

Henry James

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

A young woman starts her first job as a governess of two young children, Miles and Flora, at a country house called Bly. The children are beautiful and well-behaved, but are they too good to be true? When the governess starts to see ghosts, she suspects that the children are hiding a terrible secret. Are there ghosts at Bly, or is the governess going mad? Henry James's classic ghost story is retold here at level B2.

In this reader you will find:

- Information about Henry James's life
- Sections focusing on background and context
- Glossary of difficult words
- Comprehension activities
- B2 First-style activities
- Exit test

Tag

Ghost story

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Henry James

Stage 4 B2

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

Readers



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Young Adult

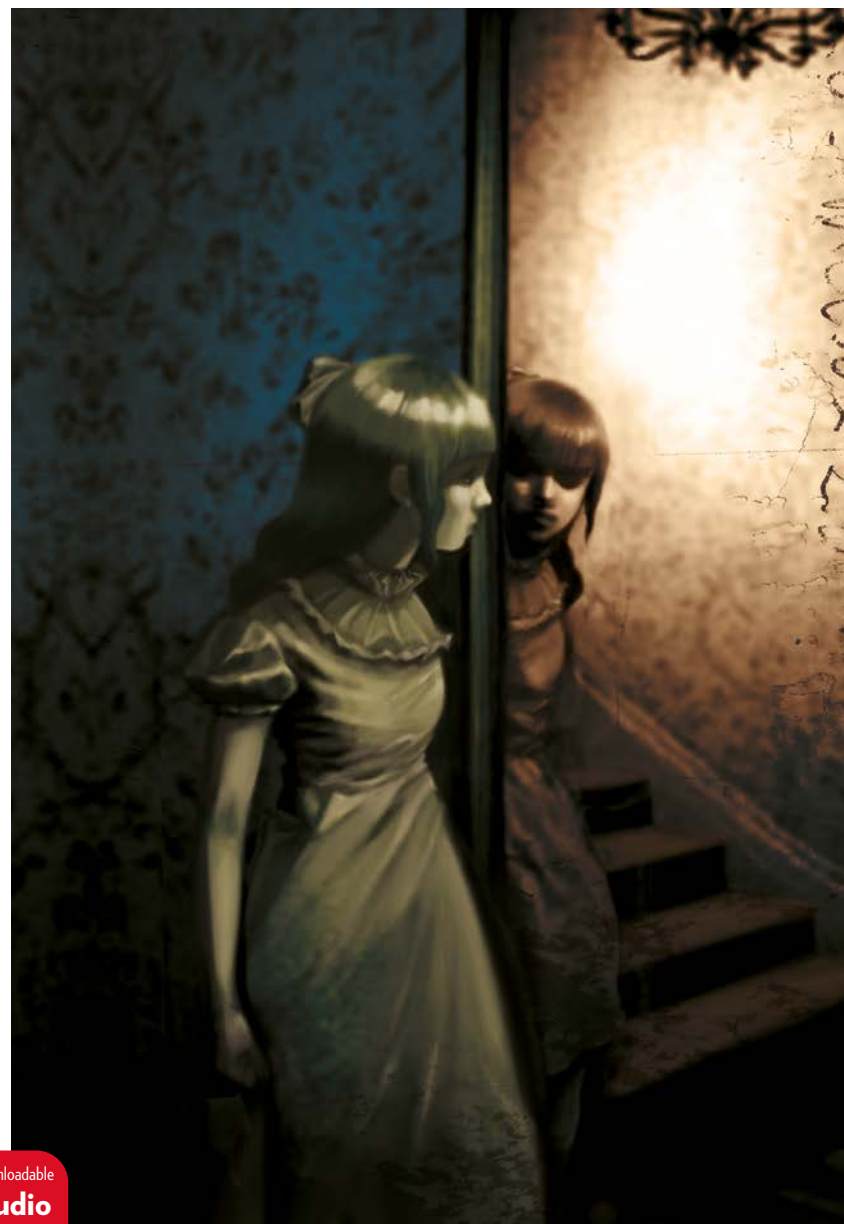


Readers

Classic

Henry James

THE TURN OF THE SCREW



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Book brief

- 1 *The Turn of the Screw* is an 1898 horror novella written by author Henry James.
- 2 It is considered a work of both Gothic and horror fiction, although unlike Gothic tales, the ghosts in this story appear as they were in real life.
- 3 The story is set in the 1840s in Bly, a Victorian country house in Essex, England.
- 4 Apart from the prologue, the story is told in 1st person by the Governess who's sent to Bly to look after two children, Miles and Flora. She becomes convinced that Bly is haunted and does all she can to protect her two pupils against what she believes to be supernatural forces.
- 5 Main themes include the corruption of innocence, beauty in contrast to evil, and how heroism and obsession can lead to destruction.

Henry James

The Turn of the Screw

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Main Characters



The Governess

20 years old and with not much experience, she's employed to educate Flora and Miles at Bly. She's extremely protective of the children.



Miles

10 years old, he's charming, very attractive but almost too well-behaved for a child.



Flora

8 years old, she's beautiful and well-mannered, but never talks about herself.

Miss Jessel

Previous governess, her ghost is dressed in black and looks miserable, pale and dreadful.



Peter Quint

A former servant at Bly, who looked after the owner there, he has red hair, is handsome and clever but is said to have been 'too free' with everyone. His ghost is unnaturally white, silent and frightening.



Mrs Grose

