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The Magic Mountain

Thomas Mann · *1924 · H. T. Lowe-Porter translation (1927)*

Hans Castorp, a plain, pleasant young engineer from Hamburg, goes to a sanatorium at Davos in the Swiss Alps to visit his cousin Joachim for three weeks. He is told he has a spot on his lung, and he stays for seven years. Thomas Mann's great novel of ideas takes up the large questions of Europe before the First World War through the story of one ordinary young man.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does an ordinary person make of the great arguments of his age, and what does he do with time when time is given to him?

Hans is neither a thinker nor a fool. He listens to the humanist Settembrini and to the Jesuit-communist Naphta, falls in love with Clavdia Chauchat, and drifts in the sanatorium's routine. A snowstorm gives him a vision of life and death. The book ends in 1914 with a thunderclap, as the war pulls him down from the mountain and into the fighting.

KEY CHARACTERS

Hans Castorp
The hero, an ordinary young engineer.

Joachim Ziemssen
His soldierly cousin.

Lodovico Settembrini
A humanist and talker.

Leo Naphta
A Jesuit and radical.

Clavdia Chauchat
A Russian patient.

Mynheer Peeperkorn
A Dutch planter of great presence.

Hofrat Behrens
The medical director.

Grades 11–12
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01
Arrival
CHAPTERS I–II

Hans arrives at the Berghof to visit Joachim for three weeks and is diagnosed with a spot on his lung.

- The journey up the mountain is a change of world.
- The cousin Joachim is a soldierly foil.
- The three weeks begin to stretch.

02
The Life of the Sanatorium
CHAPTERS III–IV

Hans learns the routine of the sanatorium, meets Settembrini, and falls in love with Clavdia.

- Time moves differently at the sanatorium.
- Settembrini is a talker for progress.
- Clavdia is a Russian patient who fascinates Hans.

03
Naphta and the Snow
CHAPTERS V–VI

Naphta and Settembrini compete for Hans, who is lost in a snowstorm and has a visionary dream.

- The arguments of the two men are a debate of Europe.
- The snowstorm is a near-death.
- The dream gives Hans a creed.

04
Peeperkorn and the End
CHAPTER VII

Joachim dies. Peeperkorn kills himself. Naphta and Settembrini fight a duel, and Naphta shoots himself.

- Peeperkorn is a huge, vague personality.
- The duel ends the debate in an act.
- Death takes the people around Hans.

05
The Thunderclap
CHAPTER VII, ENDING

War breaks out in 1914, Hans leaves the mountain and goes to the front.

- The war breaks the spell.
- Hans is one of many soldiers.
- The ending leaves his fate unclear.

Time · Ideas · Illness · Europe

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. Time is the book's great subject. Notice how it is measured.
2. Settembrini and Naphta argue about the world. See how Hans listens.
3. The snow chapter is the center. Ask what Hans learns.
4. The ending is a war. Ask what the mountain has taught him.

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