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Literature Teaching Unit

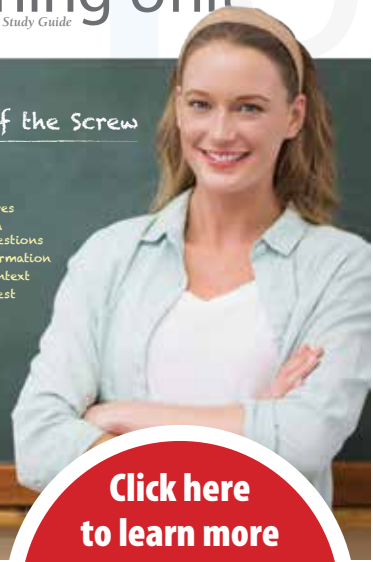
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Turn of the Screw

by Henry James

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



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Note To Teacher

To students who are likely to ask, “Are the ghosts in this story real or not?” the answer is, “You must decide for yourself.” The author, Henry James, means this to be an ambiguous story. As such, it can be read as a ghost story, or it can be read as a psychological novel.

As students read the story, they should try to look at it from both points of view. When they are finished, they will have to decide for themselves how to interpret what James intended.

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *The Turn of the Screw*, published 2006.

Objectives

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

1. correctly identify incidents in the plot that make this tale a classic ghost story.
2. discuss the author's deliberate use of ambiguity in this novel, and state reasons why James employs this device. In this regard, the student will be able to formulate answers for the following:
 - What actually happens versus what is only imagined by the governess.
 - Is Miles expelled from school for an evil act or merely for a routine infraction?
 - Are Miles and Flora bright, normal children, or are they evil and consorting with ghosts?
 - Does Mrs. Grose believe in ghosts?
 - Does the governess actually see ghosts, or is she engaging in some type of fantasy?
3. identify and discuss "the presence of evil" that is a motif in this novel. In doing so, the following points are to be mentioned:
 - Miles's expulsion from school and Miss Jessel's death.
 - the evil acts Quint and Miss Jessel involve the children in while they are alive, and the evil acts they involve them in now.
 - the contrast brought out by the "Garden of Eden setting" and the "angelic" descriptions of the children, with the presence of evil.
4. write an essay on the topic "The Governess—A Study in Sexual Repression and its Effects." The essay should present a compelling reason to believe that the governess is sexually repressed and should mention some of the Freudian symbolism cited in the novel to support this thesis.
5. define stream-of-consciousness as a literary style, relate the definition to parts of this novel, and state why a style that concentrates on what is within the narrator's mind is particularly appropriate for this novel.
6. identify the two narrators in this story and discuss reasons the author might have chosen to use both rather than just one or the other.
7. write an essay on the topic "*The Turn of the Screw*: A Ghost Story or a Psychological Novel?"
8. recognize and appreciate examples of imagery, and correlate their importance to the setting of the story.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why does Miles's expulsion from school become a point of importance in this novel?
2. Provide support for the following thesis: Miles and Flora—A Study of Two Possessed by Evil.
3. Provide arguments to support the contention that this is a story of a country parson's daughter whose obsession with evil deranges her mind.
4. Provide a logical supposition of your own to explain why Henry James chose to make this an ambiguous novel. Or, if the story line does not seem ambiguous to you, refute the notion that it is an ambiguous story line.
5. Write an essay in which you discuss the function of Mrs. Grose in this novel.
6. What is Douglas's function in the novel? (Remember, he is the one the story focuses on in the prologue.)
7. Identify and discuss points in the novel that lead some critics to maintain that the governess's actions are a result of her sexual repression.
8. Assuming that the governess did actually see ghosts and that she does not just imagine their existence, trace the battle between good and evil in this novel and identify who wins and why.
9. Choosing a passage from the novel that you think is representative, describe Henry James's style of writing in objective terms. (Do not include your opinion.) State why you think that the style in which it was written is or is not appropriate for this story.
10. Is this story's purpose to characterize the innocence of children or to make a wry observation of their predatory nature? Explain, and give your reasons with reference to the text.
11. Is there a possibility that Henry James wrote this "ghost story" as a humorous tale—unbelievable, but with high entertainment value? Explain your answer and discuss it with the class.
12. Discuss the features of a Gothic novel and whether *The Turn of the Screw* qualifies as such. Explain the reasons for your opinion.

Chapter I

VOCABULARY

agitation – a state of restlessness
allusions – references or hints
beatific – innocent, pure; blessed
brooded – worried
commodious – roomy
contrive – to arrange or to plan
diversion – a distraction
fly – a light, horse-drawn carriage
fortitude – strength
imputed – attributed a quality to another person
inordinately – excessively
liberality – generosity
machicolated – containing narrow windows or openings
oppression – a burden, especially on the mind or spirit
placid – calm, peaceful
pretensions – unrealistic claims
prodigious – great in size or force
recollect – to remember
recurrence – a repetition, reappearance
rooks – birds similar to crows
scant – slight, small

1. Who begins narrating the story, and what is her first impression of Bly, the name of the estate at which she is to work?

2. After arriving there, what is the first thing that makes her uneasy?

3. At this point, the governess is convinced that Quint is an evil ghost who has come to corrupt Miles, and she is prepared to risk her life to save Miles. What is there to suggest, however, that her motives are not entirely unselfish?

4. What is it that the governess sees across the lake?

5. What is Flora's reaction to the figure on the other side of the lake?

Chapter IX

VOCABULARY

attestation – the act of bearing witness
beguilement – a hypnotic attraction
confabulations – discussions of imagined experiences
deprecated – disapproved
detestable – hateful
exuberance – excitement; cheerfulness
grievous – causing grief or sadness
homage – reverence, respect
idolaters – those who worship an idol or are blindly devoted to something
interminably – for extensive lengths of time; unendingly
mystification – a mystery
naïve – innocent; natural; unaffected
odious – hateful, repulsive; objectionable
pensive – filled with thought
preternaturally – in a way that is beyond normal limits; supernaturally
sequestered – segregated; secluded
slavish – unquestioning; servile
sojourn – a journey; visit

1. What characterizes the relationship of the children and the governess at the opening of this chapter?
