



Rebecca

Daphne du Maurier



About the author

Daphne du Maurier was born in London in 1907 into a richly artistic family. She grew up in a lively household where famous writers often visited. She was the favourite daughter of her father, actor Gerald du Maurier, and led an indulged idyllic childhood with tremendous freedom. However, as du Maurier and her two sisters became adolescents, their father became very possessive, discouraging friendships with boys and demanding their attention. Du Maurier later wrote several short stories that reveal the strong influence of her dogmatic father.

When du Maurier was a young woman, her family bought a country home in Cornwall, in the south-west of England. Du Maurier fell in love with Cornwall's wild seas and isolated coves. She realised that she had found her spiritual home, and later she set many of her books there. Du Maurier was fiercely independent and embarrassed by her indulgent upbringing, and was determined to support herself. In 1927 she wrote her first novel *The Loving Spirit* in Cornwall. When it was published, it brought her fame. It also brought her a husband. Major Frederick Arthur Montague Browning, a war hero, was 34 years old when he sailed in to Fowey harbour in Cornwall in October 1931 to find the author of the book he so much admired. A year later, they married. They had a quiet wedding in Cornwall, after which they sailed off and moored for the night in Frenchman's Creek, which du Maurier later used as the title of one of her novels. They had two daughters and one son.

Daphne du Maurier and her husband found it difficult to share each other's lives. They spent a lot of time apart during and after the war, when her husband worked for Prince Phillip at Buckingham Palace in London. Also, du

Maurier disliked formal socialising and preferred a natural outdoor life.

Despite her writing success, du Maurier remained humble and self-conscious about her books. She spent a large portion of her later life alone, walking the moors and cliff tops, and sailing the Cornish seas and rivers. In thunderstorms she would disappear from home, returning windswept and drenched hours later.

In 1952 Daphne du Maurier was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and in 1969 she was created a Dame of the British Empire. She lived in Cornwall until her death in 1989.

Summary

Rebecca, published in 1938, was Daphne du Maurier's most successful novel. In 1940, film director Alfred Hitchcock won the Best Picture Oscar with his first Hollywood film, *Rebecca*, based on the book *Rebecca* and starring Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine.

The narrator of the story, a naïve young woman, marries Maxim de Winter, an aristocrat several years older than herself. They return to his large country home, Manderley, in Cornwall, to a life that his new wife knows little about. Inexperienced, self-conscious and lacking in confidence, the new Mrs de Winter finds her life dominated by the shadow of Maxim's first wife, Rebecca, who died at Manderley a year earlier. The narrator becomes obsessed with the presence of Rebecca. She finds her new husband distant and unapproachable. She feels the servants and friends of the family are comparing her unfavourably with his first wife, and she feels more and more inadequate. Only when a ship is blown off course at sea, does the new Mrs de Winter begin to learn just how much her husband needs her.

Chapter 1 *Maxim de Winter*

With the famous opening line 'Last night I dreamed I went to Manderley again', an unnamed narrator of this book recalls her past. She works as a companion to the aristocratic Mrs Van Hopper. While they are in Monte Carlo, she meets a wealthy widower Maxim de Winter. They fall in love.

Chapter 2 *Manderley*

Soon they are married, and Mr de Winter takes his new bride to Manderley, his country manor in Cornwall, England. Lacking self-confidence, the new Mrs de Winter



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feels that the servants are not welcoming her, particularly Mrs Danvers the housekeeper.

Chapter 3 *The Cottage in the Bay*

Maxim's sister Beatrice tells the new Mrs de Winter that Mrs Danvers was profoundly devoted to Rebecca, Maxim's first wife. Later, Maxim and his wife go for a walk, and she finds a cottage in the bay; this causes the couple to have a little argument.

Chapter 4 *The Shadow of Rebecca*

Mrs de Winter finds out that the cottage was used by Rebecca who drowned off the coast. Despite her death, her aura seems to pervade Manderley.

Chapter 5 *Rebecca's Room*

Rebecca's cousin Jack Favell appears at Manderley when Maxim is away. He seems to know Mrs Danvers very well. Mrs de Winter accidentally goes into Rebecca's room where everything was preserved as it used to be.

Chapter 6 *The Fancy-Dress Dance*

There is a fancy dress party at Manderley, and Mrs de Winter has no idea what to wear. Mrs Danvers is unusually kind to her and suggests that she wear a costume replica of one of the former inhabitants of Manderley. The same costume, in fact, had been worn by Rebecca at the previous fancy dress party. Maxim gets very angry.

