

Mrs. Dalloway

by Virginia Woolf

Narrative Technique and Structure

1. Why did Woolf choose this particular writing style—no chapter breaks, stream of consciousness, mostly plotless structure—and does it continue to work as most of us read it again after so many years? **(Judy W)** Why does this almost stream of consciousness (of many consciousnesses!) work so well and read so effortlessly compared to, for instance, Joyce's *Ulysses*? **(Katherine G)**
2. Why did the writer choose throughout the story to use the clock (Big Ben) striking (the hour, the half hour, the quarter hour) and the sun's heat ("*fear no more the heat of the sun*"), and how does the author use both at the point when Clarissa is grappling with the news, at her party, of the young man's suicide? **(Kathleen)**
3. How does Woolf handle shifts between characters' minds? Look at a specific transition—what makes it seamless or jarring, and why might she want that effect?
4. Why do you think Woolf chose to compress the entire novel into a single day? How does that constraint shape the pacing and depth of character revelation?

Characterization through Craft

5. How does the author depict Sally—both as a young girl during her stay at Clarissa's family home, and later, when she arrives at Clarissa's party? How have Clarissa's feelings toward Sally changed over the years, and why? **(Kathleen)**
6. Why does the author introduce two characters who Warren Smith's wife turns to for help with her husband's mental illness? How do the characters, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw differ? How does the author depict their roles, —both in diagnosing and prescribing a remedy for Warren Smith, and for their role in London society at large? What significance does the author give to the fact that Clarissa once sought Sir William's opinion on her health? How does the author's own mental health challenges impact the story, as a whole? **(Kathleen)**
7. Clarissa and Septimus never meet, yet their stories intertwine. How does Woolf's parallel structure and juxtaposition make their connection feel inevitable?
8. How does shifting point of view reveal different facets of the same social world? Does seeing characters through each other's eyes change how we judge them?

Style and Language

9. Woolf often uses long, flowing sentences mixed with short, abrupt ones. How does this rhythmic variation mirror the flow of thought or external interruptions?
10. In what ways does Woolf's prose blend sensory details of London with internal memories? Pick a passage—how does that fusion create a richer sense of reality?

Symbolism & Motifs

11. Clocks like Big Ben and St. Margaret's mark time differently in the novel. How does Woolf use these symbols to contrast external, mechanical time with characters' subjective, internal time?
12. The airplane's skywriting draws everyone's gaze at once. How does this moment serve as a craft tool to connect disparate characters and minds?
13. Flowers appear throughout, especially in Clarissa's opening errand. What does Woolf achieve by weaving this recurring image through multiple characters' thoughts?
14. "How does Woolf use narrative techniques—such as stream of consciousness, motifs, and structural juxtaposition—to make death feel omnipresent in *Mrs. Dalloway*, even during seemingly ordinary moments?"