



PLOTTING SOMETHING / GOTHIC LITERATURE

Shirley Jackson

AUTHOR BACKGROUND & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A pre-reading lesson for The Haunting of Hill House

11

LESSON SLIDES

5

NOTE PAGES

2

QUIZZES

Inside the lesson

Everything needed for a focused introduction to Jackson and her world.

01

PRESENTATION

11 original slides exploring Jackson's life and ideas.

02

STUDENT NOTES

5 pages students complete alongside the slides.

03

TEACHER GUIDE

2 pages with preparation and a 35-minute teaching map.

04

TWO QUIZZES

Two different 10-point checks, each with its own key.

Editable PowerPoint and Word files + matching PDFs.

A look at the slides

Selected original slides, shown as they appear in the lesson.

POSTWAR IDEALS OF HOME

POSTWAR CONTEXT

What is a home supposed to be?

THE PROMISE

Postwar American culture often presented home as a place of safety, privacy, order, and family stability.

Women in particular faced strong expectations around marriage, motherhood, housekeeping, and respectability.

JACKSON'S QUESTION

What happens when home does not provide the safety, belonging, or identity it is supposed to provide?

Jackson keeps asking what happens when that promise fails.

Plotting Something

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MAKING ROOM FOR UNCERTAINTY

DO NOT RUSH TO SOLVE IT

Not everything has one explanation

ONE POSSIBILITY

Something outside the character may actually be strange, threatening, or supernatural.

ANOTHER POSSIBILITY

Fear, memory, isolation, or desire may affect how the character understands what is happening.

Instead of asking “Which explanation is right?” ask: What does each explanation help us notice?

Plotting Something

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Notes students complete

Students do more than copy a summary: they record facts, compare ideas, and write their own responses.

SAMPLES FROM THE 5-PAGE STUDENT PACKET

A Few Facts Worth Knowing

Slides 2-5 · Record the ideas as we discuss them.

OPENING · SLIDE 2

Name one detail that could make a fictional house feel unsettling.

A FEW FACTS · SLIDE 3

Jackson's years: 1916-_____ University: _____

Vermont town: _____ Hill House published: _____

THE SAME WRITER · SLIDE 4

FAMILY LIFE

Two subjects Jackson wrote about:

DARK FICTION

Two subjects Jackson explored:

"THE LOTTERY" · SLIDE 5

Jackson begins with an ordinary gathering. What makes the town's familiar tradition unsettling?

CONNECT THE IDEAS

How could noticing ordinary life help a writer create unsettling fiction?

Plotting Something

2

Home: Promise vs. Pressure

Slides 6-7 · Home can offer comfort—and create pressure.

THE POSTWAR IDEAL · SLIDE 6

List four things a home was often expected to provide in postwar American culture.

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS · SLIDE 6

Name two expectations often placed on women during this period.

JACKSON'S QUESTION · SLIDE 6

If home is supposed to offer safety and belonging, what happens when it does not?

BELONGING · SLIDE 7

How can a group make someone feel included—or like an outsider?

AS YOU READ

Watch for characters who want to belong—even somewhere unsafe.

Plotting Something

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Writing space sits directly beneath the questions.

The notes follow the slide sequence and leave key information for students to supply during instruction.

Choose your quiz focus

Both options are ten multiple-choice questions, one point each.

QUIZ 1: LITERARY IDEAS

QUIZ 2: AUTHOR + HISTORY

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Background Lesson — 10-Point Quiz

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Circle the one best answer for each question, or mark an answer sheet if your teacher provides one.

1. Which statement best describes the range of Shirley Jackson's writing?

- A. She wrote only ghost stories and supernatural novels.
- B. She wrote both humorous family pieces and unsettling fiction.
- C. She wrote mainly poetry about New England landscapes.
- D. She wrote only scholarly essays about literature.

2. In what year was *The Haunting of Hill House* published?

- A. 1948
- B. 1952
- C. 1959
- D. 1965

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Quiz 2 — Jackson & Postwar America

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Choose the one best answer for each question. Circle your answer or use an answer sheet. Each question is worth 1 point.

1. Which university did Shirley Jackson attend?

- A. Bennington College
- B. Syracuse University
- C. University of Vermont
- D. Columbia University

2. In which Vermont town did Jackson live for many years?

- A. Montpelier
- B. Burlington
- C. North Bennington
- D. Brattleboro

Excerpts from the actual printable assessments.

Literary connections

Concepts introduced in the slides

Author + time period

Biography and postwar expectations

TWO 10-POINT ASSESSMENTS

Teacher keys with explanations are included.

Quiz images are excerpts; answer keys are not shown.

Ready for your classroom

Designed for one approximately 35-minute instructional block.

INSIDE THE TEACHER MAP



Shirley Jackson: Context for Hill House

Teacher Guide & 1-Day Teaching Map

BEST USE	Before reading The Haunting of Hill House. No prerequisite reading or viewing.
TIME	One 35-minute instructional block.
MATERIALS	11 slides; 5-page guided notes (one per student); teacher guide; pen or pencil. An optional 10-point quiz is included.
GRADING	Guided notes and discussion are formative. An optional 10-item multiple choice quiz (1 point each) may be given after the lesson in a separate 10-minute check.
PURPOSE	Provide useful context without spoiling the novel or treating one interpretation as correct.

What Students Need From This Lesson

This is a short pre-reading lesson, not a full biography. Students need a few useful details about Jackson, some context for mid-century ideas about home, and questions to carry into the novel: Who belongs? What makes a place feel safe? What happens when more than one explanation remains possible?

Do not tell students whether Hill House is “really” haunted. Let them encounter that uncertainty for themselves as they read.

35-Minute Map

TIME	SLIDES / NOTES	WHAT TO DO
0-3 min	Slides 1-2 · Notes p. 2	Have students jot one fictional-house detail. Ask how a familiar place might feel unsettling; do not ask for personal experiences.
3-8 min	Slides 3-4 · Notes p. 2	Students fill in key facts and record two topics in each writing category as you explain.
8-12 min	Slide 5 · Notes p. 2	Explain “The Lottery” without revealing its ending. Students identify why the ordinary gathering becomes troubling and connect that idea to Jackson’s domestic observations.
12-19 min	Slides 6-7 · Notes p. 3	Allow time for four postwar ideals: two

AT A GLANCE

35 MIN
Teaching block

BEFORE
The novel begins

NO
Prerequisite reading

EDITABLE
Files included

Context before the novel.

This is a background lesson, not a complete novel unit.
No prerequisite reading. The novel text is not included.