

Girl with a Pearl Earring work booklet

(Page references are to the HarperCollins paperback edition.)

Note:

This study guide is structured in sequential sections, according to the sections of the novel. The sections here are titled, unlike the sections in the novel, which have no titles. Each section can therefore be examined for alternative titles, which may raise further key ideas.

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pp. 3-6 VEGETABLE CIRCLE

1. Griet's introduction to the unexpected arrival of the man and woman is through her impression of the voices. Draw and label the images Griet associates with the voices of her mother and the visitors.
2. The woman is named by page 4, but the man is not. Why do you think the man isn't named immediately? Do you know of any other literary text or film where a similar technique is used to achieve a comparable effect?
3.
 - a) Examine the description of Griet's vegetable circle and depict it, using the appropriate colours. What kind of person would want to make such a thing?
 - b) 'And do you spend much time setting out the vegetables ... ?' Does she, and how do you know?
4.
 - a) 'He was testing me.' What is here revealed about Griet and the stranger?
 - b) If you were directing a film version of this scene, what kinds of notes would you make regarding such things as camera angles, facial expressions, and POV?
5. 'Papists' Corner?' Discuss what it is that disturbs Griet here, and why this is the case. Does the same situation continue to exist, in one form or another, in contemporary society - are there any analogies you can think of?
6. Her future settled, what happens to Griet's vegetable circle? And what is your impression of the mother's actions here?
7. What other symbolic feature apart from the vegetable circle is referred to? Name that feature. Having named it, try discussing the relationship between that feature and the vegetable circle by drawing upon your understanding of metaphorical imagery.

8. Provide a series of character analyses gleaned from the information available so far. Think about the way characters move, speak, gaze and appear.
9. From this section of the text, choose five words that you think are significant. Provide brief explanations for each of your chosen words.

pp. 7-8 FATHER

1. 'Father had been a tile painter ...'. Why isn't he any longer?
2. 'I heard, ... I heard everything.' Comment on the tone here, and on why he speaks before Griet has a chance to tell him things.
3.
 - a) What kinds of pictures did Griet's father used to paint?
 - b) Are such pictures 'art'?
 - c) Were such pictures common or rare in the 17th century?
 - d) Were such pictures expensive?
 - e) Would one of the same tile pictures be rare or expensive today?
 - f) Who would now own such a tile picture?
 - g) What, then, in your opinion, is 'art'? (Is a brick wall, for example, ever a work of art? You might also wish to consider ideas such as beauty, originality, antiquity, provenance and functionality.)

pp. 8-9 MOTHER

1. Her mother prepares Griet's belongings for her new role as maid in the Vermeer household. What significance is there in the need for the prayer book? And why might it be that '... an ornamental tortoiseshell comb, shaped like a shell ... was too fine for a maid to wear ...' - what might happen, were she to wear it?
2. What do you make of the societal attitudes implicit in the several references, so far, to things and persons being *clean*? (Consider, for example, what kinds of people are *not* clean and, morally speaking, in turn neither worthy nor deserving. Who, so far, is clean and deserving: Catharina? Griet? The 'man'?)
3. 'We won't take public charity ...' What kind of belief system would prompt this attitude? Is this value-system apparent in our own society? What is there to be said either in support of or against such a value-system?

4. What kind of (unspoken) belief-system would prompt a person such as Vermeer to require someone who could ‘clean this studio without moving anything ... as if nothing has been disturbed’? (Think about who is visible and invisible in society; or who is allowed to be visible - do ‘invisible’ roles continue to exist in contemporary society?)

pp. 9-10 AGNES & FRANS

1. ‘Eight stuivers a day ...’ Agnes disputes the financial explanation for Griet’s departure: with whom do you side on this issue? Is the money worth it?
2. How old is Frans, and what do you make of his working life? Imagine you are Frans, and write a brief journal entry in which you reflect upon your circumstances.
3. Each member of Griet’s family and both of the Vermeers seem to have a different way of ‘seeing things’. Draw up a table, as below, and write notes as to what each of these characters might think, feel, or fear about Griet’s new role.