A servant at Bly who listens to the new governess and her fears and treats her with respect. She's very fond of the children.

Before you Read

Vocabulary

- 1 A** *The Turn of the Screw* is set in a Victorian country house. Many people were employed to run this kind of house. Match the household job in Box A to the job description in Box B. Use your dictionary to help you.

A	B
1 ☐ governess	a was responsible for running the house
2 ☐ gardener	b made the meals for the family and the servants
3 ☐ housekeeper	c looked after the master and his clothes
4 ☐ butler	d looked after the mistress and her clothes
5 ☐ housemaid	e looked after the horses and stables
6 ☐ lady's maid	f managed the other servants
7 ☐ valet	g looked after and taught the children
8 ☐ groom	h was responsible for the parks and grounds
9 ☐ cook	i did the cleaning and helped in the kitchen



- 1 B** **Work in pairs. Discuss these points.** **21st Century Skills**

- Which of these jobs would you most like to do? Why?
- Which would you least like to do? Why?

- 2 A** **Read this short summary of the plot of *The Turn of the Screw*. Tick the words you expect to read in the text.**

A nervous young governess comes to Bly to take care of two children. She finds herself responsible for them and the servants of a large country house. She begins to hear and see strange things and she's drawn into a battle to try and save the children. The consequences of her actions lead to a terrible conclusion.

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ☐ ghost | ☐ death | ☐ terror | ☐ love | ☐ murder |
| ☐ fight | ☐ possessed | ☐ cruel | ☐ sick | ☐ disappear |

2 B Use your dictionary. Complete the word-building table.

noun	verb	adjective(s)
death		deathly/dead
	possess	
	disappear	<i>not applicable</i>
	<i>not applicable</i>	cruel
murder		
	love	
	<i>not applicable</i>	sick

3 Anagrams. Solve these anagrams to find the ten verbs we use to report speech. Then put them into the context phrases in the Past Simple.

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 mxcliea | 'Oh no!' | Miles. |
| 2 ryc | 'Help!' | Flora. |
| 3 kas | 'Why are you here?' she | . |
| 4 rwpheis | 'Shh!' he | . |
| 5 pelry | 'I don't know,' | the governess. |
| 6 eaddmn | 'Tell me now,' she | . |
| 7 ecionnut | 'And another thing,' he | . |
| 8 aenrsw | 'At ten,' they | . |
| 9 emrcsa | 'There!' Flora | . |
| 10 ueinqre | 'When?' he | . |

Speaking

21st Century Skills

4 Answer the questions then work in pairs to discuss your answers.

- What sort of books do you enjoy reading?
- Have you ever seen a horror film? Was it good?
- Have you ever felt afraid? Why? When?



