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The Ambassadors

Henry James · *1903 · original English text*

Lambert Strether, sent from Woollett to Paris to bring home Chad Newsome, finds a life larger than his errand. In Gloriani's garden he tells little Bilham to live all he can. The hosted text is James's original English, Project Gutenberg #432, complete, including the later preface that already points to that outbreak.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens when a man sent to rescue a young American from Paris discovers that the life there has something his own town had not dreamt of, and that it may be too late for himself?

"Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what have you had?"

Lambert Strether · Book Fifth, Gloriani's garden, to little Bilham

The counsel is spoken in the novel itself, in Book Fifth, not only in the preface. Strether has come as an ambassador of Woollett and of Mrs. Newsome. Paris, Chad, and Madame de Vionnet undo the simplicity of his errand. The close will test what he will take home, and what he will refuse. Teach the awakening, and the cost of a late one. For older students (11–12).

KEY CHARACTERS

Lambert Strether
The ambassador from Woollett, whose late awakening is the book's center

Chad Newsome
The young American Strether was sent to bring home

Madame de Vionnet
The Frenchwoman whose attachment to Chad undoes the simplicity of the errand

Maria Gostrey
Strether's friend and guide, and, as the preface says, the reader's friend much rather

Waymarsh
The American friend at the hotel, who holds to the old view

Mrs. Newsome and the Pococks
The authority at Woollett, and the later ambassadors sent to reinforce it

LIVE ALL YOU CAN

> *"Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted."*
>
> Book First, I

> *"Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what have you had?"*
>
> **Lambert Strether** · Book Fifth

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Strether's First Question

BOOK FIRST, OPENING

Strether reaches the hotel and asks first about his friend Waymarsh, who is not to arrive till evening. He is not wholly disconcerted.

- The novel itself begins, after the preface, "Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend"
- A telegram from Waymarsh, bespeaking a room "only if not noisy," is already produced
- Maria Gostrey, who becomes the reader's friend as well as Strether's, belongs to this threshold
- Quote the narrative, not only the preface, for the first sentence of the story

02

The Errand from Woollett

THE EARLY BOOKS

Strether has been sent by Mrs. Newsome to bring her son Chad home from a Paris that Woollett believes has corrupted him. The ambassadorship is also a test of Strether himself.

- Woollett, Massachusetts, is the philosophy he has brought with him
- Chad Newsome is the young man who will not be easily fetched
- The early books are recognition: Paris is not the simple snare he was sent to name
- Waymarsh remains the voice of the old view

03

Live All You Can

BOOK FIFTH, GLORIANI'S GARDEN

On a Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden, Strether yields, for his young friend little Bilham, the candour of a late confession: live all you can; it is a mistake not to.

- The speech is exact in the novel's body, including the comma after "particular"
- The same outbreak is also discussed in James's preface; quote the spoken scene in Book Fifth as the source of the counsel
- Strether already feels himself too old for what he sees; the counsel is given to the young
- Madame de Vionnet is in view; the errand is already changing

04

Chad, Madame de Vionnet, and the Other Ambassadors

THE LATER BOOKS

The Pococks arrive as reinforcements from Woollett. Strether comes to see what Chad's attachment really is, and what a return to Woollett would cost.

- Sarah Pocock and the family party are the second embassy
- Madame de Vionnet is not to be reduced to a snare; the book asks for a harder judgment
- The famous recognition on the river is a test of what Strether will admit
- Teach the moral complication; do not flatten Paris into vice or Woollett into virtue only

05

What He Will Not Take

THE CLOSE, AND THE HOSTED FILE

Strether will not take a reward that would look like payment for his change of mind. The hosted text is complete, PG #432, original English.

- The close is a refusal as much as an awakening; do not invent a last-chapter prize James did not write
- The preface is in the file and already names the garden speech; keep preface and novel distinct when citing
- For older students (11–12)
- This is the international novel at full stretch; it may be read beside The American and The Portrait of a Lady

A Late Awakening · Duty and Freedom · America and Europe · Friendship and Influence · What One Will Not Take · Time and Youth

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The novel itself begins: "Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted." A preface stands first in this file; cite the narrative for that opening.
2. "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to" is spoken in Book Fifth, in Gloriani's garden, to little Bilham. In the novel there is a comma after "particular." The preface also discusses the speech; quote the scene itself.
3. Strether's counsel is not a shrug at duty. He has come as an ambassador, and the close tests what he will refuse as well as what he has seen.
4. The hosted text is complete, PG #432, original English. For older students (11–12).
5. Do not flatten Paris into vice or Woollett into simple virtue. The book is a moral complication, not a travel brochure.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #432, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/james-the-ambassadors/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.