Chapter 7 *The Sunken Boat*

Overwhelmed and intimidated, Mrs de Winter begins to doubt her relationship with her husband; she thinks that Maxim is still in love with the perfect Rebecca. Things, however, change dramatically when the sunken boat is discovered. Rebecca's body is found in the boat at the bottom of the sea, and this leads Maxim to confess the truth to his new wife. He and Rebecca hated each other. Rebecca had series of love affairs, and then she claimed to be pregnant by another man and threatened to burden Maxim with the responsibility of raising the child. Maxim killed her and took the body out in the boat, which he sank at sea. Instead of being scared of the murderer, Mrs de Winter is relieved to hear that Maxim didn't and doesn't love Rebecca.

Chapter 8 *The Inquiry*

There is an inquest, and the boat builder makes a statement about three holes hammered through the bottom of the boat. When Maxim is asked if he and Rebecca had a happy relationship, Mrs de Winter gets faint.

Chapter 9 *Favell Accuses Maxim*

A verdict of suicide is brought at the inquiry. Then Jack Favell claims that Rebecca wasn't suicidal, and Maxim comes under suspicion of murder. It is revealed that Rebecca had a secret visit to a London doctor.

Chapter 10 *The Visit to Dr Baker*

Dr Baker, the doctor who Rebecca saw shortly before her death, reveals that Rebecca wasn't pregnant, but suffering from a serious illness and would have died within a few months. Maxim thinks Rebecca wanted him to kill her. On returning to Manderley, Maxim and his wife find it on fire.

Background and themes

In 1937–8, when Daphne du Maurier wrote *Rebecca*, Europe was on the brink of war. Many contemporary writers were concerned with subjects such as poverty, psychology, war, fascism and religion. Authors like James Joyce, were exploring the 'stream of consciousness' technique to illustrate the human condition.

Daphne du Maurier ignored the modern trends and wrote straightforward stories that gripped the imagination of her readers. She recognised early on in her career, that it was mainly women who read her books. She fed her audience's desire for adventure, romance, sexuality and mystery with stories that transported them into the world of their fantasies.

First wife versus second wife: Only after the second Mrs de Winter arrives at Manderley, does she realise how difficult it will be to live there, continuously competing with the memory of the first Mrs de Winter, Rebecca.

Inadequacy: Daphne de Maurier hated social events, feeling self-conscious, shy, out of her depth and inadequate. These are the feelings she gives the character of the second Mrs de Winter, who is lost and awkward in her new life as mistress of Manderley. The second Mrs de Winter has never known the life of aristocracy and struggles with the social demands. Du Maurier emphasises her sense of inadequacy by not even giving her a name.

The balance of power in marriage: The story shows a relationship between a powerful man and his intimidated wife. When the husband tells the truth of his past, the young, naïve wife suddenly grows up. The balance of power in their marriage changes at that moment.



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Jealousy: This story is a study of how jealousy motivates people. Manderley's housekeeper, Mrs Danvers admired Rebecca so much that she cannot accept the second Mrs de Winter. Her domineering acts showing scorn towards the second Mrs de Winter has made Mrs Danvers one of literature's most infamous female villains.

Guilt and innocence: The story makes you wonder who was really guilty and who was really innocent in the end. Perhaps many readers feel that Maxim is innocent even though he was guilty and that Rebecca was guilty even though she was 'innocent'.

Transition: The story describes the second Mrs de Winter's transition from a self-conscious, inexperienced new bride to a mature woman.

Discussion activities

Chapter 1, pages 1–7

Before reading

- Discuss:** Talk about the story. Ask students if there is anyone who knows this story (by reading the book or seeing the film). Ask those students to tell the rest of the class a little bit about the story, e.g. who the protagonist is, when the story is set, who the other characters are, etc. If no one knows, give them the information as above. Then lead a whole class discussion on what the story is about and how they think it ends. Ask students to write down what they know and presume about the story. They should keep this record in order to come back to it when they finish reading.

While reading

- Discuss:** Stop reading at page 3, line 28. Have students work in small groups. Have them discuss the following questions.
 - *Where is the narrator now?*
 - *What has happened to Manderley?*

After reading

- Describe:** Put students into small groups. Have them work out what they know about the characters now and try to describe them. Have each group share their descriptions with the rest of the class. You could appoint one character per group or you could ask them to describe all of the characters: the narrator, Mrs Van Hopper and Mr de Winter.

