Assignment on Searle's Chinese Room Argument

Read Searle's Chinese Room paper.

http://cogprints.org/7150/1/10.1.1.83.5248.pdf

Also see the following website that has some nice animations:

http://www.mind.ilstu.edu/curriculum/modOverview.php?modGUI=203

(a lot more videos on the Chinese Room can be found on YouTube. Also see Links on LMS)

1. What is Searle's argument? No need to describe the whole Chinese Room set-up … but what does Searle try to show with that and how? Try to be exact, but use your own words.

2. The animations show the person inside the room transforming input strings into output strings in a single step: "If you see [THIS], then output [THAT]". On the other hand, the Systems Reply states that the man inside the room has "a lot of scratch paper and pencils for doing calculations", suggesting that the computations performed by the person inside the room require multiple steps, where the scratch paper is used to keep track of all the symbol manipulations. Do you think it is realistic that a 'single-step' computation will be sufficient to make the Chinese people outside the room believe that they are dealing with someone inside the room who understand Chinese, or are multiple step computations required? Explain your answer. (Hint: think of what it would be like for a basic calculator that is supposed to do addition or multiplication to use a single-step 'look-up table' … would that even work?).

3. Other than communicating with the people outside the room, and performing any multi-step processes of symbol-manipulation, there is a third important reason for the person needing paper inside the room. What is this third reason? (Hint: no longer think of the paper as mere "scratch" paper, but as something more 'permanent'). Again, explain why this third function is necessary in order for the Chinese people outside the room to come to the belief that they are dealing with someone inside the room who understand Chinese.

4. Where does Searle stand on the mind-body problem? Is Searle a dualist? A materialist? A functionalist? A computationalist? State and explain your answer for *each* of these views.

5. How large do you estimate the book has to be that would make the Chinese Room scenario work? And how fast do you estimate the person inside the room would have to work in order to keep up the pace of a normal conversation in Chinese? Why do you think that?