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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Gulliver's Travels

by Jonathan Swift

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Gulliver's Travels

Objectives

By the end of the Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define the term satire and point out the manner in which Swift satirizes the following:
 - the English government, including several specific contemporary politicians
 - travel journals of his time
 - scientists of his time and their concept of reason
 - philosophers of his time and their view of man as a rational animal
 - religious differences which separate people and incite violence
2. discuss the rhetorical devices Swift uses in his satire and illustrate any generalizations by citing examples from the book.
3. discuss Lemuel Gulliver's role as narrator of this story, pointing out where he may or may not reflect Swift's point of view.
4. discuss the Houyhnhnms (pronounced Whin-Nims) and the Yahoos; identify the most prominent features of each group, and point out what each group is meant to represent.
5. write an essay answering this question: "What is Swift's view of the nature of man?"
6. define the following terms and relate the terms to this novel:
 - Allegory
 - Misanthrope
 - Allusion
 - Parody
7. contrast the prominent characteristics of the Lilliputian king with those of the Brobdingnagian ruler.
8. identify significant features of the Laputan government and its relationship with Balnibarbi.
9. prove by citing comments or incidents from the novel that Swift attacks pride the most often of all human vices.
10. identify and discuss which satire is tied to a particular place or time in history and which satire is universal and relevant to the reader's world, regardless of time or place.

Gulliver's Travels

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Define the term allegory and identify in what respect the characters in this book may be said to be allegorical.
2. Some critics say that in *Gulliver's Travels* we see Swift at his most misanthropic; he is a bitter hater of mankind. Other critics say, however, that for Swift the Yahoos do not represent mankind but what mankind must strive to overcome. Offer arguments for both sides and then state your opinion on this issue.
3. Define the term satire and point out in what ways this novel is a satire on the following:
 - the travel journals of Swift's time
 - the British government of his time
 - the scientists of his time and their view of reason
 - religious differences that divide people
4. Gulliver seems to think that in an ideal world men would be rational creatures like the Houyhnhnms. Do you think the rationality of the Houyhnhnms makes for a good place to live, or do you see problems with their lifestyle? How do you suppose Swift would answer this question?
5. Some critics think that at the end of the novel, when Gulliver rejects all human contact because humans are Yahoos, Swift is denouncing humans also. Support or attack that thesis and refer to the text to support your position.
6. Point out at least three incidents in which Swift satirizes "pride."
7. State what satire in this novel is tied to a specific place or time in history and what satire is universal.
8. State how Swift uses verisimilitude to get the reader to accept impossible situations.
9. Contrast Swift's treatment of the Yahoos with his treatment of the Houyhnhnms.
10. Considering the book as a whole, point out both negative and positive pictures of humanity.

Gulliver's Travels

A Letter From Captain Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson

Vocabulary

censure – criticism
innuendo – hidden meaning
intreaties – requests
veracity – truthfulness

1. What is the purpose of this letter?

2. What genre does this novel seek to parody?

3. What hint suggests that perhaps Gulliver does not always tell the truth?

4. What is ironic about the doubts that some of the British public have expressed about *Gulliver's Travels*?

5. How does Gulliver use parallelism to emphasize his purpose in writing the *Travels*?

Chapter 3

Vocabulary

courser – horse

diversion – a form of entertainment

prostrating – putting himself on his stomach; placing himself in a submissive position

1. When a vacancy occurs in a public office in Lilliput, how are officials appointed? Explain the significance of this process.

2. Who is Flimnap, and for what is he admired? What is the significance of his nearly fatal accident?

3. Flimnap is said to represent Swift's enemy, the king's Prime Minister Robert Walpole. What does the name Flimnap suggest?

4. It is said of Walpole that he had once fallen out of King George's favor and the only thing that saved his career was that one of the king's mistresses intervened on Walpole's behalf. How might that have been satirized in this chapter?

Chapter 7

Vocabulary

engine – a machine
mercurial – fickle or whimsical
scruple – a pang of the conscience

1. What is the significance of Gulliver's attempts to explain the king's criticisms?

2. Describe the legal and educational systems of Brobdingnag. How do these systems compare to the same system in England? What is the significance of these systems?

3. How is local government chosen in Brobdingnag? What result does this have on the military?

4. How can the reader tell that Brobdingnag may not be far superior to England, after all?
