country’?
5. Why does Nick encourage Martha to describe George’s novel?
6. What does Martha mean by the line ‘My arm has gotten tired of whipping you’?
7. Outline the effects of George’s game of ‘Get the Guests’.
8. Why does George decide to tell Martha that their son is dead?

Act 3
1. What does Martha reveal in her soliloquy at the opening of this Act?
2. Is Martha telling the truth when she tells Nick that ‘There is only one man’ who has made her happy - George?
3. What is the impact of George’s entrance with flowers?
4. Why, amid all the games and illusions, does Martha insist that it is a moonless night?
5. What connection is there between George’s use of the word ‘snap’ and Martha’s earlier use of the same word?
6. What is the significance of Honey’s game ‘Peel the Label’ (p.124)?
7. What does George's recitation of the Latin funeral rite contribute to the play?
8. Why does Martha respond so violently to George’s claim that he has a stack of letters from their son?
9. Why does Martha’s comment ‘You can’t decide that for yourself!’ tell us about the rules of ‘Bringing Up Baby’?
10. What is suggested by Martha repeating George’s ‘We couldn’t’?
11. What is meant by Martha’s closing remarks?
Titles, Setting and Action

1. Carefully consider the nursery rhyme “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf” and the English novelist and literary critic, Virginia Woolf. What is the significance of the title? HOW is it shown throughout the play?

2. Without a doubt, the play is about fear. Albee’s characters have many fears: what is each character afraid of? HOW are each character’s fears conveyed throughout the play?

3. HOW does Albee use the setting – small college town in New England, called New Carthage – and the names of the two central characters – George and Martha as allegorical representations?

4. Examine the following structural devices closely. Then discuss HOW the symbols, motifs and ideas associated with each take on great significance in the play.
   (a) the four games
      • “Humiliate the Host,”
      • “Get the Guests”
      • “Hump the Hostess”
      • “Bringing up Baby”
   (b) The stories of:
      • the boxing match between George and Martha
      • Martha’s previous marriage
      • Her courtship of George
      • George’s career in the university
      • Nick’s marriage to Honey
      • George’s unpublished novel
   (c) Debates and discussions concerning:
      • Nick’s sporting and academic achievements
      • Biology and its aims
      • The return of the “son”
      • Nick’s ambitions and strategies
   (d) Physical action:
      • George’s pretended shooting of Martha
      • The broken bottle
      • Honey’s dance
      • Nick and Martha’s dance
      • The scuffle

5. HOW are the following themes presented and explored throughout the novel?
   • Truth/Reality and Illusion
   • Conflict (iii)
   • Marriage; Parents and children
   • American Dream – Materialism and success worship
   • the history and biology debate

6. Albee presents a central point: one cannot escape reality; one can only hope to find peace by facing reality free from false ‘escape’. Consider HOW the following forms of escape are presented in the play as having failed:
   • alcohol
   • promiscuous behavior
   • money and material success
   • escape into the past or future
   • power
   • language: learning, wit, and humour