



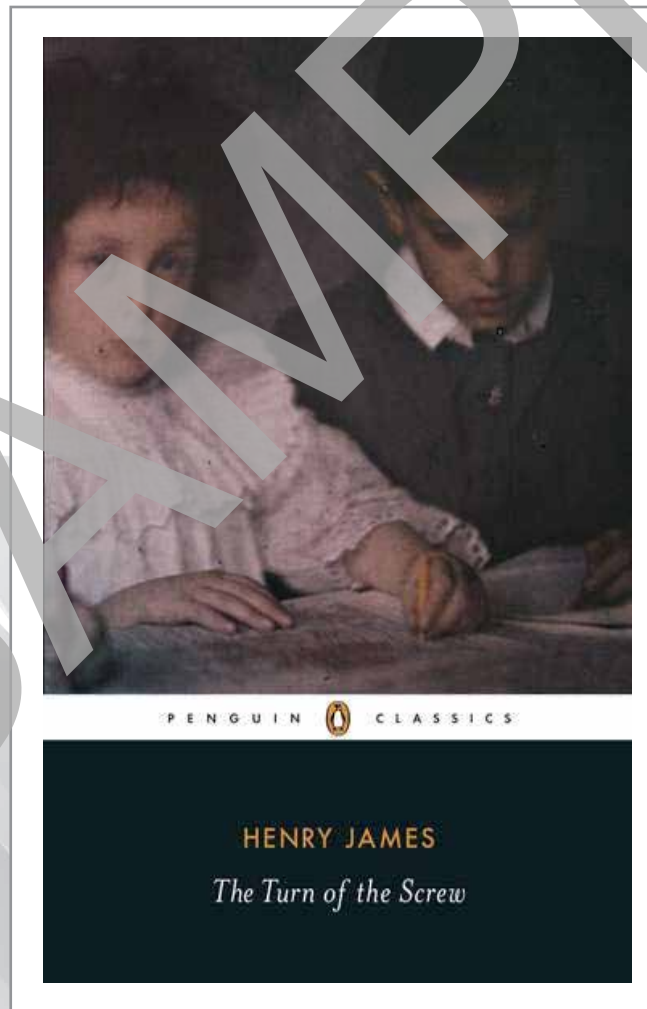
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Turn of the Screw

Henry James



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Turn of the Screw

Henry James

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Summary

A classic, *The Turn of the Screw* is an unconventional ghost story about a governess hired to care for an orphaned brother and sister. The governess encounters two phantoms—her employer’s valet and the children’s previous governess, both dead now—and terror mounts as she strives to defend the children against these evil figures. As the story unfolds (through the governess’ handwritten account), readers are left to decide for themselves whether the ghosts are real or the products of the governess’ fevered imagination.

About the Author

Henry James was born in New York City on April 15, 1843, into a fabulously wealthy family. His family had several homes in this country—in New York City and Albany, New York; Newport, Rhode Island; Boston, Massachusetts—and abroad. The Jameses traveled extensively and Henry was schooled in England, Switzerland, and France before enrolling in Harvard Law School. Henry published his first critical essay and his first short story at age 21. His first bestseller, *Daisy Miller*, came out in 1879; he published *The Turn of the Screw* in 1898.

Extremely prolific, he eventually produced 112 tales, 20 novels, 16 plays, a two-volume autobiography, travel essays, and a profusion of literary criticism. Although his first and lasting love was apparently his cousin Minnie, he never married; Minnie died in 1869. Henry James once said that “to be an artist, a person should be free of the obligations of family life.”

He returned to England in 1882 an expatriate, and did not go back to the U.S. for 21 years. At that point he went on a lecture tour of the United States and Canada. Five years later he suffered some sort of nervous breakdown and six years after that he became a naturalized British subject. He died the following year, in 1916, and his ashes were interred in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1917, two unfinished novels (*The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past*) and an unfinished autobiographical volume (*The Middle Years*) were published.

James’ other best-known novels include *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Aspern Papers*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*.

Initiating Activities

Choose one or more of the following activities to prepare students for the novella they are about to read.

1. Prereading Discussion/Writing:

Ghost Stories: Do you like ghost stories? Why or why not? Why do people tell ghost stories? Under what circumstances? What do most ghost stories have in common? Are any of the stories real? What should a good ghost story do? What are the qualities of a good ghost

Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could be either an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.

