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Literature Teaching Unit

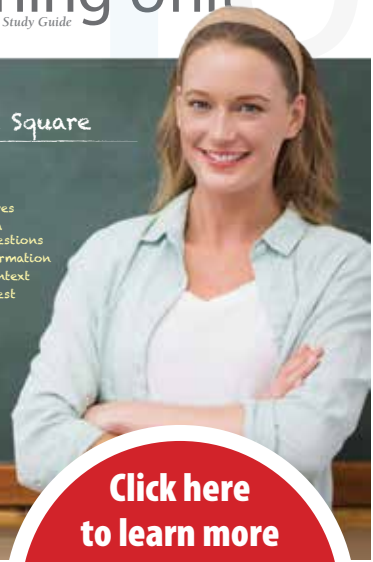
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Washington Square

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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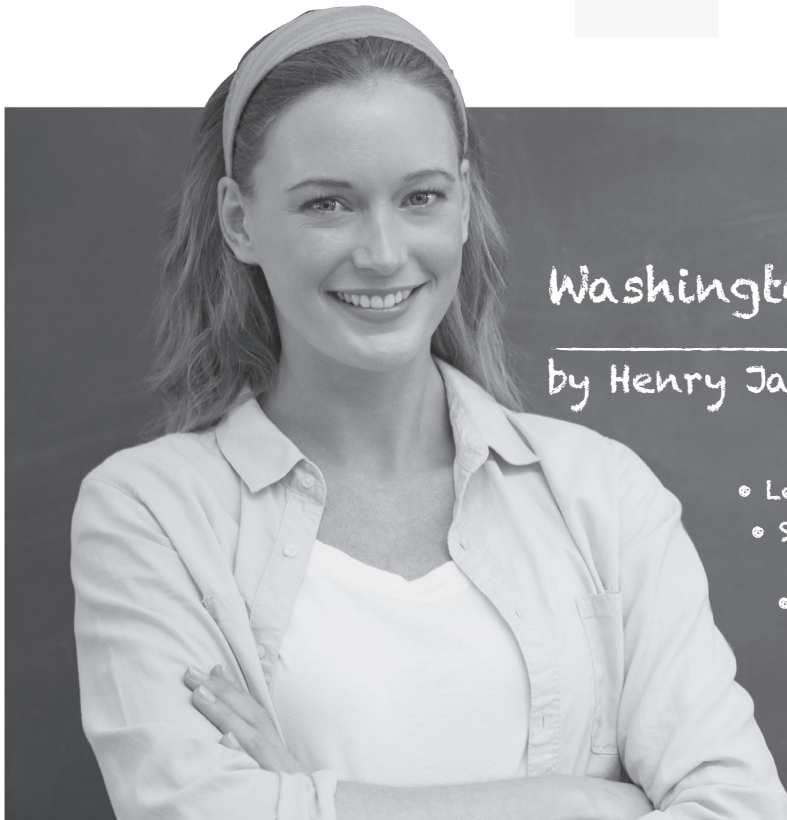
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P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

ISBN: 978-1-58049432-8

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Item No: 301210

Washington Square

Notes

Washington Square was written in 1880, while the author was living in England. It therefore includes the English form of words such as color (colour) and honor (honour). In addition, James uses the French form for several words that are cognates in English (e.g., denouement), and these are italicized in the text. The book is reflective of upper-class morality, conventions, and prejudices in New York in 1880.

All references come from the Dover Thrift Editions of *Washington Square*, copyright 1998.

Washington Square

Objectives

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

1. infer information about characters and events when the information is not given explicitly.
2. evaluate a character's morality and importance based on events and on observations of that character's interactions with others.
3. cite examples of foreshadowing both in dialog and in personality descriptions.
4. discuss humor in the work of Henry James, especially his use of the ironic.
5. give an overview of the practices of New York society in the late 1800s as portrayed by Henry James.
6. infer how a young man should go about the task of finding work and what kinds of work were considered acceptable.
7. have an informed opinion on the role of women in society and in the family in the period that James covers.
8. comment on how the following book titles could apply to people and events in *Washington Square*:
 - *Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*
 - *King and Joker*
 - *Pride and Prejudice*
9. discuss the use of caricature in the novel, citing Mrs. Penniman as the example.
10. make inferences about the opinion of New York society would hold on the following topics:
 - education of the upper classes
 - foreigners and foreign travel
11. discuss how *Washington Square* is a coming-of-age novel about Catherine.
12. discuss the following proverbs in the context of *Washington Square*:
 - “Money is the root of all evil”
 - “Handsome is as handsome does”

