

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Dubliners**

by James Joyce

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# Dubliners

## Brief Biography

James Joyce was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1882. Modern critics generally consider him one of the twentieth century's most influential and important authors. During his career, Joyce wrote numerous novels, poems, and short stories, including what are generally believed to be two of the greatest works in English since Shakespeare: *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. In these two novels, Joyce pioneered the use of "stream of consciousness," a revolutionary technique that freed words from the restrictions placed on them by grammar, syntax, and diction. Despite, or possibly because of his style and subject matter, Joyce's contemporaries ignored his contributions, and *Ulysses* was banned outright or heavily censored. In his later years, he grew blind and had to depend on memory and friends to be able to produce any literature at all. Joyce died in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1941.

# Dubliners

## Notes

The *Dubliners* is a collection of fifteen short stories depicting the lives of ordinary citizens living in Dublin at the end of the nineteenth century. In a letter to an editor, Joyce wrote,

My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life. The stories are arranged in this order. I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard.

Based on this letter, the lessons in this unit have been divided into four sections corresponding with Joyce's categories: Childhood, Adolescence, Maturity, and Public Life. The fifteen stories in the *Dubliners* come together as a group because they share common themes. As a whole, the stories trace the life of the city of Dublin, from innocence to maturity.

This book is recommended for gifted 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students because of the difficult themes and challenging vocabulary.

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *Dubliners*, copyright 2006.

# Dubliners

## Objectives

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

1. define vocabulary words from the stories.
2. discuss the author's writing style; point out examples in the story of how his tone, diction, subtle comments, and objectivity support the themes in the story.
3. point out the extent to which the following overall themes are present in each of the stories:
  - Many of the characters experience a form of paralysis that results in an inability to change their lives
  - The Dubliners of this era succumb to temptations which contribute to a morally decaying society.
  - The lives of the older and younger generations in Dublin are intertwined, with each influencing the other.
4. discuss the author's opinions on the following political and social issues:
  - the importance of Parnell and the politics of the time on the Dubliners
  - the role of Nationalism in Ireland
  - the impact alcoholism has on Irish families
  - the emergence of materialism in Dublin
5. discuss the ways these stories, broken down into the four groups below, tell the coming of age story for the inhabitants of Dublin:
  - childhood
  - adolescence
  - maturity
  - public life
6. recognize that in many of the stories, the protagonist experiences an epiphany; identify when it occurs and what each character learns from his or her epiphany.

# Dubliners

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Joyce refers to the stories *The Sisters*, *An Encounter*, and *Araby* as representing Childhood. Briefly summarize each of these stories. What aspects of Childhood does each story explore? How do the protagonists of each story get along with the adults in their life?
2. Which stories in the collection does Joyce consider to be representative of Adolescence? Why?
3. What does the reader learn about the lives of young women in Dublin from the story *Eveline*? In your opinion, is Eveline trapped in her life?
4. Do you feel any sympathy for the character Jimmy in *After the Race*? What subtle comment on businessmen in Dublin is Joyce making in this story?
5. Why is it ironic that Corley is swindling the young woman out of her hard-earned money in the story *Two Gallants*? What subtle political comment might Joyce be making about the police in this story? What is the overall theme of this story?
6. How would you describe Polly in the story *The Boarding House*? Is she a moral young woman? What are her goals and dreams? Does she achieve them by the end of the story?
7. Why is Chandler from the story *The Little Cloud* referred to as Little Chandler? At the beginning of the story, Little Chandler is excited about his reunion with Gallaher. What dream does Little Chandler hope Gallaher will help him to achieve? In your opinion, to what extent is Little Chandler trapped or paralyzed by the circumstances of his life, so that he is unable to break away from his dull or unsatisfying life?
8. What is the significance of the title of the story *Counterparts*? Why might the ending of this story be called ironic?
9. In what sense might Maria's life in the story *Clay* be described as sad? Why does Joe cry after Maria's song?
10. Why does Mr. Duffy, in the story *A Painful Case*, break off his relationship with Mrs. Sinico? What is implied, but not stated, about the real cause of her death? What insight does Mr. Duffy discover about himself when he reflects on his relationship with Mrs. Sinico? In your opinion, is Mr. Duffy trapped by his life or can he still make some changes?
11. The stories *A Painful Case*, *Clay*, *The Little Cloud*, and *Counterparts* comprise what Joyce refers to as Maturity because in each story the protagonist is a fully developed adult. What decision does the protagonist in each story make early in his or her life that has far-reaching consequences in that person's adulthood?

# Dubliners

## Section I: Childhood

### The Sisters

#### Vocabulary

**alluding** – referring  
**anointed** – applied an ointment to as part of a religious ceremony  
**assent** – an agreement  
**breviary** – a Roman Catholic book containing the daily reading prayers  
**chalice** – a cup  
**communing** – communicating  
**copious** – very plentiful, abundant  
**crape** – a type of soft fabric  
**decanter** – a decorative bottle  
**distillery** – an establishment where alcohol is made  
**elucidating** – explaining, clarifying  
**faints** – impure alcohol that comes from the distillation of liquor  
**fancy** – an idea, notion  
**gnomon** – the object on a sundial that casts a shadow and indicates the time  
**grate** – the fireplace  
**great-coat** – a heavyweight overcoat  
**inefficacious** – ineffective  
**interrogatively** – questioningly  
**latterly** – lately  
**maleficent** – harmful; evil  
**mutton** – lamb meat  
**nipper** – [slang] a small boy  
**paralytic** – relating to paralysis  
**pensively** – thoughtfully  
**piously** – religiously  
**resigned** – submissive  
**revery** – [*reverie*] a daydream  
**scanty** – thin, meager, insufficient  
**scrupulous** – extremely careful to do the right and proper thing  
**shrewdly** – wisely, sharply  
**simoniac** – a person who commits simony (see note: *simony* in “The Sisters” glossary)  
**snuff-box** – a container for tobacco (snuff)  
**stirabout** – a porridge stirred in boiling water or milk  
**suffused** – filled  
**tawny** – a brown or brownish-orange color

## Section II: Adolescence

### Eveline

#### Vocabulary

**blackthorne** – a cane or stick  
**cretonne** – a cloth used for curtains  
**fervent** – passionate, enthusiastic  
**harmonium** – a small musical instrument  
**illumined** – lit  
**nix** – [slang] quiet, silent  
**palpitations** – the rapid beating or fluttering of one's heart  
**squander** – to waste

1. Describe the circumstances in Eveline's life which contributes to her desire to escape her responsibilities at home by running away with a sailor to Buenos Ayres.

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2. Some critics believe that the protagonists in these stories usually experience an epiphany. What sentences in this story tell of a moment of insight Eveline has into the value of her life?

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3. What is revealed to the reader about the lives of women living in Dublin during this era?

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6. For what reason do you think Mr. Kernan agrees to go to the retreat, but refuses to light a candle?

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7. Why does Mr. Kernan begin to feel comfortable at the retreat?

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8. What metaphor does the priest use to try and reach his audience?

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9. According to the priest, what is the one thing God asks of his hearers?

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10. Why do you think Joyce titles this story Grace? What does this story reveal to the reader about the place of religion in the lives of Dubliners?

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