

# Individual Learning Packet

## Teaching Unit

# Rebecca

by Daphne du Maurier

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# Rebecca

## Notes

Written in 1938, *Rebecca* is an enduring classic example of romantic suspense that remains popular today. A young bride travels to her new husband's ancient family home, Manderley, where she must bravely unravel the mystery of her new husband's relationship with his first wife. She worries that her husband is still in love with his first wife and that she is not strong enough to be mistress of Manderley. Her innocence is shattered by the secrets surrounding the death of the first Mrs. de Winter and the truth about her husband's feelings. Despite its length, this novel is an exciting, fast paced suspense story with a moderate vocabulary level, making it appropriate for grades 7-12. Students may be interested to know that the famous director Alfred Hitchcock has made a classic movie based on this novel and another movie based on Daphne DuMaurier's story, *The Birds*.

Romantic writers are interested in expressing themselves through emotional intensity which often includes extremes of rapture, nostalgia, horror, melancholy, the exotic, the macabre and irrational dreams or superstitions and legends. Romanticism is defined as the attitude that art and writing should be a freedom of individual self expression, sincerity, spontaneity, originality, emotional directness of personal experience, individual imagination, and free spirits expressing imaginative truths. These writers broke the bonds of modesty with powerful imaginations. As the students read the novel encourage them to look for elements of Romanticism in the novel.

All references come from the Avon Edition of *Rebecca*, copyright 1938.

## Objectives

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

1. define vocabulary words from the text.
2. relate incidents from the story that illustrate the narrator's loss of innocence on her path to adult understanding.
3. cite incidents from the story that support the idea that this novel is an example of Romanticism.
4. point out how the limitations of first-person narration contributes to the suspense in the story.
5. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the theme that servants provide their best service only to those they consider to be socially superior.
6. discuss how the author uses descriptions of nature to represent characters, to establish the mood, and to foreshadow events.
7. identify incidents in which the narrator breaks away from the story to relate generalizations about life.
8. point out examples of irony, allusion, metaphor, and symbolism in the story.
9. discuss the significance of the fact that the narrator lacks a name.
10. discuss the following as possible symbols in the story: the sea, the rose garden, blindness, the fog, bluebells, and rhododendrons.
11. point out instances of the author's use of mood.
12. discuss the importance of the following items to the characters in the story: the handkerchief, the china cup, the cottage at the beach, Rebecca's note to Jack Favell, the hair brushes, the library, and the white azaleas.
13. identify the story's climax and the events (involving the narrator's innocence) that lead to this climax.
14. discuss the importance of the minor characters to the plot.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. A coming-of-age novel is defined as a novel in which the main character or characters grow, mature, or understand the world in adult terms. A loss-of-innocence novel is one in which the child or young adult is living a blissfully happy life, innocent of any real evil or hardship. This innocence is shattered, however, by what the character observes or experiences; this experience changes the character. Which of the above definitions best describes the narrator's experiences in this story? Cite incidents from the novel to support your answer.
2. Discuss the importance of Manderley to the following characters in the story: Maxim, Rebecca, the narrator, the community.
3. What is the climax of the novel? In what way does the narrator change after this incident?
4. Discuss the narrator's relationship with the servants (except Mrs. Danvers) in the story. How does this relationship change as the novel progresses? State a theme for the novel based on this relationship.
5. Some critics believe that the author uses descriptions of nature to represent some of the characters in the story. Find a passage in the story illustrating the connection between the following natural elements and the characters:
  - Maxim and the rose garden
  - The narrator and blue bells
  - Rhododendrons and Rebecca
6. What evidence is there that Rebecca is an evil, cruel woman? How does her cruelty to Ben help clear Maxim of her murder?
7. In what sense is the name of Rebecca's boat ironic? Prophetic?
8. Point out the irony in the wedding present Beatrice gives the narrator.
9. Suspense is created and maintained in this novel in several ways. Find a passage in the novel or cite an incident to illustrate each of the following techniques:
  - The mood or tone of the description (usually of nature) helps to foreshadow future events. For example, if the mood is dark, then something fearful happens. Hint: Consider the descriptions of the fog, the woods, Happy Valley, etc.
  - The reader is curious to discover how a character will respond to a situation.
  - The reader knows more than the characters in the story and is curious to see how the characters discover the truth of certain situations.
10. List four items or props in the story that remind the narrator of Rebecca's powerful presence at Manderley.

## Chapter Two

### VOCABULARY

**ablutions** – washing of the body  
**deride** – make fun of; ridicule  
**ennui** – boredom  
**furtive** – done or acting in a stealthy manner  
**gaucherie** – awkwardness; tactlessness  
**hide-bound** – conservative and narrow-minded  
**lorgnette** – a pair of eyeglasses attached to a handle  
**panacea** – a supposed remedy, cure, or medicine; cure-all

1. Why does the narrator believe “they” can never go back to Manderley?

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2. This story is told in first-person narration. Frequently, the narrator breaks away from the story to comment on life in general and offer the reader bits of wisdom she has acquired through the experiences she is relating. Find an example of a generalization about life discussing the definition of happiness. In your opinion, is the narrator happy at this point in her life?

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## Chapter Eight

1. How does Mrs. de Winter feel about the wonderful breakfast that is prepared for her on her first morning at Manderley?

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2. In what way does Mrs. de Winter surprise Frith? How does he help her on her first morning as mistress of Manderley?

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3. Daphne du Maurier often uses descriptions of nature to represent characters in the novel. Find a description of nature in this chapter that illustrates that the morning room was Rebecca's.

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4. What are Mrs. de Winter's feelings as she examines the desk in the morning room?

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5. Why does Mrs. de Winter decide to write a letter to Mrs. Van Hopper?

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## Chapter Seventeen

1. Why does the narrator decide to attend the party in her blue dress?

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2. Tone is defined as the mood or atmosphere of a piece of literature. Tone can be formal, intimate, oppressed, happy, etc. What is the tone of this chapter?

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3. What significance do you think the narrator places on the fact that Maxim never comes to bed after the party?

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## Chapter Twenty-Two

### VOCABULARY

**seacock** – a valve below the waterline in the hull of a ship, used to control the intake of sea water.

1. Often the author uses descriptions of nature to set the mood or tone of the story. What does the following description of the weather on the day of the inquest suggest to the reader about the mood of the day? In what sense can this description also be an example of foreshadowing which helps to create suspense?

The weather had not broken yet. It was still hot, oppressive. The air was full of thunder, and there was rain behind the white dull sky, but it did not fall. I could feel it, and smell it, pent up there, behind the clouds.”

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2. What surprising evidence does Mr. Tabb present at the hearing?

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