“Two turns of the screw.”

- 2 It was Christmas Eve and there we were, listening to the story, sitting around the fire, holding our breath and, except for one or two comments about the scariness* of the tale*, generally very quiet. Everything was as it should be; the story was strange, the house was old. Someone said that this was the only story he remembered where a child had been involved. It was the tale of an apparition* which had taken place in a house very like the one where we were staying. A small child, asleep in his room, had been woken up by the appearance of this terrible apparition. The child's terrified screams had woken the mother and, as she went to calm her child, she'd seen the exact same thing.

The observation that it was unusual for such stories to involve children seemed to interest Douglas and I thought he might have a story he wanted to share, so I waited. Just before we all went to bed, he explained what was on his mind. ‘I quite agree that Griffin's story of the ghost, or whatever the apparition was, was much more interesting because it first appeared to the little boy. I know of another similar story involving a child. If the child gives the effect of another turn of the screw*, what do you think about a story involving *two* children?’

‘We say, of course,’ somebody exclaimed, ‘that they give two turns of the screw! And that we want to hear about them.’

scariness scary is the adjective, scariness is the noun

tale story

apparition a ghost or unexpected appearance of someone

turn of the screw a mechanical way of increasing tension

The Turn of the Screw

I can see Douglas standing in front of the fire, looking at us with his hands in his pockets. 'Nobody except me, until this moment, has ever heard this story. It's absolutely horrible.'

Several people, naturally, thought this made the prospect* even more exciting, and our friend, with great skill*, looked at each of us in turn and said: 'It's worse than anything. Nothing at all touches it.'

'For terror?' I remember asking.

'For dreadful – dreadfulness!'

'Oh, how delicious!' cried one of the women.

He took no notice of her. 'For general ugliness and horror and pain.'

'Well then,' I said, 'just sit right down and begin.'

He turned to look at the fire and watched it for a moment. Then he turned to us again: 'I can't begin. I'll have to send to town for it.'

Everyone groaned* in disappointment, so he explained. 'The story's written. It's in a locked drawer. I could send the key to my servant and ask him to send the envelope to me here.'

It seemed as if he wanted us to encourage him, to stop him from hesitating. He'd broken the ice, ice which had formed over many winters. The others were irritated that they couldn't hear the story immediately, but I asked him to write first thing the next morning, so that we could hear it as soon as possible; then I asked whether the story had happened to him.

'Oh, thank God, no!' he answered quickly.

'And were you the person who wrote the story down?'

'No, I have the impression *here*,' he put his hand on his heart, 'I've never lost it.'

'Then your manuscript* –?'

prospect expectation
skill ability

groan speak in a way that shows you're unhappy
manuscript something written by hand



‘Is in old, faded* ink, and in the most beautiful handwriting.’ He paused. ‘A woman’s. She’s been dead for twenty years. She sent me the story before she died.’

They were all listening now, and some people, of course, were wondering about Douglas and the woman. He wasn’t annoyed. ‘She was a charming person, ten years older than I. My sister’s governess*’, he quietly said. ‘She was the nicest governess I’ve ever known. It was a long time ago, and this story happened many years before that. I was at university, and when I came home the second summer, she was already looking after my sister. It was a beautiful summer and we often went for walks in the garden. We talked a lot and I thought she was extremely clever and nice. Oh yes, don’t smile like that: I liked her very much and she liked me too. If she hadn’t liked me, she wouldn’t have told me the story. She’d never told anyone.’

‘Because it was so frightening?’

He continued to stare at me. ‘You’ll easily see why. You *will*.’

I stared back at him. ‘I see. She was in love.’

He laughed for the first time. ‘You *are* perceptive*. Yes, she was in love. I mean, she’d been in love. That was clear. I remember the time and the place – the beautiful garden, the shade of the trees and the long, hot summer afternoon. It wasn’t the place for a horror story; but oh –!’

He walked away from the fire and sat down in his chair.

‘You’ll receive the envelope Thursday morning then,’ I said.

‘Probably not until the second post.’

