

The Woman in Black
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Christmas Eve

1. When Arthur starts his narrative, what time of year is it and what time of day?
2. What is the weather like?
3. Describe the inside of the house.
4. At this point in the story, how do you think Arthur is feeling?
5. Summarise Arthur's history.
6. Describe how Arthur came to buy Monk's Piece. Why do you think this detail is included?
7. From the comments that Arthur makes, what do his feelings towards Mr Bentley appear to be?
8. Summarise Arthur's descriptions of his step-children. Why are they depicted in such detail when they do not feature in the rest of the story?
9. Why do you think Arthur describes the drawing room in such detail? What impression do you get of it?
10. Make a list of the ghost story elements that Arthur's children use in their stories; why do you think they do? How does Arthur repeat the list?
11. Overall, what sort of impression do you get of Arthur from this first chapter?
12. What hints are there here that Arthur is about to narrate a ghost story which has overshadowed the rest of his life?

The Woman in Black

1. Why does Arthur settle his account at the Gifford Arms by messenger and why does he not return to Crythin Gifford? Why might Hill include these details?
2. How does Arthur attempt to reassure himself about the woman in black after he discusses the possible death of a child with Samuel Daily?
3. Re-read the two paragraphs that begin, 'My story is almost done'. What does Arthur's anxiety suggest to the reader at this point? When reading this for the first time what do, or did, you think he might have yet to reveal?
4. Why do Arthur and Stella marry so quickly? What have Arthur's experiences at Eel Marsh House taught him, as he sees it?
5. When Arthur writes of the next events in his life what does his phrase, 'I could not have been less prepared for what was to come,' hint at to us?
6. Why do you think Hill decides to set the last major event on a summer afternoon?
7. As a reader, how do you feel when Arthur suddenly notices the woman in black whilst his wife and son are in the pony and trap?
8. How satisfied do you find the last line of the novel, 'The task is over my story. I have told it. Enough.'?

A London Particular

1. What time of year is it when the story begins?
2. What time of day is it?
3. Describe the weather; what elements does it have?
4. Why do you think Hill begins the chapter with very similar information to the first line of year / day / weather?
5. Read the paragraph beginning, 'Pools of sulphurous yellow light ...' (p.26) What do you notice about it? Why do you think Hill has included such details?
6. What do we learn about Mrs Drablow from Mr Bentley's conversation with Arthur? Is there anything to make the reader suspicious of what might happen later on?
7. What impression do you get of Mr Bentley from this chapter? What do you think Arthur's feelings towards him were at the time? What evidence do you have for your opinion?
8. What is the effect of the last two sentences of the chapter, beginning, 'On my way out of the building ...'?

The Journey North

1. Why do you think Hill describes Arthur as initially thrilled to be going by train up north and then, increasingly, finding it more unpleasant?
2. Note down the various descriptions Arthur gives of the trains and the surroundings as he journeys north and compare the language used; what is the effect?
3. Arthur says of his summary of Samuel Daily, 'Having, in my youthful and priggish way, summed up and all but dismissed him ...' What might this hint to the reader?
4. What more do we learn about Mrs Drablow and her circumstances from the conversation between the two men?
5. Why do you think Hill has used names such as Nines Lives Causeway, Eel Marsh House, Gavelnuth and Crythin Gifford for the area where the story takes place?
6. How do you think Arthur is feeling at the end of this chapter? What gives you this impression?

A Packet of Letters - continued

10. As Arthur sets off for a walk with Spider, the atmosphere and surroundings are again described. Write down what Hill depicts for the reader and explain why you think she sets the scene like this.
11. When Arthur and Samuel Daily talk together after dinner, what does Samuel's hesitation in telling Arthur any more about Mrs Drablow suggest to us?
12. What does Samuel eventually tell Arthur? Why might this alarm Arthur even though he is now leaving the town?
13. What further illness does Arthur suffer before he is able to leave the Dailys' house? Why do you think Hill includes this sickness and graphic description of it?
14. Describe the weather on the morning Arthur is meant to leave and the last morning when he is sitting up watching the bird. Why has Hill juxtaposed these two images?

A Packet of Letters

1. What does Arthur's conversation with Samuel Daily show us about Arthur's feelings and state of mind?
2. What are Arthur's thoughts when Samuel Daily tells him he has come to take him away from Eel Marsh House? What is it that Arthur is keen to escape from?
3. Describe what Arthur finds when he enters the nursery this morning? What does he consider might have been to the room and why does he dismiss this idea?
4. As Arthur and Samuel leave Eel Marsh House, what is the atmosphere and the weather like?
5. Re-read the paragraph that begins, 'I rested but I could not sleep ...' What do you think Arthur means when he writes about being reassured by all the people?
6. How does Arthur feel about not returning to Eel Marsh House? Explain his feelings.
7. What does he mean when he writes that he 'had learned a hard lesson.'?
8. How does Arthur feel when he reads the last of Jennet's letters?
9. Why is Arthur so horror-stricken when he finds the three death certificates? What do you think he has realised?

