CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Turn of the Screw and The Aspern Papers

Henry James · *1898 / 1888 · original English text*

Two novellas in one hosted file: The Turn of the Screw (1898), a Christmas-Eve tale of a governess, two children, and a visitation at Bly; and The Aspern Papers (1888), a tale of a biographer in Venice who will do almost anything for a poet's papers. Project Gutenberg #209 and #211, joined, complete. Map both, as the volume is labeled.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What should a student watch for in a tale of visitation that will not settle its own mystery, and in a tale of literary hunger that will not stop at another person's privacy?

"The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as, on Christmas Eve in an old house, a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to say that it was the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child."

The Turn of the Screw, opening

The hosted volume is two works. The Turn of the Screw begins as a story told round the fire, and then becomes the governess's manuscript. Do not "solve" the ghosts on the map; James does not settle them. The Aspern Papers is a story of curiosity that becomes a trespass. Teach both as moral trials, for older students.

KEY CHARACTERS

The governess
The unnamed narrator of the Bly manuscript, young, isolated, and sure she must save the children

Miles and Flora
The children at Bly, around whom the visitation is said to turn

Peter Quint and Miss Jessel
The dead valet and the former governess, as the new governess names them

Mrs. Grose
The housekeeper, the governess's only adult stay at Bly

The unnamed narrator of The Aspern Papers
The literary hunter in Venice

Juliana Bordereau, and her niece
The old woman who keeps the papers, and the younger woman who lives with her

A TALE TOLD ROUND THE FIRE

> *"The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as, on Christmas Eve in an old house, a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to say that it was the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child."*
>
> The Turn of the Screw, opening

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

01

Round the Fire, on Christmas Eve

THE TURN OF THE SCREW, THE FRAME

A company, held breathless by a gruesome story, hears that the next tale is a visitation that has fallen on a child. The manuscript of the governess is then brought forward.

- The opening sentence is exact, including "round the fire" and "on Christmas Eve in an old house"
- The frame matters: we receive the governess's words through a teller and a manuscript
- Do not skip the frame in order to rush at Bly
- This is James's original English, PG #209, complete in the joined file

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02

Bly, the Children, and the Visitation

THE GOVERNESS'S MANUSCRIPT

A young governess comes to Bly to take charge of Miles and Flora. She becomes convinced that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, both dead, are visiting the children.

- Keep the names as James prints them: Bly, Miles, Flora, Peter Quint, Miss Jessel
- The uncle in London will not be written to; that condition is part of her isolation
- Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, is the only adult companion
- Do not name a single official "solution" on the map; the tale is written to remain in question

03

The Last Turn

THE CLOSE OF THE TURN OF THE SCREW

The last chapters press the children, the governess, and the visitation to a crisis. The end is terrible, and brief.

- Teach the close with gravity; a child is at the center of the tale
- For older and advanced students (grade band 11–12)
- Do not turn the last pages into a horror entertainment only
- The work is 1898, original English, complete in this file

04

The Aspern Papers, in Venice

THE SECOND WORK IN THE FILE

A narrator comes to Venice hunting the papers of the poet Jeffrey Aspern, which he believes are in the keeping of Juliana Bordereau, who once knew the poet, and of her niece.

- The second work is The Aspern Papers, 1888, PG #211, complete in the same hosted file
- The hunger is literary, and it becomes a trespass on a private life
- Juliana Bordereau is old, sharp, and not a mere obstacle
- Teach the moral question: what may a biographer do for a dead poet's papers?

05

A Volume of Two Novellas

THE HOSTED FILE

The catalogue title is exact: both works, joined. Map both; do not pretend the file is only the ghost story.

- Quote each work from its own pages; do not mix speeches
- Both are James's original English
- The Aspern close, like the other, should not be recast as a neat fable the sentences do not support
- For older students; one tale of visitation, one of literary appetite

Innocence and Fear | Isolation | Testimony and Doubt | Literary Hunger | Privacy and Trespass | Responsibility for Children

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The Turn of the Screw opens exactly: "The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless..." It is a Christmas-Eve frame, then a manuscript. Keep both.
2. Do not settle the ghosts on the map. James does not. The moral trial of the governess, and of the reader, is part of the design.
3. The hosted file is two complete works, PG #209 and #211 joined: The Turn of the Screw (1898) and The Aspern Papers (1888). Map both, as the title says.
4. The Aspern Papers is a story of curiosity become trespass. Teach what a person may not do, even for a great poet's papers.
5. For older students (11–12). A visitation involving children, and a death at the close of the first tale, should be taught with gravity, not as spectacle.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #209/#211, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-turn-of-the-screw-and-the-aspern-papers/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.