‘Well then; after dinner–’

‘You’ll all meet me here?’ He looked at us all again. ‘Isn’t anybody going?’ He seemed to hope.

In the 19th century, the Royal Mail, the UK’s official postal service, introduced ‘The Uniform Penny Post’.

This meant that the postal service could be afforded by most British people as it only cost one penny (about 40p now) to send something between any two places in Great Britain and Ireland, no matter how far apart they were.

faded pale in colour because of age
governess in the past, a woman whose job was to teach and look after children at home

perceptive observant, sensitive



‘Everybody will stay!’

‘I will – and I will,’ cried the ladies, although, earlier, they’d been planning to leave.

Mrs Griffin wanted more details. ‘Who was she in love with?’

‘The story will tell,’ I replied.

‘Oh, I can’t wait for the story!’

‘The story *won’t* tell,’ said Douglas; ‘not in any obvious way.’

‘That’s a pity. That’s the only way I ever understand.’

‘Won’t *you* tell, Douglas?’ somebody else asked.

He jumped up. ‘Yes, tomorrow. Now I must go to bed. Good night.’ And, quickly picking up a candle, he left us.

Mrs Griffin spoke. ‘Well, if I don’t know who she was in love with, I know who *he* was in love with.’

‘She was ten years older,’ said her husband.

‘All the more reason, at that age!’

‘And now he finally wants to tell the story.’

‘This,’ I replied, ‘will make Thursday night interesting.’ Everyone agreed with me and we could think of nothing else, so we all said goodnight and took our candles up to bed.

The next day, we discovered that a letter had been sent to his London apartment by the first post. We said nothing to him till after dinner, till the time of the evening that was best for scary stories. Then he began to talk, just as we’d hoped. He thought it was important to explain some things, on this second night, before the envelope arrived.

To cut a long story short, I should say that the manuscript arrived on the third day and that Douglas finally started reading it to the party on the fourth night. By then, some of the ladies had left the

The first electric lights were developed in different places around the world in the late 1870s. The first person who put lights in his house in Britain was Joseph Swan in 1878.

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party. Their departure made our group smaller and select*, and this only added to the atmosphere.

Douglas gave us this information in the form of a prologue. His old friend, the woman who wrote the story, was the youngest daughter of a country clergyman*. Her father was poor, so, at the age of twenty, she answered an advertisement to work as a governess. She was invited to London to meet her possible future employer. She arrived at Harley Street, a fashionable London address, and met the gentleman. He was impressive, unmarried and in the prime of life*, a fine gentleman of the type she'd only met before in her dreams or in old novels. This anxious, shy girl from a country clergyman's house saw a handsome, pleasant man who was relaxed, cheerful and kind. She was impressed with his wealth, his good looks and his charm with women. His London home was fine, full of things he'd bought during his travels, but he wanted her to go to his family's country home.

The gentleman explained the situation. He was guardian* to his nephew and niece, because their parents were dead. The children were a worry for him, because they were young and because he was single with no children of his own. He was, of course, determined to do his best for the poor children, although he'd made some mistakes in the past. The children lived at Bly, the house in the country, and he visited them from time to time, but it was very unfortunate that they'd almost no other relatives and he was a very busy man. A servant, called Mrs Grose, managed the house for the moment, and she was a very good woman. There were plenty of other servants to help, but the new governess would be in charge*. In the holidays, the governess would also have to look after the young boy. He was

select chosen from a number or group for special qualities

clergyman a man of the church

in the prime of life the best years of your life when you're at your most powerful

guardian the person who's legally responsible for a child after his/her parents have died

in charge in control

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away at school during term time*, despite being very young, but there really was no other choice. The children had had a governess before, but they'd, unfortunately, lost her. It was a shame, she'd been a respectable person and she'd been the perfect governess until she died. Since then, little Miles had gone to school and Mrs Grose had looked after little Flora; there was also a cook, a couple of maids*, an old pony*, an old groom* and an old gardener, who were all very respectable indeed.

Douglas had told his story up to this point, when someone asked a question. 'And what did the former* governess die of?'

Our friend answered quickly. 'That'll become clear. I'm not going to tell you anything in advance.'