The Funeral of Mrs Drablow

1. What are Arthur's first impressions of the town of Crythin Gifford? Why might these be important to reflect on later on in the novel?
2. What is the landlord's reaction to Arthur's comment that he is going to Mrs Drablow's funeral?
3. What is Arthur's response to the landlord's reaction? What reasons does he give for not looking back, for his feelings?
4. What comments does Arthur make about his night's sleep in the town? What reasons does he give for remembering it so well? Why do you think Hill includes all these details?
5. Arthur contrasts the busy atmosphere of the market and the surroundings of Crythin Gifford. Give some examples of the language used and explore the reason why Hill might do this.
6. Re-read the description of Mr Jerome (pp.46-47), summarise it, and make a note of anything about him which Arthur may realize has significance later on.
7. When Arthur first sees the woman in black what are his first impressions of her and what are his feelings towards her?
8. What might be the significance of the children lined up against the railings?
9. What happens to Mr Jerome when Arthur asks him the identity of the woman in black? Make detailed notes and consider the importance of his reaction.
10. Why does Hill include the conversation between Arthur and the farmer from the auction?

Across the Causeway

1. As you read this chapter, note down any references to, and descriptions of, birds. Think about why Hill has included these and what effect the descriptions have.
2. Throughout this chapter are references to colour; make a note of each one to gain an overall impression of Eel Marsh House and its surroundings. What do you notice about the colours used?
3. As the chapter progresses Arthur goes through a series of extreme emotions; note down his changing feelings and what it is that prompts them – You might want to plot your ideas on a graph.
4. 'My head reeled at the sheer and startling beauty, the wide, bare openness of it. The sense of space, the vastness of the sky above and on either side made my heart race. I would have travelled a thousand miles to see this. I had never imagined such a place.' Why do you think Hill includes this and what significance might it hold?
5. Find Arthur's first sighting and impression of Eel Marsh House. Note down any words or phrases you find particularly striking and explore their possible significance.

Whistle and I'll Come to You - continued

8. Who does Arthur see looking at him from the window after he's rescued Spider? How is the eeriness of the sighting conveyed to us?
9. Arthur's last line of the chapter is 'It was the sound of a pony and trap'. What does this suggest about what might we imagine at this point?
10. Overall, what are your impressions of this chapter of the novel? Do you feel as if Arthur is overcoming his fears, about to lose his life, getting further into danger or something else?

Whistle and I'll Come to You

1. When Arthur wakes up, at the beginning of this chapter, how does he describe the wind? In what ways do his memories contrast the environment he is currently in?
2. What happens when Arthur goes out on to the landing? How do both these events heighten the tension even further?
3. What effect do Arthur's questions have, as he ponders what has just happened?
4. How does Arthur feel when he drops and breaks the torch? How does the darkness add to the horror of his situation?
5. What feelings overcome Arthur when he goes into the nursery? How does Hill convey the distress that Arthur feels and also his bewilderment at having such feelings?
6. What noise does Spider hear, when she goes outside, that causes her to set off across the marshes? What comment does Arthur make about the noise itself?
7. How does Hill signifiy the horror of the dog sinking in the mud? In your opinion, what else might you think of as you read about the dog's struggle?

Across the Causeway - continued

6. Just as the light goes from the sun and Arthur is about to leave the burial ground, he sees the woman in black again. Why do you think Hill waits until this moment in the chapter for the woman to reappear? What effect does the woman have on Arthur this time?
7. As Arthur wanders through the rooms in the house he describes them, make a list of the rooms and his description of their appearance and contents.
8. At the end of the chapter, Arthur decides to make his own way back to Crythin Gifford. What do you think of the way Hill finishes, with the words, 'The causeway was still visible, the roads back were straight and I could not possibly lose myself.
So thinking, I closed up the windows and drew the blinds again and left Eel Marsh House to itself in the declining November light.'

