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The Pillow-Book of Sei Shōnagon

Sei Shonagon · *c. 1002* · *Arthur Waley*

When I first entered her Majesty's service I felt indescribably shy, and was indeed constantly on the verge of tears. Arthur Waley's English, Project Gutenberg #76016, is a selection, not the complete Pillow Book, and this file weaves Waley's commentary around her passages. For grades 10–12. Quote Shōnagon, not only the essay. The famous seasonal opening of later complete translations is not in this file; do not invent it.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should a school read this Pillow-Book as what it is—Arthur Waley's selection, with his commentary around Shōnagon's own court memories—rather than as a complete later translation, or as the translator's essay only?

"When I first entered her Majesty's service I felt indescribably shy, and was indeed"

Waley's selection: her arrival at court

Waley's book is a selection, not the complete Pillow Book. In this hosted file his introduction and commentary surround her passages. Quote her, not only him. When she first entered her Majesty's service she felt indescribably shy, and was constantly on the verge of tears; so nervous was she that when the Empress passed her a picture or book, she was hardly capable of putting out her hand to take it. To an inexperienced home-bred girl, it was a wonderful surprise that such people existed on earth at all. Teach that court, for grades 10–12. The famous opening of later complete translations—"In spring it is the dawn"—is not in this file; do not invent it or import it from Ivan Morris or another edition.

KEY CHARACTERS

Sei Shonagon
A gentlewoman in the Empress's service, who writes of her first shyness and of the court she learned to notice

The Empress
Whose service she first enters, and who passes her a picture, and calls after her at dawn

Arthur Waley
The translator of this selection, whose commentary surrounds her passages; not the author of the Pillow Book

HOW TO READ THIS SELECTION

> *"When I first entered her Majesty's service I felt indescribably shy, and was indeed"*
>
> Her arrival at court

> *"To an inexperienced home-bred girl like me it was a wonderful surprise to discover that such people as this existed on earth at all. At dawn"*
>
> Her arrival at court

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

When I First Entered Her Service

HER ARRIVAL AT COURT

When she first entered her Majesty's service she felt indescribably shy, and was indeed constantly on the verge of tears. Waley introduces the passage; the voice is hers.

- Quote Shōnagon, not only Waley's frame.
- Keep the shyness and the verge of tears.
- 10–12.
- This is a selection, not the complete book.

> *"When I first entered her Majesty's service I felt indescribably shy, and was indeed"*
>
> Waley's selection: her arrival at court

02

A Picture, and a Hand That Would Hardly Move

HER ARRIVAL AT COURT

So nervous was she that when the Empress passed her some picture or book to look at, she was hardly capable of putting out her hand to take it. A first evening is told through a hand.

- Keep "picture or book" and "hardly capable."
- The lamp, in the next lines, is close beside them.
- 10–12. Tact.
- Quote this English.

> *"so nervous was I that when she passed me some picture or book to look at, I was hardly capable of putting out my hand to take it. While she"*
>
> Waley's selection: her arrival at court

03

An Inexperienced, Home-Bred Girl

HER ARRIVAL AT COURT

To an inexperienced home-bred girl like her it was a wonderful surprise to discover that such people as this existed on earth at all. At dawn she hurried away, and the Empress called after her.

- Keep "home-bred girl" and "existed on earth at all."
- The Empress is Sadako's court; name the service honestly.
- 10–12.
- Do not flatten Heian court life into a later slogan.

> *"To an inexperienced home-bred girl like me it was a wonderful surprise to discover that such people as this existed on earth at all. At dawn"*
>
> Waley's selection: her arrival at court

04

At Dawn I Hurried Away

HER ARRIVAL AT COURT

At dawn she hurried away, but the Empress called after her, saying she seemed to be as frightened of the daylight as the ugly old God of Katsuragi. The first night ends in a calling-back, and a joke.

- Keep the dawn and the calling after.
- Waley's note on Katsuragi, if present, is his; quote her line.
- 10–12.
- A first service, not the whole court career.

> *"At dawn I hurried away, but the Empress called after me, saying I seemed to be"*
>
> Waley's selection: her arrival at court

05

Waley's Selection, Not the Complete Book

THE EDITION

Project Gutenberg #76016 is Arthur Waley's The Pillow-Book of Sei Shōnagon. It is a selection, and this file mixes his commentary with her passages. Quote her. The seasonal opening familiar from later complete translations is not here; do not invent it. For grades 10–12. One map cannot teach even this selection entire.

- Name Waley, and say selection.
- Do not import Ivan Morris's opening.
- Tact; a court of women and men, not a spectacle.
- Beauty, shyness, and exact noticing.

> *"When I first entered her Majesty's service I felt indescribably shy, and was indeed"*
>
> Waley's selection: her arrival at court

A first evening at court

Shyness, and exact noticing

A home-bred girl, surprised

Waley's selection, honestly named

Beauty under a close lamp

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. This is Arthur Waley's selection, not the complete Pillow Book. The file weaves his commentary around her passages; quote her.
2. The famous seasonal opening of later complete translations is not in this file; do not invent it or import it.
3. When she first entered her Majesty's service she felt indescribably shy, on the verge of tears.
4. For grades 10–12. Tact. One map cannot teach even this selection entire.

Quotations are verbatim from the Arthur Waley, Project Gutenberg #76016, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/sei-shonagon-the-pillow-book/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.