'But you *are* telling us things in advance.'

'If I were the new governess, I'd want to know –'

'If there was any danger?' Douglas finished my sentence. 'She did want to know, and she did find out. You'll hear tomorrow what she found out. Meanwhile, of course, she was a little concerned at the responsibility. She was young, inexperienced and nervous: the position of governess seemed serious and quite lonely. She went home for a few days to consider the offer. The salary was very good and she soon returned to London to accept the position.'

Douglas paused and I decided to comment. 'The splendid* young man! He charmed* her.'

He got up and went to the fire and, as he'd done the night before, watched it for a moment. 'She only saw him twice.'

'Yes, but that's the beauty of her passion.'

I was surprised when Douglas turned to me. 'It *was* the beauty

term time the times in the year when children are at school

maid a woman who cleans in a rich person's house

pony a small horse

groom a man who looks after the horses

former the one before

splendid gorgeous, admirable

charm attract someone to you

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of it. There had been other people who'd wanted the position,' he continued, 'but they hadn't been charmed. The gentleman explained honestly that some had thought the position sounded boring or strange, or that they hadn't liked his main condition.'

'Which was -?'

'That she should never bother him – but never, never: she should never write to ask him anything or to complain about anything. She had to solve all problems herself, be in total charge of everything and leave him in peace. She promised to do this and he was delighted. When he took her hand and thanked her for the sacrifice* she was making, she felt rewarded.'

'But was this her only reward?' one of the ladies asked.

'She never saw him again.'

'Oh!' said the lady.

Douglas left and there was no more discussion of the story until the following evening, when, sitting by the fire, in his best chair, he opened the faded red cover of a thin, old-fashioned, gilt-edged* album. The whole thing took more than one night, but, on the first night, the same lady asked another question. 'What's the title of the story?'

'There isn't one.'

'I have one!' I said.

But Douglas took no notice and began to read in a fine, clear voice like the beauty of his author's hand.



sacrifice give up something you value for the good of others
gilt-edged with gold edges

Reading B2 First

1 Choose the best answer – A, B, C or D.

- 1** When does the story start?
A ☐ Christmas Eve
B ☐ Christmas Day
C ☐ New Year's Eve
D ☐ New Year's Day

- 2** What are the guests at the old house doing?
A ☐ Telling ghost stories
B ☐ Telling funny stories
C ☐ Telling jokes
D ☐ Telling lies

- 3** Why is Douglas's story unusual?
A ☐ It involves a child
B ☐ It involves two children
C ☐ It's set in an old country house
D ☐ It's a ghost story

- 4** Why can't Douglas tell the story immediately?
A ☐ The manuscript is in London
B ☐ He has to go to London the next morning
C ☐ He can't remember the ending
D ☐ He hasn't got the key to the drawer

- 5** How do people feel when they can't hear the story immediately?
A ☐ Irritated and disappointed
B ☐ Pleased
C ☐ Surprised
D ☐ Tired

- 6** What does Mrs Griffin think?
A ☐ That it was a true story
B ☐ That the governess was in love with Douglas
C ☐ That Douglas was older than the governess
D ☐ That Douglas was in love with the governess

Reading Comprehension

2 Are these statements true or false? Correct the false ones.

	T	F
1 The governess is the daughter of a clergyman.	☐	☐
2 The governess's family is quite wealthy.	☐	☐
3 Her future employer lives in Harley Street.	☐	☐
4 The two children are called Miles and Flora.	☐	☐
5 The children's parents live abroad.	☒	☐
6 The children live in a country house called Bly.	☐	☐
7 Her employer wants to know every detail about the children's progress.	☐	☐
8 The governess never saw the children's uncle again.	☐	☐

Vocabulary

3 A Divide the adjectives in the table into two columns. Which describe the governess? Which describe the children's uncle? Some adjectives describe both of them.

shy • fashionable • nice • clever • beautiful • unmarried • pleasant
young • handsome • charming • anxious • fine • impressive • nervous

the governess	the children's uncle

3 B Write a short description of either the governess or the children's uncle.