The Sound of a Pony and Trap

1. Find three phrases or sentences to show how quickly Arthur goes from confidently setting off along the causeway to turning back in fear that he will get lost in the mist. Look at the way Hill shows his increasing bewilderment and fear.
2. Find the verbs that Arthur uses to describe the sinking of the pony and trap in the marsh. Why does Hill use three and what effect do they have?
3. When Arthur reaches the house again, what does he do? List his various actions and make a note of his corresponding feelings. What does this show us about him?
4. Compare the characters of Arthur and Keckwick and their behaviour at the end of this chapter. What do you learn about each man? Why do you think all his friends and Keckwick react to Arthur in the way they do?
5. Look at the last paragraph of the chapter which is all one sentence, 'So I thought that night, as I laid my head on the soft pillow and fell eventually into a restless, shadowy sleep, across which figures came and went, troubling me so that once or twice I half-woke myself, as I cried

In the Nursery — continued

8. Arthur looks through a slim packet of letters in the evening; what information do these hold and what significance, if any, do you think they might have to the strange events that keep occurring at the house?
9. List the scenes or events that take place between Spider becoming angry and tense again and eventually having to be calmed back inside the house by Arthur. What does Arthur realise at this point in the novel?
10. What further incident horrifies Arthur when he goes back upstairs to investigate the noise once again? Why is he so terrified by this?
11. What does Arthur identify the noise as being? When he describes his own childhood memories of the noise he explains that the sound calms him but in what ways is this the opposite for the reader and why do you think this is the case?
12. Either draw a diagram, or describe, the room that Arthur finds when he goes into it. What sort of impression does Arthur get of the place and how does he feel about being in there?

In the Nursery

1. What sort of mood is Arthur in when he wakes up? What hints are there that he is not quite as cheerful and rested as he suggests?
2. What is the weather like as Arthur sets off for the house? Why do you think Hill chooses to have the weather like this?
3. Describe what Arthur does up to and including lunchtime.
4. Again Hill describes the weather and the environment in some detail; explain what the scene is like when Arthur and Spider are out for the walk after lunch.
5. As Arthur works late into the evening, and then goes to bed, the atmosphere becomes stiller and darker. Either make a list, or draw a flow chart, of the words Hill uses to describe the increasingly quiet night up until the point at which Spider growls.
6. Before Arthur discovers the source of the noise, list all the ways he describes it, what he does to try to find where it is coming from, and his and Spider's reaction as they move towards it. How does Hill build up tension in this part of the chapter?
7. Describe the change in the weather the next day, and when Arthur considers going to Crythin Gifford. In what ways does this prepare the reader for more sinister happenings at Marsh House?

The Sound of a Pony and Trap - continued

out or spoke a few incoherent words, I started, turned and turned about, trying to free myself from the nightmares, to escape from my own semi-conscious sense of dread and foreboding, and all the time, piercing through the surface of my dreams, came the terrified whinnying of the pony and the crying and howling of that child over and over, while I stood, helpless in the mist, my feet held fast, my body pulled back, and while behind me, though I could not see, only sense her dark presence, hovered the woman.'

- Why do you think Hill has written such a long last sentence?
- What is the effect of it?
- What does it reveal to us about Arthur's feelings?
- Try changing it to a number of short sentences and see what difference it makes to the effect.

Mr Jerome is Afraid

1. Find some phrases in the first few paragraphs which show Arthur's contrasting feelings between the night before and the morning. Think about how some of these are reflected in the description of the room and the daylight; why do you think Hill does this?
2. Describe the office of Mr Jerome. What sort of impression does it give the reader of him?
3. What is Mr Jerome's reaction to Arthur's suggestion? Why do you think he responds in the way he does? Find some quotations as illustrations for your ideas.
4. Why do you think Arthur writes Mr Bentley a letter rather than telephoning him? For what reasons might Hill have felt this was better for the narrative?
5. Look at the description of Arthur's bike ride.
 - Where does Arthur intend to cycle?
 - What reasons does he give for not going where he intended?
 - What does his decision reveal to us about Arthur's attitude?
 - What does the last sentence suggest to us about what might happen in the end?

Spider

1. What sort of mood is Arthur in when he gets on his bicycle ride? To what can you attribute this?
2. How do you know that Mrs Daily does not believe in Arthur's apparent enthusiasm? Find some examples from the text as evidence.
3. Arthur speculates about the landlord's true feelings about what he is doing; why do you think Hill presents the landlord in this way?
4. Describe Samuel Daily's house. What sort of impression do you get of it, as a reader?

Why do you think Hill depicts Mrs Daily as, 'a quiet, shy-seeming, powdery-looking little woman, even more ill at ease in her surroundings than he,?' What purpose might this description of her serve?
6. Samuel Daily is presented as a very successful businessman but one who is rather isolated by his prosperity; why do you think Hill has created such a character as the one who befriends Arthur?
7. The two men talk for a long time before they discuss the Drablow estate; what do they talk about first and why do you think they take so long to turn to the main subject of their meeting?
8. Describe the dog that Daily loans Arthur and explain why you think Hill includes the loan of the dog in her novel.