Chapter 2, pages 7–11

After reading

- Discuss:** Have students work in pairs or small groups. Have them discuss Mrs Danvers' feelings towards the new bride.
 - *How do you think Mrs Danvers feels towards the new Mrs de Winter?*
 - *Why do you think she feels like this?*

- Write:** Have students write a diary as the protagonist. *You are the new Mrs de Winter. You've been married for a few weeks now. This is your first night at Manderley. Write in your diary and describe what has happened during the day, how you feel about it and what you think you are going to do the next day.*

Chapter 3, pages 11–18

After reading

- Describe:** Divide the class into small groups. Give each group an anagram of a name of one of the characters: Maxim, narrator, Beatrice, Frank, Mrs Danvers and Rebecca. Students unscramble their name and then think up as many adjectives as they can to describe that person. Each group tells the rest of the class their adjectives, and the class tries to work out who the character is.
- Discuss:** Put students into pairs. Have them discuss the following question.
 - *Why do you think Daphne du Maurier does not give the narrator a name?*
 - *Do you like the narrator?*
 - *If you were in the narrator's place, would you act differently? If so, how?*

Chapter 4, pages 19–23

After reading

- Role play:** Put students into pairs for a role play. One student is Frank, the other is the narrator. Discuss with the whole class what they need to know and what they should pay attention to, such as body language, facial expressions and voice quality. Have them act out the conversation when the narrator asks questions about Rebecca. Monitor the pairs while they're practising, and later ask some of them to perform in front of the class.

Chapter 5, pages 23–31

After reading

- Discuss:** Have students work in pairs or small groups. Ask, *Why do you think Jack Favell visited Mrs Danvers while Maxim was away?* Have them discuss the reasons from the narrator's point of view.
- Discuss:** Put students into pairs. Have them discuss the following question.
 - *Why does Mrs Danvers keep Rebecca's room as though it were in use?*
 - *How would you feel if you were the second Mrs de Winter and saw Rebecca's room? How would you react to the fact that Rebecca's room was kept as it used to be?*



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Chapter 6, pages 31–36

After reading

- 11 Discuss:** Talk about the marriage of Maxim and the second Mrs de Winter.
Put students into small groups. Have them discuss how and why they think the marriage of Maxim and his second wife has changed since they came to Manderley.
- 12 Group work:** Divide the class into small groups. Give each group one of the following characters' names: Mr de Winter, Mrs de Winter, Beatrice, Frank, Rebecca, Jack, Mrs Danvers and Clarice. Groups discuss and write a history for their character, describing the childhood, adolescence, family, jobs, etc that person may have had. Each group reports their thoughts to the whole class.
- 13 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to imagine that they are going to a fancy dress party. You could give each group a theme for the party if it's easier for your students to come up with the costumes. Have them discuss what to wear. They could draw a picture or describe it in writing. Later, ask some students to share their ideas about costumes with the rest of the class.

Chapter 7, pages 36–59

Before reading

- 14 Guess:** Give students a list of words from Chapter 7, e.g. explosion, rock, sunken boat, diver, body, love, kill, etc. Then, put students into small groups, and have them guess what happens in this chapter. Ask each group to share their guesses with the rest of the class.

After reading

- 15 Discuss:** Have students discuss in pairs or small groups.
- *Why and how does the relationship between Maxim and his second wife change in Chapter 7?*
 - *What would you do if your husband or wife committed a crime?*
- 16 Discuss:** Now that the real Rebecca is revealed, ask students what they think of Rebecca and Maxim. Students could work in pairs or small groups first, but later have a whole class discussion.
- *Describe the image of Rebecca that people know.*
 - *Describe the real Rebecca that Maxim knows.*
 - *Do you like Rebecca?*
 - *What do you think of Maxim's terrible act?*
 - *If you were in Maxim's place, what would you do?*
- 17 Debate:** Organise a debate on whether Maxim should be punished or not. Divide the class into two groups: one is the 'Maxim should be punished' group; the other is the 'Maxim shouldn't be punished' group. *Maxim killed Rebecca. Should he be punished? What are the pros and cons if he is punished? What are the pros and cons if he does not get punished?*

Appoint two people from each team to present their case at the start of the debate. Then open the debate to general discussion. At the end, the class votes on whether Maxim should be punished or not.

Chapter 8, pages 60–64

After reading

- 18 Role play:** Have students act out the courtroom scene. Divide the class into two groups. Have them sit on opposite sides of the room. One group takes the roles of barristers and solicitors. The other group takes the parts of the characters in the book. The 'solicitors' take it in turns to ask the 'characters' questions about Rebecca's death. The 'characters' take it in turns to answer the questions, assuming the part of the character the 'solicitors' want to question.
- 19 Role play:** Put students into pairs to act out a conversation between Maxim and James Tabb the boat builder. Suppose James Tabb came to Manderley to meet Maxim before the inquiry, and have them talk about what happened to Rebecca's boat.

