

Mrs. Dalloway

(Published in 1925)

by Virginia Woolf

Approved for use in

Summary of the Work:

With a tip of the hat to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Virginia Woolf portrays a day-in-the-life of Clarissa Dalloway as she goes about prepping and hosting an evening party for her Londonite society friends and acquaintances. As Clarissa busies herself with preparations for the party, she reflects on her life, her family, and her friends. Her sense that life and love have been somehow misspent or her values misplaced is precipitated by the arrival from India of Peter Walsh, a man she once passionately loved but whom she rejected in favor of security and stability. A complementary character is Septimus Warren Smith, who has retreated to a private world of madness (due in part to shellshock) and commits suicide the night of the Dalloway party. The two never meet, but their lives are connected by external events, such as an airplane overhead and a bus passing both, and by the fact that they are both sensitive individuals who feel emotionally bankrupt.

Rationale:

Mrs. Dalloway is an excellent novel for senior AP Literature, especially for college-bound students due to its challenging narrative and technical craft. This period (1900-1935) of British, Irish, and American literature is flooded with innovative, technical, literary invention. Specifically, Woolf experiments heavily with *stream of consciousness* and the novel acts as a literary bellwether, both to her own future works and to contemporary modernist authors (notably, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Mansfield, and Faulkner). While the novel follows a chronological narrative progression, the characters are constantly flashing back to their previous experiences as the day goes on with the party preparations continue. Techniques like *stream of consciousness*, *doppelganger*, and Woolf's trademark "*tunneling*" are all front-and-center in the novel. For these reasons, the novel serves as an excellent introductory challenge for AP Lit students in the sense that they likely have never been exposed to such creative technique in their prior reading.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Woolf was an English novelist, critic, and essayist, and an exact contemporary of James Joyce, both living from 1882-1941. She's known for her experimentation and innovation and her novels are noted for their poetic and symbolic quality and their emphasis on the psychological realm.

Noted Distinction:

Readability

- Lexile Score: 950
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: 2021

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* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Notes on the Text:

Mrs. Dalloway narration opens with the main character, Clarissa Dalloway, heading out to buy flowers for her evening party in the Westminster-Soho area of 1920's London. Utilizing a technique my classes (Mr. Proctor-HHS) have coined as "venning" (in the tradition of a Venn Diagram), characters' paths are constantly brushes, interfacing, overlapping on several levels—physically, socially, psychologically, emotionally. The challenge is that there's no frame narrator to put everything into perspective. Reading and study of the novel provokes discussion on virtually every major literary technique in the AP catalogue: stream of consciousness; style, dialect, figurative language, allusion, point of view, conflict and so forth.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Mrs. Dalloway is generally taught in AP Literature and regularly appears on the AP Novel List as viable work to undertake on the AP Lit exam, Q3.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)