Washington Square

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss Henry James himself as an intellectual and social figure, using information from the introductory Note, the formalized society he describes in the story, and how his elaborate vocabulary and style suit the complex society he discusses.
2. Three key characters (Dr. Sloper, Catherine Sloper, and Mrs. Penniman) are described in Chapter II. Discuss how their early descriptions foreshadow later behaviors.
3. Why would the author establish three leading characters (Dr. Sloper, Catherine Sloper, and Mrs. Penniman) before introducing the love interest?
4. Discuss Dr. Sloper's reputation, including his medical reputation, his social standing, and how his family situation affected him both socially and as to his medical reputation.
5. Catherine never knew her mother, but her father's recollection of his dead wife has a great influence on his relationship with Catherine. Discuss the triangle of Dr. Sloper, Catherine Sloper, and the dead Mrs. Sloper.
6. Analyze the character of Catherine Sloper, showing how her relationship with her father and her relationship with Mrs. Penniman limited or enlarged her character.
7. *Washington Square* can be called a "coming of age" story, in which the main character gains in maturity and awareness. Discuss the evidence in the story that Catherine is grows in independence and judgment and that she has come of age by the end of the story.
8. When Arthur Townsend brings his cousin Morris Townsend to call on Catherine, Morris spends the visit in conversation with Mrs. Penniman. How does this foreshadow the roles of Mrs. Penniman, Morris Townsend, and Catherine Sloper as the romance develops?
9. How does the author exaggerate Mrs. Penniman's vanities to present her as a caricature of the poor widow who is starved for drama? Include her dress, mannerisms, and speech.
10. Mrs. Almond and Mrs. Penniman are sisters, but they are very different. Describe the different roles they fill in Dr. Sloper's life and in Catherine's life, including how each functions in the role of confidante, and to whom.

Washington Square

Note

VOCABULARY

acerbic – acid or somewhat annoying
resonate – strike a chord with, be meaningful to
alienating – annoying or off-putting
correlate – are “in sync” with, go well with
affectation – put-on mannerisms

1. How did Henry James develop the idea for the story of *Washington Square*?

2. Where was James living when he wrote this novel?

3. Where did James grow up, and why is that information important to the story?

4. When was the novel published?

5. Has *Washington Square* ever been presented as a play or movie?

Chapter I

VOCABULARY

epithet – title or label
theoretic – academic, or relying on theory
minutely – in a detailed way
practitioners – others who practice, in this case, who practice medicine; doctors
inscrutable – unreadable or difficult to understand
vulgar – coarse or rude
misconception – false idea
charlatan – fake
pretensions – false behaviors, airs
dowry – money or property given by a woman's father to her husband when they married
mitigate – ease
anomaly – exceptional event
patrimony – money left to a child by his or her father
preponderantly – mainly
programme – program or goal (spelling as used in England)
patent – clear or obvious
intrinsic – coming from within, inherent
widower – a man whose wife has died
impugned – questioned or challenged
censure – criticism
castigation – reprimand or critical remarks
insidious – building gradually, treacherous
diminutive – small, tiny

1. When was Dr. Sloper active in the practice of medicine?

2. How does the author describe Dr. Sloper?

Chapter VIII

VOCABULARY

self-oblivion – being forgotten or becoming unknown

self-effacement – deflecting attention from oneself

feline – cat-like

vicissitudes – trials or sorrows

1. Did Catherine see Morris Townsend again after the dinner party?

2. Did Dr. Sloper know of these visits?

3. Does Catherine think she is in love?

4. What does Dr. Sloper tell Mrs. Penniman to do about the kittens, and why is the incident included?