Chapter 9, pages 64–88

Before reading

- 20 Guess:** Draw students' attention to the title of Chapter 9, *Favell Accuses Maxim*. Ask them to imagine how Jack Favell is going to accuse Maxim in this chapter, and elicit the answers.

After reading

- 21 Guess:** Tell students that there is only one more chapter left. Ask the following questions.
- *How do you think the story will end?*
 - *If you were write the last chapter, how would you end this story?*
- Have students discuss in pairs or small groups first, and then ask them to write down their thoughts. When they are ready, have them share them by reading aloud. Or you could make a classroom wall display so that everyone can read others' stories.

Chapter 10, pages 88–101

After reading

- 22 Check:** Have students check if their guesses from the previous activity (activity 21) were right. Ask some students to report how different it was if their guesses were wrong.
- 23 Check:** Remind students to go back to the notes they wrote before reading the story (activity 1). Put students in groups and have them discuss what they guessed before and in what way the story ended differently in the book.
- 24 Discuss:** Put students into pairs have them discuss the following question.
- *What is the significance of the first paragraph of the last chapter?*
 - *What does the last paragraph really mean?*
 - *What exactly happened? Why did it happen? What do you think?*



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25 Discuss: Start a whole class discussion by asking students: *Maxim says to his second wife 'Rebecca has won.' Do you think this is true? If so, in what way has she 'won'?*

Extra activities

26 Research: Talk about Daphne du Maurier. Put students in groups to learn about the author Daphne du Maurier. To start with, have them use the information from the Introduction and discuss the following questions.

- *How old was Daphne du Maurier when she died?*
- *Where did Daphne live as a child?*
- *In what way was Daphne connected to the theatre?*
- *How did Daphne meet her husband?*
- *What sort of books did Daphne write?*
- *Who starred in the film Rebecca? Who directed it?*
- *Where are most of Daphne du Maurier's books set?*
- *Which is Daphne du Maurier's best-known book?*

Then have each group discover more about the author, using the resources from outside class, e.g. library books, the Internet, etc. Give each group a chance to make a presentation to share the information they've got with the rest of the class.

27 Discuss: Divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to discuss the following and decide which statement they feel is most true:
Rebecca is a novel about a) the effects of the past upon the present, b) the balance of power in marriage, or c) the fantasies of a jealous, insecure woman. If the students feel that none of these statements describes the book to them, they can come up with their own ideas. Have a class discussion.

28 Discuss: Divide the class into small groups. Give each group the name of one of these characters: Ben, Mrs Danvers, Jack Favell and Frank. Each group discusses the role their character plays in the novel. They say how important their character is to the book, and whether the book would be less successful if their character wasn't included.

29 Compare: Play a short sequence of the film, and have students find the same part in the book. Have them say in what way it is different from the film.

30 Production: Divide the class into groups. Have them choose a small part of the story and get ready to act it out. Each group can choose a production manager (or managers), and discuss how to produce a play. Have students talk about what kind of work they need to do besides acting, such as writing a script, checking historical/geographical/background information, preparing props, sound effects, and lighting. Give

students sufficient time to prepare for their productions, and help them when needed. When they are ready, hold a performance day for each group. Arrange the groups to perform in sequence. You could film their performance if the equipment is available. When students watch the other students' productions, hand out a peer evaluation form and encourage them to give some positive feedback in writing.

31 Discuss: Ask, *If you could choose a new title for each chapter, what would they be?* Have students exchange their ideas in groups. Encourage them to give reasons for their ideas. Have each group come to agree on their new chapter titles. When they are ready, ask each group to share their ideas with the rest of the class. The class could decide the best title for each chapter.

32 Retell: Using the titles they've chosen in activity 31, have students use their own words to retell the story of each chapter. Have students work in groups, taking turns to retell the story. Monitor the students during the group work, and help them if necessary.

33 Write: Give students an opportunity to imagine what happened after Manderley was burnt down. Give them a choice of 'one month later', 'one year later', or 'ten years later'. Encourage them to jot down their ideas on how the story continues first, and then write about what happened to each character and Manderley. This could be done in a mini-book format so that you can make an easy classroom display or you can run a 'library' with these mini-books. Students could deliver their stories in front of the class, and/or give them a chance to read other students' final products.

34 Discuss: Put students into small groups. Have them discuss the following questions.

- *Who is your most favourite character?*
- *Who is your least favourite character?*

Make sure that they give the reasons for their choices. Later, ask some students share their opinions with the rest of the class. Or you could conduct a class survey to find out who is the most/least popular character in the class.

35 Write: Tell students to imagine that they could write a letter to one of the characters in the story. Have them choose one character and write him/her a letter. To help them, guide a whole class discussion on what they want to say to each character before they start writing.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.