

BOOK CLUB TO GO!

The Dead

From Dubliners

By James Joyce

Introduction

The Dead is the last story in the short story collection *Dubliners* that was first published in 1914. Joyce wrote to a friend that the intent of this collection was to chronicle the "moral history of Ireland" through four stages: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life. *The Dead* was actually written after the completion of the original collection, in 1907, as a coda to uplift the spirit of a work many saw as depressing and dreary. While the other stories fit into one of the four categories into which Joyce organized the collection, *The Dead* actually has elements both of the maturity and the public life categories. It is also different from the other stories because it is much longer and contains more than just a "thumbnail sketch of characteristic situations".

(Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World*)

About the Author

James Joyce, the twentieth century's most influential novelist, was born in Dublin on February 2, 1882. The oldest of ten children, he grew up in a family that went from prosperity to penury because of his father's wastrel behavior. After receiving a rigorous Jesuit education, twenty-year-old Joyce renounced his Catholicism and left Dublin in 1902 to spend most of his life as a writer in exile in Paris, Trieste, Rome, and Zurich. On one trip back to Ireland, he fell in love with the now famous Nora Barnacle on June 16, the day he later chose as "Bloomsday" in his novel *Ulysses*. Nora was an uneducated Galway girl who became his lifelong companion and the mother of his two children. In debt and drinking heavily, Joyce lived for thirty-six years on the Continent, supporting himself first by teaching jobs, then through the patronage of Mrs. Harold McCormick (Edith Rockefeller) and the English feminist and Editor Harriet Shaw Weaver. His writings include *Chamber music* (1907), *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Exiles* (1918), *Ulysses* (1922), *Poems Penyeach* (1927), *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and an early draft of *A Portrait of a Young Man*, *Stephan Hero* (1944). *Ulysses* required seven years to complete, and his masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake*, took seventeen. Both works revolutionized the form, structure, and content of the novel. Joyce died in Zurich in 1941.

(randomhouse.com)

Reviews

“Joyce renews our apprehension of reality, strengthens our sympathy with our fellow creatures, and leaves us in awe before the mystery of created things.” – *Atlantic Monthly*

“James Joyce reinvented the art of fiction, using a scrupulous, deadpan realism to convey truths that were at once blasphemous and sacramental. Writing about the Christmas party at which an uprooted intellectual discovers just how little he really knows about his wife (*The Dead*), Joyce takes narrative places it had never been before.” – *Penguingroup.com*

“It is in the prose of *Dubliners* that we first hear the authentic rhythms of Joyce the poet . . . *Dubliners* is, in a very real sense, the foundation of Joyce’s art. In shaping its stories, he developed that mastery of naturalistic detail and symbolic design which is the hallmark of his mature fiction.” – Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz, authors of *Dubliners: Text and Criticism*

Further Reading

Hedda Gabler by Henrik Ibsen

The Collected Stories by William Trevor

In Our Time by Ernest Hemingway

(*Penguingroup.com*)

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Possible Discussion Questions

1. On page 21-24, Lily is the first character to be introduced to us. What is her position in the text—her social class, etc? How important will she be in the rest of the story?
2. On page 24, why does Gabriel “color” as if he has made a mistake when Lily becomes upset about the subject of men? What might his reaction reveal about his ability to relate to women and to people of other social classes?
3. On page 24, why is Gabriel anxious about the after-dinner speech he must make? How does he see himself in relation to his hosts, Aunt Kate and Julia? Does the narrative voice offer any enlightenment about Gabriel’s thoughts here—or elsewhere in the story?
4. On page 23, Gretta explains why she is wearing galoshes. What picture of her marriage with Gabriel emerges from the interchange (spoken and unspoken between Gretta, Gabriel, and Aunts Kate and Julia)?
5. On page 27, what mistake does Mr. Browne make? How does his conduct hint at the rift that is beginning to open up between the men and the women in Joyce’s story?
6. On page 30-33, why is Miss Ivors successful in getting under Gabriel’s skin? What things has she implied about him that he finds unpleasant?
7. On page 35-36, what is revealed about Julia’s abortive singing career? Is she a good singer? What kept her from going further with her singing? Why is the subject of Julia dropped or diverted so quickly?
8. On page 41-42, why is Mr. Browne unable to understand what he is told about the Monk’s habits? More generally, what contrast does Mr. Browne provide in the story?
9. From page 42 onwards, what effect does the narrative’s mention of snow have upon your perception of events and of the characters’ thoughts?
10. On page 42-46, Gabriel makes his speech. What themes does he offer his guests, and how sincerely do you suppose his words reflect his real views about Kate and Julia, his own self-image, Irish hospitality, and possibly other things?

11. On page 46-47, what effect does Gabriel's anecdote about Patrick Morkan ("the Old Gentleman") have upon the speech he has just made at the dinner table?
12. On page 53-54, what does the text reveal about Gabriel's understanding of his wife as an individual with thoughts beyond her marriage relations with him? Describe the advancing states of Gabriel's desire for his wife—what makes him remember their "secret life together," and what further excites him?
13. From page 55-59, how does Gabriel's long time misunderstanding of his wife play out? To what extent is Gabriel able to reflect accurately upon his own motivations, desires, and actions? To what extent does he seem sincere or accurate in his reflections upon himself and Gretta?
14. By the story's end on page 59, we hear that the snow is falling all over Ireland, on both the living and the dead. What symbolic and predictive value does the snowfall have by this point?

(www.ajdrake.com/e336_fall_03/materials/authors/joyce_sq.htm)