Griet	Mother	Father	Agnes	Frans	Vermeer	Catharina
	Pleased - extra income	Loses companion, his ‘eyes’				

pp. 10-14 BRIDGES

1. ‘To remind you of home.’ Examine the description of the tile Griet’s father gives her. Design your own interpretation of this tile, an interpretation which reflects not only the contents as described in the narrative but also reflects the stylistic approach of 17th century Delft tile painters. Then comment on whether you would like to be considered an artist or an artisan.
2. ‘No one asked where I was going.’ Why would people not want to?
3. ‘I ... had never been so aware that my back was to my home.’ To what aspects of her former life has Griet now turned her back? List these. For example:
 - no longer a ch - - - but an a - - - -
 - not a daughter but a m - - -
 - not a sister but a s - - - - t
 - no longer in a P - - - - - household but a C - - - - - one.
 - etc.

4. What is it about Griet's way of 'seeing things' that prompts her to stop the games of imagination that Frans and Agnes liked to play?
5. 'I walked to the centre of the square.' On either side of this square there is a bridge. Read this section very closely; draw a diagram or map which includes the two neighbourhoods and which also labels key elements relevant to the narrative. Your diagram should detail and label the following:
 - Griet's old neighbourhood
 - the bridge over the canal before reaching Market Square
 - details of Market Square, together with a labelling of the eight-pointed star
 - the bridge over the canal leading away from Market Square and on towards ...?
6. 'I crossed a bridge over the canal ...'
What happens in life when we 'cross bridges'? Discuss. (Extension task: research 'liminality'.)
7. In what ways has Griet experienced a 'crossing of bridges?' Or would you argue that she has merely walked across two bridges?

pp. 14-16 THE VERMEER CHILDREN

1. Describe the behaviour of the girl with the bright red hair. What character traits are evident?
2. Name the Vermeer children, and state their approximate ages.
3. Who has a 'Voice like a feather'?

pp. 16-17 TANNEKE

1. Examine the way in which Chevalier introduces Tanneke: what are we as readers supposed to make of such a character? How are we supposed to react to Tanneke? What judgements about her are implicit in the description? Do you think that an unfavourable depiction of Tanneke-as-maid works as a literary foil to the favourable depiction of Griet-as-maid?
2. a) Examine Vermeer's 'Milkmaid'. Would you say that the intention of the painting is to convey grace and dignity in the duties of a maid? Or would you tend to say that the intention of the painting is to represent the servant as a coarse, unclean and ungainly person?

b) In view of your analysis, how does Chevalier's Tanneke compare with Vermeer's 'Milkmaid'? And would you want to say anything further on this point - is it fair, e.g. that certain kinds of people are often depicted in literature as essentially unworthy characters?



The Milkmaid by Johannes Vermeer, 1658-1660, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
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pp. 17-18 THRESHOLD

1. 'I stepped across the threshold.' What is a threshold? In what ways is the crossing of this threshold comparable to Griet's crossing of the bridges?
2. Can you think of any circumstances today when the crossing of a threshold is treated ceremoniously?
3. What is the significance of 'the shadowy interior' beyond the threshold? Who, and what kind of world, lies beyond?

p. 18 THE CRUCIFIXION ROOM

What is it about this room that so disturbs Griet, and why would this be? Try to think of several reasons.

p. 18 MARIA THINS

1. What differences are described between the clothing of Catharina and that of Maria Thins, and how do these differences relate to the way Griet perceives each of these women?

2. '... her gaze was watchful.' How does Griet respond to being the object of 'the gaze'? And why would she choose this kind of response in particular - what might be signified in her reaction?

pp. 19-20 THE STUDIO

Imagine that Tanneke makes a journal entry in which tells of how she went about introducing Griet to the Vermeer household while leading her and showing her the various rooms. Write that journal entry, describing in particular Tanneke's observations about how Griet reacts at every stage - especially upon arriving at the studio.

pp. 20-21 WORK

What realisation does Griet arrive at regarding the effects upon her of her work as a maid?

pp. 21-22 BRIGHT RED

Describe how you see the existing relationship between Griet and Cornelia.

pp. 23-24 THE SILENT WATCHER

How does Chevalier position us as readers regarding Griet as the *feminine* - how are we supposed to react to Griet as the object of the boatman's gaze; or as the object of the unseen watcher in the 'middle window'?

pp. 24-27 CATHARINA

1. Examine Catharina's appearance, and comment on the extent to which her appearance is a reflection of her inner life.
2. Discuss in detail the many ways in which Catharina represents a contrast to Griet.
3. 'I would not have said such a thing with pride ...'. How are we as readers positioned, and by whom - what are we supposed to think of Tanneke here?

pp. 27-29 MEAT HALL

1. Note the difference between Pieter and 'our old butcher' - how would you explain the difference between the two - what do these differences signify? (Keep in mind the significance of the symbolic imagery.)
2. 'Pieter looked me over ...' What aspects of Griet's presence would form the object of the father's gaze here - what kinds of things would he be looking for, and for what purpose?

pp. 29-32 THE WATCHERS

1. Examine closely the paragraph beginning, 'When the meal was ready ...' Who is here the object of the gaze? How do you know? State precisely.

