

Washington Square (Henry James)

The students should answer these questions for a good understanding of the novel:

FAMILY BACKGROUND, CHAPTERS 1-3

CHAPTER 1

1. What were some of Dr. Sloper's accomplishments?
2. What were some benefits of Dr. Sloper's marriage to a wealthy woman?
3. What were Dr. Sloper's reactions to the death of his son and the birth of his daughter?

CHAPTER 2

4. How are Catherine's aunts (Mrs. Lavinia Penniman and Mrs. Almond) different from each other?
5. What sort of girl is Catherine?
6. What is Dr. Sloper's opinion about women in general?
7. What is Dr. Sloper's prediction about how Lavinia will meddle in Catherine's romantic life? Why does he have this opinion?
8. How does Dr. Sloper deal with his disappointment in Catherine? Are there any hints that Dr. Sloper's opinion of his daughter underestimates her true character?

CHAPTER 3

9. How does Catherine express herself in her clothes?

FIRST MEETINGS WITH MR. TOWNSEND, CHAPTERS 4-10

CHAPTER 4

1. What are Catherine's first impressions of Mr. Townsend?
2. What are your first impressions of Mr. Townsend? Do you see any hint that cousin Marian's view of him as conceited is justified?
3. The narrator says that Dr. Sloper chiefly uses irony in his conversations with Catherine. Cite some examples of this? Why do you think he talks to her this way?

CHAPTER 5

4. How does Morris treat Catherine in his first visit to the house? Why does he act in this manner?
5. What role is Aunt Lavinia playing in the courtship? Why does she play this role?

CHAPTER 6

6. How does Dr. Sloper's view of Catherine differ from that of Mrs. Almond?

CHAPTER 7

7. Why does Dr. Sloper form a negative view of Mr. Townsend? Do you think that he is jumping to conclusions? Why or why not?
8. Why does Catherine care so much about what her father thinks of Mr. Townsend?

CHAPTER 8

9. Why doesn't Dr. Sloper step in and forbid Catherine from seeing Mr. Townsend?

CHAPTER 9

10. Does Mr. Townsend act impudently in his conversation with Dr. Sloper? What is

the double meaning in Mr. Townsend's remarks that Dr. Sloper senses?

11. Why do you think that Catherine refuses to meet Mr. Townsend in the Square, but asks him to see her at her home?

CHAPTER 10

12. When Morris visits Catherine at her home, what does he tell her, and how do they act together? To what extent do you feel that the couple is actually in love?

13. Why does Morris ask Catherine to tell her father that they intend to marry instead of taking on the task himself? To what extent do you think he is justified in this?

THE ENGAGEMENT, CHAPTER 11-21

CHAPTER 11

1. Why does Catherine expect her father not to be cruel to her in dealing with her relationship with Morris?

CHAPTERS 12 AND 13

2. Why does Dr. Sloper think Morris would make a good companion but a poor son-in-law?

CHAPTER 14

3. How does Dr. Sloper manage to get what he wants in his conversation with Morris's sister, Mrs. Montgomery?

4. How does Dr. Sloper reveal his opinion of the weak nature of women? How justified is his concern?

CHAPTER 15

5. How does Catherine plan to resist her father's refusal to accept Morris? Would you choose the same if you were in her place?

CHAPTERS 16 AND 17

6. What motivates Mrs. Penniman to attempt to advise Morris and Catherine?

CHAPTER 18

7. How does Dr. Sloper play on Catherine's affection for him in trying to persuade her?

8. Why does Dr. Sloper seem entertained by Catherine's resistance?

CHAPTER 19

9. Why does Catherine feel that she is bad even though her heart is breaking? Do you agree that she is acting in a "bad" manner? How do you define "bad behavior" in this sense?

CHAPTER 20

10. What moves Catherine to agree to marry Morris?

11. What does Morris do when Catherine tells him she will marry him as soon as he wishes? How do you interpret his response?

CHAPTER 21

12. What do you think of Mrs. Penniman's accusation that Dr. Sloper is cold-blooded?

THE DOCTOR'S COUNTERATTACK, CHAPTERS 22-24

CHAPTER 22

1. Why does Morris delay marrying Catherine?

2. Catherine feels that she shouldn't live under her father's roof if she doesn't obey him. Do you think this is an appropriate attitude for a daughter to have?

CHAPTER 23

3. Do you agree with Mrs. Almond's opinion about what will happen if Morris marries Catherine? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 24

4. How does Dr. Sloper get tough with Catherine in trying to dissuade her from marrying Morris? How justified is he in his methods?

THE RETREAT OF MORRIS, CHAPTERS 25-29

CHAPTER 25

1. How has Catherine's feeling for her father changed? What do you think has changed her? How would you feel in her situation?

CHAPTER 26

2. What convinces Catherine that her father does not love her? How accurate is her perception about her father?

CHAPTER 27

3. How does Dr. Sloper reveal that he is not moved by Catherine's suffering?

CHAPTER 28

4. What does Morris reveal about his feelings about Catherine? How much does he love her?

5. Has Morris only been interested in her money all along? Has her father been right in trying to prevent Catherine from marrying him? Has Catherine been right in trying to resist her father?

CHAPTER 29

6. How does Catherine feel when Morris leaves her?

THE AFTERMATH, CHAPTERS 30-35

CHAPTER 30

1. Why is Dr. Sloper pleased about Catherine's loss of her fiancé? What does this say about his character?

CHAPTER 31

2. Why does Catherine try to conceal her feelings from her father?

CHAPTER 32

3. What does Dr. Sloper suspect about Catherine and Morris? Do you think he understands his daughter? Why or why not?

4. How do you feel about Catherine's refusal of other suitors?

CHAPTER 33

5. Why does Catherine refuse to tell her father she will never marry Morris?

CHAPTERS 34 AND 35

6. Why does Catherine not want to see Morris anymore?

7. What is Morris's response to Catherine's rejection of him? What does this say about his reason for returning to her?