

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Dubliners

by James Joyce

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ISBN 978-1-62019-021-0

Item No. 308973

Dubliners

Objectives

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

1. identify prominent themes in the text and explain how these themes are developed.
2. explain how the author establishes motifs and what these motifs contribute to thematic development.
3. analyze the differences between first-person narratives and third-person narratives and explain how each narrative mode affects the text.
4. explain how allusions function in the text.
5. analyze irony in the text and explain how irony affects the text.
6. examine the historical and political contexts in which the text was written and explain how these affect the meaning of the work as a whole.
7. analyze textual elements to determine tone and explain how tone affects a text.
8. analyze various symbols in the text.
9. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
10. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND FINANCIAL CONTEXT

Dubliners is so dependent on setting that it is essential to understand the political, religious, and financial climate of the time. At the time Joyce was writing, Ireland was struggling to find its identity and independence under—and in spite of—British rule. Home Rule, the demand of an occupied country to exercise independent self-governance, is considered by many to be the most pervading feature of Irish political life from the 1870s to the 1920s.

One significant proponent of the Home Rule movement was Charles Stewart Parnell, an “advanced Nationalist” (to use a Joycean term), who led the Irish Parliamentary Party as a Member of Parliament from its inception in 1875 until his death in 1891. Although he was only nine years old when Parnell died, Joyce was so affected by his death that he wrote a poem titled “Et Tu, Healy” against Parnell’s successor, Tim Healy. Healy sided with the Catholic Church, condemning Parnell on moral grounds after his scandalous divorce. John Joyce, James’s proud father, had the poem published, although no copies are extant. Moreover, James Joyce regarded Healy as so villainous compared to the anti-English “Uncrowned King of Ireland” Parnell that he denounced him a second time in his masterpiece *Ulysses*, in which Healy appeared in the main character’s nightmare.

Although Joyce continued to be educated in Jesuit schools (Belvedere College and University College, Dublin) until 1902, he soon developed an anti-religious sentiment, especially towards conservative Christianity, which continued throughout his life. In Dublin, there was a split between Catholics, associated with Nationalism, and Protestants, associated with Unionism (union with the British Empire). This tension between the sects is prevalent throughout the book; Joyce expresses both the common Dubliner anti-Protestant sentiment and his personal scorn for religion as a whole. Joyce alludes to the Catholic Church’s controversies and pitfalls as often as—if not more often than—he refers to its strengths. Priestly scandal, church corruption, and misguided parishioners are symbols of the broader issue of religious decay. Inaction on the part of righteous and just individuals led to a degeneration of the church and, consequently, society at large. In one of his letters, Joyce writes, “I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city.”

Tied closely to the religious shortfall of Dublin was its financial state. *Dubliners* focuses on the plight of the lower-middle class, mainly taking a stance of Irish Nationalism. Many of Joyce’s characters are one paycheck from being homeless; desperate for a revival of funds, cultural pride, and spirit, they search for renewed hope, adventure, and love, but are often left empty. This plight of the poor makes the work universally relevant despite its localized setting.

Dubliners

The Sisters

1. The word “paralysis” in the first paragraph is developed into a motif in this and many of the other stories in this book. How does Joyce develop this concept of paralysis in “The Sisters?”

2. How does the narrator’s perspective affect the tone of this story?

3. What is implied in the conversation between Mr. Cotter and the narrator’s aunt and uncle?

An Encounter

1. How does Joyce’s diction add verisimilitude to the story?

2. How does Joyce use danger to establish suspense? Is the danger real or imagined?

3. What does the color green symbolize throughout the story?

4. What does the final paragraph reveal about the nature of the narrator’s relationship with Mahony? How did “the encounter” affect that relationship?

Araby

1. What is the significance of darkness and light in this story?

2. How does the setting reflect the emotions of the narrator?

3. How does Joyce use diction to reveal the narrator's character?

4. What role does religion play in the plot?

5. At the end of the story, the narrator has an epiphany. What does he realize and why?

Eveline

1. How does Eveline’s window-watching contribute to her characterization?

2. Near the end of the story, the break in the text suggests a break in both time and tone. What has changed? Why?

3. Why is Eveline paralyzed at the end?

4. How does the tone of this story of adolescence differ from the tone of the previous three stories of childhood?

After the Race

1. How does the setting contribute to the overall theme of the story?

2. What role does the nationality of each character play in the story?

3. What is the meaning of the line, “The alert host at an opportunity lifted his glass to Humanity and, when the toast had been drunk, he threw open a window significantly”? What could it mean in the context of the other stories of *Dubliners*?

4. How does the flashback to Jimmy’s college days add to his characterization?

5. How is the outcome of the card game on the yacht an example of situational irony?

6. What is the epiphany at the end of this story? How does it relate to other stories in *Dubliners*?

Two Gallants

1. How does the opening walk characterize the two men?

2. How does the setting affect the plot?

3. What are the two men plotting to do? What is their justification? Cite evidence from the text.

4. What is ironic about the title “Two Gallants?”

5. How does Joyce characterize Ireland in this story?

6. What is the role of women in this story?