Comment on the evocative imagery, as well as on the shifts in the subject or object. (Perhaps make a quick sketch of the details in the text.)
2. '... none had been painted by my father.' What does this information suggest about the nature of the father's work - is his work art, or is it a trade? And, to review a previous question, what would make it either?
3. Analyse this entire section for the way Griet is watched, and by whom; also why. Consider the similarities between the watchers, and comment on what this may signify.

pp. 32-39 MANTLE AND PEARLS

1. '... the room gave off a clean, sharp odour ...' What memories does the studio stir up in Griet? And from this, do you agree that the studio, from the start, is in contrast to the rest of the house, a more welcoming place, a refuge, a s - - - - - y?
2. 'Catharina remained on the threshold.' What is the significance of this?
3. Griet captures something of a self-portrait in the wall-mirror: in what respects does her interpretation of the mirror-image resemble Vermeer's portrait, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*?
4. Examine Vermeer's painting of van Ruijven's wife, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace*. List those features in the painting that Griet comes across in her cleaning of the studio as well as those features that are noted in her appraisal of the painting. Your observations should provide interesting information on the painting itself.
5. 'I wanted to wear the mantle and the pearls. I wanted to know the man who painted her like that.' What might wanting to wear the mantle and pearls indicate about Griet, or about any other young maid? And what might the second sentence in the quotation indicate about Griet - what, precisely, does she want in relation to the man?

pp. 39-40 THE MILKMAID

1. '... his best painting.' Which one is it? Who owns it? Who looks at it now, and what does this suggest about the relationships between the subjects/objects and the owners/owned?

2. How does Griet manage to alter Tanneke's mood, and what do you make of her ability in this respect?

pp. 40-42 THE GAZE AND THE GAZERS

1. '... was that not the best tongue ... ?' How does Griet interpret the question, and what reply does she make? And why do you think she would choose to reply in the manner that she does?
2. What aspect of Pieter the son does Griet find pleasing, and which particular aspect does she find disturbing?
3. How does Griet describe Pieter's eyes, and how does she perceive herself in this meeting? Discuss the imagery here.
4. 'I caught the glance that passed between father and son. Even then I knew somehow what it meant, and what it would mean for me.' Discuss this observation by Griet - what does the glance mean, what kind of a look passes between them, and in what way does this glance 'capture' Griet?

p. 42 THE APRON

'At night I covered the Crucifixion hanging at the foot of my bed ...'. Analyse this paragraph - refer to the kinds of things you have so far discussed in your study of this novel.

pp. 43-46 DESIRE

1. 'It seemed she never entered the studio.' Why might this have been the case, beyond the reason that she's clumsy? (Consider, for example, whether 'mundane' realities are at ease in 'sacred', or 'artistic' realities; and who would want to keep these realities apart, and why.)
2. 'Hearing his voice made me feel ...' Describe Griet's emotions at this stage.
3. 'I came face to face with him ... she would have no trouble meeting the gaze of a gentleman.' In what ways does Griet feel different from the woman wearing the pearls?
4. 'Yet she was beautiful' What makes the woman beautiful? And, in your opinion, what is 'beauty'?

pp. 46-47 NOT A WORD

1. How would you describe relations, so far, between Cornelia and Griet?
2. '... he came out of the house ...' Who did, and how would you explain Griet's reaction?