The diagram consists of three rectangular boxes and one oval, all connected by lines to a large table at the bottom. The top-left box contains the text "Use the facts and ideas the author gives." The oval on the right contains "Use your own prior knowledge." The middle rounded rectangular box contains "Apply any new information (i.e., from class discussion) that may cause you to change your mind." The table at the bottom is titled "Predictions" and has four horizontal lines for writing.

Predictions

Using Character Webs

Attribute webs are simply a visual representation of a character from the novel. They provide a systematic way for students to organize and recap the information they have about a particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the novel to recapitulate information about a particular character, or completed gradually as information unfolds. They may be completed individually or as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character act? How do you think the character feels? How would you feel if this happened to you?)
- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him/her to me.)
- Where a character lives. (Where and when does the character live?)
- How others feel about the character. (How does another specific character feel about our character?)

In group discussion about the characters described in student attribute webs, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. Inferential thinking can be included in the discussion.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They may also be used to organize information about a concept, object, or place.

Attribute Web

The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about a character in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

Acts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Feels

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Looks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Says

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Introduction and Chapters I-II, pages 291-306

In the opening pages, the narrator reveals the frame story structure of Henry James' tale. One Christmas Eve, the narrator and some acquaintances had been telling ghost stories around the fire. His friend Douglas chose to share a true story about two children, set down in letters years before by their governess—a friend of Douglas', dead for forty years. Douglas sent home to London for the letters, and before reading them to the group the next night, explained how the writer came to her position: The youngest of several daughters of a poor country minister, she had gone to London in answer to an advertisement for a governess. There she met a dashing, rich bachelor who offered her a job at his country home, caring for his young nephew and niece, who had been orphaned by the death of their parents. Several other applicants had turned down the job when they heard the main condition—that the taker handle everything on her own without troubling him—but this young woman was quite captivated by the bachelor—and by the generous salary he offered—and overcame her initial reluctance. Having promised never to appeal to her employer, she set out on her journey to take over where her predecessor—who had died under unknown circumstances—had left off. Here, Douglas begins to read the letters and the point of view shifts to the young governess'.

After a long coach ride to "Bly," the governess is pleased by her first impression of the big old house, the cordial housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, and the beautiful little girl, Flora. She spends the next day touring the house with Flora, quickly feeling close to the sociable child. Two days later the little boy, Miles, arrives home from school. That evening a distressing letter arrives from the headmaster—a dismissal from school. Mrs. Grose defends the little ten-year-old, but admits he can be naughty. She seems uncomfortable discussing the previous governess, and whether she might have noticed anything amiss in the boy.

Vocabulary

visitation 291	dissipate 291	interlocutor 292	uncanny 292
adjured 292	arch 293	acute 293	reticence 294
serial 294	diffusion 294	prologue 295	transcript 295
compact 295	trepidation 295	vicarage 295	extravagant 295
successor 297	prohibitive 297	solicitor 298	fly 298
fortitude 298	reprieve 298	civil 299	liberality 299
beatific 300	imputed 300	prodigious 301	allusions 301
placid 301	pretension 301	conveyance 301	oppression 301
machicolated 302	disconcerted 303	attenuated 304	corrupt 305
scruple 306	concession 306	brevity 306	ambiguous 306

Discussion Questions

1. What sort of stories were the narrator and his friends sitting around telling on Christmas Eve? (*ghost stories*) Would you enjoy being part of this gathering? Do you think this was a common practice in Henry James' day? (Note that *Mary Shelley* came up with the story of *Frankenstein* while part of a horror story-telling gathering.) Is this a modern-day ritual, too?
2. What did Douglas mean when he suggested that telling a story about two children who had seen a ghost would give "another turn of the screw" (p. 292)? (*This would have twice the "punch" or tension of a story about one such child.*) Does that premise remind you of other stories you know?

