

The Titles

Look through the following, which are the titles of the four novellas in *Old New York*, and then discuss the questions which come underneath them:

False Dawn (The 'Forties')
The Old Maid (The 'Fifties')
The Spark (The 'Sixties')
New Year's Day (The 'Seventies')

Before reading the text:

1. What do you think each novella might be about? Give reasons for your decisions.
2. Wharton has placed each of the stories in a different decade; why do you think she might have done this and what effect will it have on the narrative and plot of the story?
3. Why do you think the collection is called *Old New York*?

After reading the text:

1. To what extent do you think each title fits its story? Discuss this in-depth and give reasons for your ideas.
2. Which title do you think best fits the story and which the least? Why is this?
3. Why do you think Wharton chose each title for the novella? What alternative titles might she have chosen? What difference would this have made to each individual novella and to the overall text?
4. What is the effect of Wharton placing each story within a time context? Can you see any sort of progression through the novellas? Would it, for example, be possible to put them in a different order if they didn't have decade labels?
5. Have you changed your mind about the reasons behind Wharton's choice of title, *Old New York*, or do the ideas that you had before reading the text still hold true? Discuss this in-depth and give reasons for your decisions.