3. 'He had said not a word to me' Since when? What do you make of this silence - is it deliberate, a part of any particular male role? And what effect does this silence have on Griet?

pp. 47-51 HOME

1. 'Only a few things I didn't mention.' List these 'few things', and alongside each, explain why she might have chosen not to mention them.
2. '... we will not take such charity ...' From whom, and what is your opinion of such an attitude - should she have accepted the offer? And what alternative to the offer does she prefer? At whose expense is the alternative?
3. How do you interpret the mother's reaction to Griet's references to the 'new butchers'?
4. 'I loved it because I knew it, but I was aware now of its dullness.' Write a passage which compares and contrasts Griet's family home and home-life with that of the house and lifestyle on Papist's Corner.

pp. 51-52 HOUSEKEEPING

1. How would you describe Griet's relationship with 'him' at this stage? Refer to evidence.
2. 'I was careful to deflect any praise ...' Why would this be the case?
3. 'It stops you having them ...'
 - a) How scientific is this?
 - b) How are we as readers positioned with regard to Catharina's many children - are we supposed to be disapproving of her, or not?
 - c) How are we as readers positioned with regard to Vermeer's many children - are we supposed to be disapproving of him, or not?
4. 'Her judgement was not as sound as it appeared.' What has prompted Griet to make this observation?

pp. 55-56 ESCAPE

1. '... the mantle began to look so real ...'
2. At this particular point of her 'escape', which particular incident does Griet recall?
3. Explain why the watcher's silence is 'worse than any questions'.

pp. 55-56 BETRAYAL

Examine some of the key events in this section, and explain whether, and to what extent you sympathise with Griet's reactions.

pp. 57-60

1. '... a voice like a deep well.' (p. 57) Whose voice is this and how do you know? Having worked this out, is there anything further you may want to add?
2. In what terms is Catharina's voice described? Comment on this.
3. Whom is Catharina fearful of, and why?
4. 'I knew suddenly he was standing there.'
5. Study the description of the man - his stance, positioning, actions, appearance, the 'message' conveyed in his presence.
6. 'He stood up and gazed at the corner' What happens to the light? And how would you interpret this in terms of 'stage-setting', so to speak?
7. 'Then he took off his robe ... "There, Griet, it is ready".'
8. What is Griet's reaction? Examine these, and comment as to why she would react the way she does.
9. 'I did not know what to do. The thought of me covered with his robe, unable to see, and him looking at me all the while, made me feel faint.'
 - a) Discuss the metaphorical imagery of 'being covered'.
 - b) 'unable to see him ...'
 - c) 'him looking at me ...'
 - d) What is it 'to swoon'? What, then, do you think Chevalier implies about Griet's state of being where she 'feels faint'? Are there more modern expressions?
10. Study the closing dialogue of this section. Consider 'his' manner beforehand, and compare that with 'his' manner and tone at the close.

What do you make of it - what has happened, how have things changed, why, and what do these changes suggest? For example, to what extent would you agree that there is in this interaction something distinctly reminiscent of a transaction involving 'bought favours'?

pp. 64-68 PLAGUE

1. 'Where does your family live?' What does Griet reply, and what is revealed by this?
2. What news does Pieter have for Griet?
3. Describe how each of the following responds to Griet's plight:
 - a) Catharina;
 - b) Maria Thins;
 - c) 'He'.

Upon receiving 'his' reaction to her plight, how does Griet respond - what topic does she bring up, and what do you make of this?

3. 'It is a better painting now.' Does he accept Griet's comments? How do you know? What do you think about Griet in this situation?

pp. 68-70 CHURCH MOUSE

Provide a series of 2 to 4 illustrations that relate to information in this section of the narrative. You may either create these yourself or copy images from research results. For each of your illustrations, write a brief passage which can include a description of objects, of movements, of emotions, or of your own musings. (You might, for example, provide an illustration of the New Church, or of the Oude Langendijk, and write at will in relation to these.)

pp. 70-71 EXPECTATION

1. 'I did not meet his gaze.' What are the possible meanings in this?
2.
 - a) What is it in everyday language 'to be obliged'
 - b) What is it 'to be obliged' in the sense that Griet implies?
3. 'I will have to get used to that sight ...' Which sight, and whatever does she mean?
4. 'What I had feared ...' About whom is she worried: Agnes, Pieter, or herself?
5. Imagine you are Griet, and explain what you mean when you say that Pieter's eyes reflect both 'kindness' and 'expectation'.

pp. 72-73 FRANS, FACTORY AND THE WOMAN

What is your interpretation of this section? What do you make of each of the characters, of the ideas, the setting? Provide quotations from the text to substantiate each of your observations.

pp. 73-77 EYES OF THE BEHOLDER

1. 'He's finished.' Who has, and what?
2. 'His hands were very clean.' What contrasts are brought to mind here?
3. Discuss these contrasts in terms of characters involved, of imagery, and also of themes in both the particular and general.
4. 'Tanneke and I were sitting on a bench in front ...' Which of Vermeer's paintings does this setting remind you of?
5. 'I slipped around the corner ...' Explain Griet's actions here, and give detailed evidence from the text which would justify her actions.

pp. 77-78 THIEVES AND CHILDREN

'Only thieves and children run. I ran all the way home.'