-
3. When was the governess' account written? (*Many years ago, probably 40 or more; she had been dead twenty years when Douglas got her account, written presumably years earlier, and Douglas is dead now.*) Why do you suppose Douglas had kept the packet locked up for so many years?
 4. What sort of relationship had Douglas apparently had with the governess? (*They were friends, and probably Douglas was in love with her; the governess tutored Douglas' younger sister and he met her while home from university.*) He believes she told her story only to him. Why would she confide only in him?
 5. How did the narrator guess that the governess had been in love? (*perhaps by the way Douglas describes her secrecy*) Douglas acknowledged that he was right—page 293, "You are acute." With whom do you suppose she had been in love? (*her employer*)
 6. How did the governess get her job offer? (*She responded to an ad.*) Why did she accept? (*She was dazzled by the handsome bachelor; she needed money.*) Would you have accepted? Does the situation—and the description of the children's uncle, the governess, and the orphans—remind you of other stories you have read?
 7. What are the governess' first days on the job like? (*pleasant enough*) What are some things that she wonders about? (*why the uncle didn't tell her more*) At what points does Mrs. Grose seem to be holding back something—particularly with regard to Miles and the previous governess?
 8. What are your impressions of Flora, as the governess sees her? (*She seems sweet, angelic.*) Which of the governess' descriptions imply that there is something otherworldly about the girl? How do your impressions of Miles compare and contrast with your sense of what Flora is like?
 9. What is the governess like? (*young, lonely, from a poor family, eager to please and do well*) Which details give you a sense of her loneliness and anxiety?
 10. **Prediction:** How will Miles and the governess get along?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** A **framework story** is a story within a story—a convention used in such writing as the *Arabian Nights*, the *Canterbury Tales*, and *Frankenstein*. The framework may or may not have a plot itself, and the story may or may not return to the frame situation at the end.

Explain in what way *The Turn of the Screw* is actually a story within a story, and provide a time frame. (*The narrator is sharing an account by the governess that he heard Douglas read aloud. The events described by the governess took place years ago. Douglas, who is presumably old at the time of the storytelling met her when he was about 20 and she, 30 or so. He says she has been dead for 20 years. The narrator mentions that Douglas himself is dead now.*)

Does the framework have a plot? (*It does have a simple one; friends are entertaining each other with horror stories.*) At the end of the story, ask yourself whether or not it returns to the frame situation. (*It does not; we learn no more about the storytelling group.*)

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2. Writing: Write the dialogue for the scene in which the governess meets her employer and accepts the job.
 3. Writing: Write the letter that the headmaster might have sent—but didn't—containing a detailed explanation of why Miles has been expelled.

Chapters III-V, pages 307-321

When the governess meets Miles, she is charmed by him. She and Mrs. Grose become friends and all goes well for a while. Then one afternoon while the governess is taking a walk, she sees a hatless stranger up in the tower staring down at her. Not wanting to frighten Mrs. Grose, she keeps the incident to herself for several days. Meanwhile, although letters from home bring disturbing news, she enjoys teaching her two charges and learning along with them. Returning for a pair of gloves one rainy day, however, she is shaken by the sight of the stranger staring in the window—looking, apparently, for someone else.

She runs outside and around the house, but the man has vanished. Just then Mrs. Grose looks out and is inexplicably frightened by the sight of the governess. The latter describes the red-haired stranger she has just seen and Mrs. Grose reveals that the description fits the master's former valet, Peter Quint, who is dead!

Vocabulary

stupefaction 307	grotesque 307	fortified 308	infatuation 308
grandees 309	incongruous 310	crenelated 310	grandeur 310
precipitately 310	rooks 311	bridled 311	domestic 313
unscrupulous 313	indiscretion 314	infallibly 314	vindictive 314
anecdote 314	chastised 315	allude 315	antidote 315
edifying 315	certitude 316	consciousness 319	affirmative 320

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Mrs. Grose kiss the governess (p. 308)? (*Mrs. Grose likes Miles; the new governess has also expressed positive regard for him and has decided not to tell the uncle about the expulsion.*) Do you think she should advise the governess to talk to the uncle and to the boy himself about the dismissal?
2. What did the governess like about teaching the children? (*They were affectionate; she loved learning.*) How do you suppose their childhoods were different from her own? How did things change between the governess and the children? (*She began to suspect their affection was a charade.*)
3. When the governess first sees the man in the tower, who does she think it is? (*her employer*) How can you explain this? (*She has just been fantasizing about him.*) Why does she care so much about the approval of an employer she never sees? (*She is in love with him.*)
4. According to the governess herself, why did she hesitate to mention the figure she had seen to Mrs. Grose? (*She wanted to spare her.*) Can you think of other reasons she might have had? Do you think the governess is entirely "open" in her written account?