



## Take a Break Book Club

Discussion Guide for *Turn of the Screw* by Henry James  
**October 2021**

### About the Book

Join us as we read The *Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. This late Victorian ghost story is chilling, wrought with tantalizing ambiguity, and is James' most famous novella.

*The Turn of the Screw* tells of a nameless young governess sent to a country house to take charge of two orphans, Miles and Flora. Unsettled by a dark foreboding of menace within the house, she soon comes to believe that something malevolent is stalking the children in her care. But is the threat to her young charges really a malign and ghostly presence or something else entirely? *The Turn of the Screw* is James's great masterpiece of haunting atmosphere and unbearable tension and has influenced subsequent ghost stories and films such as *The Innocents* and *The Others*.

Check out the eAudiobook and eBook on OverDrive/Libby with no holds from October 1-31:

<https://bit.ly/3z6FzWB>

### About the Author

Henry James was born into a wealthy family in New York City in 1843 but spent most of his adult life living in England and travelling throughout Europe. He wrote 22 novels and over a hundred short stories as well as essays, plays, and autobiographies. He wrote primarily about European upper class traditions and their role and influence in a more modern society. His most famous novels are *A Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors*. *The Turn of the Screw* is James' most famous short story.

9 Frightening Facts about *Turn of the Screw*: <https://bit.ly/3D0AJfR>

## Discussion Questions, Facts, and Activities

### 1. What makes fiction "Gothic"?

From: <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/c.php?g=347594&p=7003511>

The Gothic Novel is thought to have emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, inspired by the architectural style of the same name. Usually the setting consists of a castle or manor in an isolated location, away from any city or civilization. This genre is dark, eerie, and mysterious, often containing elements of terror, horror, and the macabre and the bizarre. Common themes and motifs of the Gothic include power, confinement, and isolation. The genre has led to the rise of pulp magazines in the early twentieth century, the modern horror genre, and most famously, the Southern Gothic--fiction that contains elements of the gothic, taking place in the American South.

The first Gothic Novel--according to most scholars--is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, written in 1764. This began the genre that includes authors like Bram Stoker, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, and countless others.

2. Do you have a favourite Halloween or Autumn-themed book or movie that you like to read or watch this time of year? Make a list, and think about why it is you love them!
3. Ghosts aren't merely phantoms, lingering at the corner of the eye, at the fringes of our psyche – a proper ghost needs a backstory.

We know where you can find one in a hurry: <https://bit.ly/3iiFZ6Q>

Who is your ghost? What do they want?

4. *The Turn of the Screw* is a ghost story that went on to influence other stories and films in the genre. That got us thinking about other famous

literary ghosts that have come to pervade our cultural imaginations. Which classic literary ghost is your favourite?

- ❖ Jacob Marley
- ❖ Hamlet's Father
- ❖ The heart (in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Telltale Heart")
- ❖ The Headless Horseman
- ❖ The Dead Men of Dunharrow
- ❖ The Canterville Ghost
- ❖ Nearly Headless Nick
- ❖ Something else!

5. Did you know that *Turn of the Screw* has at least a dozen direct TV and film adaptations? And another dozen based loosely on the plot...?

*The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), a 9-episode Netflix series, sticks closely to the original story and rates an 87% from Rotten Tomatoes! 🎥 🍅

For feature length film adaptations, look no further than your local library: <https://bit.ly/2WmGUeC> 🎥 🌐 😊

## Readalikes

Spooky is as spooky does.

- *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte
- *Rebecca* by Daphne DuMaurier
- *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe
- *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson
- *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill
- *The Lady's Maid's Bell* by Edith Wharton
- *Carmilla* by J. Sheridan Le Fanu

- *The Old Nurse's Story* by Elizabeth Gaskell
- *This House is Haunted* by John Boyne
- *The Silent Companions* by Laura Purcell
- *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins