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Daisy Miller

Henry James · *1878* · *original English text*

At Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel. There Frederick Winterbourne meets Daisy Miller, a young American whose freedom in European society becomes a test of manners, courage, and judgment. James's original English, Project Gutenberg #208, complete.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is to be made of a young American girl who will not be guided by the rules of the European colony, and of the young man who cannot decide whether she is innocent or only reckless?

"At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel."

I

Daisy Miller is short, famous, and easily flattened into a type. The book itself is more exact. Winterbourne watches, judges, delays, and comes too late. Rome, the Colosseum at night, and a fever close the story. Teach the manners, the courage, and the cost of a hesitation. For older students, though the tale is short enough for a careful class.

KEY CHARACTERS

Annie "Daisy" Miller
The young American whose freedom in Europe is the book's test

Frederick Winterbourne
The observer, half Europeanized, who cannot decide in time

Randolph Miller
Daisy's little brother, already a commentator on American life abroad

Mrs. Miller
The mother, vague and unhelpful as a guide

Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker
The voices of the American colony and its rules

Giovanelli
The Italian with whom Daisy is seen in Rome

A HOTEL AT VEVEY

> *"At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel."*
>
> I

Grades 11–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Hotel at Vevey

PART I

Winterbourne, who has been a great deal at Geneva, meets Daisy, her little brother Randolph, and their mother at the hotel. The introduction is already a collision of manners.

- The first sentence is exact: the comfortable hotel at Vevey
- Randolph's talk of American candy and of "the old thing at Geneva" belongs to this opening
- Winterbourne is already a spectator, half charmed and half cautious
- The lake, the garden, and the walk to the Castle of Chillon follow

> *"At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel."*
>
> I

02

An American Girl Abroad

VEVEY, AND THE FIRST JUDGMENTS

Daisy talks to Winterbourne as if acquaintance were simple. Mrs. Costello, Winterbourne's aunt, will not be introduced to her. Already the colony has a verdict.

- The question of who may be "introduced" is the early social law of the book
- Daisy's freedom is real; so is the world's talk about it
- Do not reduce her at once to a flirt or to a martyr
- Winterbourne's indecision begins here

03

Rome

PART II

The scene moves to Rome. Daisy is seen with Giovanelli. Mrs. Walker attempts a public correction, and is refused. The American colony tightens.

- Giovanelli is part of the later test; do not invent a simple villain
- The Pincio, the party, and Mrs. Walker's carriage are the public scenes
- Winterbourne still watches, and still will not quite decide
- The book is as much about his hesitation as about Daisy's walk

04

The Colosseum at Night

THE CLOSE

Winterbourne finds Daisy and Giovanelli in the Colosseum at night. A fever follows. The last pages are judgment after the fact, and a late discovery about her.

- The night at the Colosseum is the turning; quote the hosted wording when you cite it
- Do not invent a last-minute rescue the story does not give
- Winterbourne's late knowledge is part of the cost; he has been a spectator too long
- Teach the ending with gravity, not as a mere cautionary tale about travel

05

The Hosted File

PG #208

The hosted text is complete, original English, 1878. A short novel, and one of James's most widely read.

- It may be read with The American and later with The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors
- Keep the place-names as printed: Vevey, Chillon, Geneva, the Pincio, the Colosseum
- The tale is short; it is not therefore slight
- Quote only the hosted wording

Innocence and Reputation · America and Europe · Manners · Hesitation · Courage · A Late Judgment

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The opening is exact: "At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel."
2. Winterbourne is a spectator who delays. The book is as much about his hesitation as about Daisy's freedom.
3. Do not flatten Daisy into a type—neither a mere flirt nor a simple martyr. The story is more exact than the legend.
4. The close at the Colosseum, and the fever that follows, should be taught with gravity. Do not invent a rescue James did not write.
5. The hosted text is complete, PG #208, original English, 1878. A short novel, not a slight one.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #208, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/daisy-miller/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.