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*“Everything for the English Classroom!”*

## **Free Lesson of the Month March, 2010**

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Please feel free to share this lesson with all your colleagues. We hope that they find these classroom-proven lessons to be as useful as you do.

This month’s Free Lesson is an excerpt from the [Prestwick House Dubliner’s Teaching Unit](#). It includes vocabulary words, student study guide, and teacher guide with suggested answers for James Joyce’s short story “The Dead.”

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## The Dead

### Vocabulary

abstracted – preoccupied  
acquiescence – passive agreement  
actuated – motivated, driven  
ardour – passion  
astrakhan – a type of fabric made to resemble lambs' fur  
brooded – hovered  
cadence – a balance  
cheval-glass – a full-length mirror  
convex – rounded  
delicate – suggests illness, specifically tuberculosis  
deprecation – disapproval  
diffidence – insecurity, lacking in confidence  
draught – [*draft*] beer  
embrasure – an opening for a door or a window  
emphatically – positively; definitely  
evocation – a re-creation  
fatuous – foolish  
flaccid – hanging in loose folds or wrinkles  
gasworks – a factory where heating and lighting is prepared  
gilt – golden  
girt – secured  
heliotrope – reddish-purple in color  
hop-bitters – most likely, a type of beer  
impalpable – invisible  
impetuous – impulsive, passionate  
implored – begged  
imprecation – cursing  
incredulously – skeptically  
invidious – envious; damaging, scandalous  
irresolutely – hesitantly  
lugubrious – very sad, mournful  
minerals – mineral water  
mirthless – not amused  
muffler – a type of scarf  
obliquely – indirectly  
palaver – flattery  
paltry – wretched  
parapets – a wall used to protect the edge of a roof, bridge, or platform  
pennyboy – someone who runs errands  
pitiable – pathetic  
plaintive – sorrowful, mournful

**prima donna** – the main female singer in an opera  
**rankled** – festered  
**refractory** – stubborn  
**row** – an argument, quarrel  
**scintillated** – flashed, sparkled  
**screwed** – [slang] drunk  
**sentries** – guards, watches  
**solicitude** – excessive care or concern  
**sottish** – drunk  
**sovereign** – a British gold coin  
**squads** – small armies  
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**toilet-table** – a type of dresser  
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**tumid** – swollen  
**unyoke** – removed, released  
**viands** – food  
**vivacious** – full of life, lively  
**vulgarians** – rude people, barbarians (referring to their education)  
**wizen** – shriveled

1. Read the following excerpt from Gabriel's conversation with Lily. Some critics believe Gabriel's statements to her are inappropriate. How would you characterize them? Why do you think he feels embarrassed by her comments? What overall theme does this conversation illustrate?

"Tell me, Lily," he said in a friendly tone, "do you still go to school?"

"O no, sir," she answered. "I'm done schooling this year and more."

"O, then," said Gabriel gaily, "I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?"

The girl glanced back at him over her shoulder and said with great bitterness:

"The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you."

Gabriel coloured, as if he felt he had made a mistake...

*Answers will vary. Example: Gabriel is just making innocent conversation with Lily. He is teasing her about getting married. He feels embarrassed when she reminds him of the improper and immoral behavior that has become commonplace among the younger generation of men in Ireland. This conversation illustrates one of Joyce's themes that runs throughout Dubliners: the moral decay of the Irish people.*

2. For what reasons is Gabriel concerned that his speech might be a failure?

*Gabriel is concerned that he will use the wrong tone in his speech and by doing so insult his audience, which he feels is incapable of understanding any references to Shakespeare.*

3. Why are Aunt Julia and Aunt Kate worried about Freddy Malins?

*They are concerned that he will come to the party drunk.*

4. Miss Ivors seems to forgive Gabriel for writing for *The Daily Express*. Why then does she insult him at the end of the dance by whispering “West Briton!” in his ear? How does Gabriel’s wife feel about Ivors’ vacation idea?

*Miss Ivors invites Gabriel and his wife to join a party of Dubliners who are going to the Aran Isles (to the west of Ireland) in the summer. Gabriel declines the invitation because he prefers to go cycling in France or Belgium. Miss Ivors is insulted that he does not want to vacation in his own country. She accuses him of being a West Briton rather than a loyal Irishman. Gretta is delighted with the idea of going to west Ireland because she is from that area.*

5. Why does Aunt Kate believe that the Church’s treatment of Aunt Julia is unjust?

*For many years Aunt Julia was a member of the church choir. She slaved day and night for many years to make the choir a success, but the Pope decided to turn the girls out of the choirs to make room for little boys. Aunt Kate says that even if the decision was for the good of the church, it was unjust.*

6. Why do the monks of Mount Melleray never speak, get up at two in the morning, and sleep in their coffins?

*The monks never speak and get up at two in the morning to atone for the sins of the rest of the world. They sleep in their coffins “to remind them of their last end.”*

7. After they leave the party, Gabriel is thinking about Gretta. Find a passage in this story illustrating the way Joyce captures Gabriel’s feelings about his wife on that snowy night.

*Answers will vary. Example: “She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory.”*

8. Read the conversation between Gabriel and Gretta when she confides in him her feelings about the song and the boy from her past. Pay attention to Gabriel's questioning of Gretta. During this conversation, Gabriel has an epiphany concerning his own character. What does he learn about himself? How does the tone of this passage help the reader to understand Gabriel's feelings?

*Gabriel feels shame when he realizes that compared to the boy from her past, he must look like a "ludicrous figure," especially in how the boy died and in his own jealous nature. Gabriel's tone in this passage is subtly satirical. He wants to end the conversation, but Gretta seems to be immune to Gabriel's tone. The reader understands that Gabriel feels jealousy, hurt, and then shame during this conversation.*

9. Gabriel lies down next to his wife. He thinks, "One by one, they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age." What lesson about life did Gabriel learn from Gretta's story about her young lover? In what sense can this lesson be applied to the political climate in Ireland at the time of this story?

*Answers will vary. Example: Gabriel wishes he had been a passionate man, like the young boy who dies because of his feeling for Gretta. Gretta has experienced this kind of passion in her life, but Gabriel has not. The young boy who visits Gretta, knows that he is doomed but he goes out in the cold night, anyway. Joyce may be saying that even though Ireland is sick and has many problems, the Irish people must show their passion for their land.*

10. What might the snow in this story represent?

*Answers will vary. Example: The snow in the story represents the coldness or lack of passion some of the Irish people feel for Ireland. Another possible answer is that the snow represents the loneliness all people feel deep inside of themselves. Snow is a fitting symbol for the book: it "was general all over Ireland;" it colors "the hill where Michael Furey lay buried;" snow falls like death, "faintly... upon all the living and the dead." It comforts, it conceals and reveals, and snow (death) comes to all people.*

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