In what ways, and to what extent is Griet either of these? (The implications here deserve in-depth analyses - be as broad as possible in your thinking.)

pp. 79-80 RAG DOLL

1. 'She smiled and skipped away.' What would give her cause for such joy?
2. 'We ate fine meat that autumn.' Explain how and why this has come about, and analyse Griet's tone in making this comment.
3. For both Frans and Griet, what has become of their feelings for 'home'?

pp. 81-85 QUEEN OF THE BEDCOVERS

1. 'I did not like to think of him that way.' Which way? Describe the 'ways' that disturb Griet, and comment on what this reaction by Griet reveals about the character.
2. How does Griet prefer to think of 'him'? Comment?
3. Which metaphorical image does Griet ascribe to Catharina, and in what sense is this both favourable and not so?

pp. 85-86 THE RIVALS

'I felt caught between the two men.' Study this section for detail as to who is doing what, who is watching whom; and draw a sketch which captures the incident - a tile, if you like.

pp. 86-87

How do Griet's parents react to her answers to their questions, and what significance might there be in their reactions?

pp. 87-89 CENTRE OF ATTENTION

1. Examine the descriptions to do with Catharina's appearance as well as those to do with her role and behaviour at the feast. Comment as to the sense in which she is the centre of attention.
2. In this section, in what ways does Griet become the centre of attention - who, precisely, is watching her and in what ways - what kind of intention is contained in each gaze?

pp. 89-92 INSPIRATION

1. Griet wonders at the ways in which she might have offended 'him' - what are some of the potential offences?
2. In what sense do you think that Griet is, in this section, inspired? And in what sense is 'he' inspired?

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pp. 95-99 LIES

1. 'Blue is Blue.' What colour is the woman's cap, and how is this achieved? What colour is the woman's cap, then?
2. 'I expected her to warn me.' Does she? And why? What answer does Griet find in her eyes?
3. Why is Tanneke angry with Griet - what is the difficulty in the situation?

pp. 99-103 A BITTER WIND

1. What are the circumstances that prompt Catharina to require that Griet visit the apothecary?
2. a) Who else asks Griet for something from the apothecary?
b) How does Griet feel about being asked?
3. At first, the apothecary is surprised about Griet being the messenger, but he soon makes another observation: what is it, and how, then, do you interpret Griet's willingness to go on the errand?
4. From Cornelia's perspective, what has happened in the act of Griet delivering the colours? And, a few days later, how does Cornelia react?
5. Examine your own and earlier depiction of the tile, and now draw another version, the one described in this section. Underneath your new tile, give an explanation of what Griet meant in saying, 'I would have been less upset if she had broken our heads from our bodies.'

pp. 104-106 SUBTERFUGE

1. What 'other things' is Griet now doing, and how has this implicated her in guilty acts?
2. Imagine you are Cornelia watching, unnoticed, the session in which Griet acts as 'his' substitute model for the baker's daughter. Write your own brief version of events, in two separate paragraphs, being as descriptive as possible of all that you notice.
3. How does the session end, with what attitude and words - and does this remind you of any previous endings to encounters?



Young Woman with a Water Pitcher by Johannes Vermeer, 1662-1663, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
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pp. 106-108 TRUE BLUE

Using the information in this section of the novel, write a brief descriptive passage of the painting.

pp. 108-111

1. Griet, in the attic, is taught the secret art:
 - a) What secret is she taught?
 - b) Name the several ways in which Griet is now implicated into somewhat surreptitious acts - how many of her duties are now kept secret from everyone else but 'him'?
2. Why do you think Griet in the given context mentions 'the butcher's'?

pp. 111-114 LOCKED AWAY

1. Study the description of Catharina's appearance: what precisely is she wearing?
2. How does Catharina feel about the proposal that Griet sleep in the attic, and why might she feel this way?

3. 'The next day, the baker's daughter began to wear the wide white collar while modelling for the painting.' What do you make of this observation?

pp. 114-116 FOOLED

'I began to get used to lying.'

'Not a word to my daughter ...'

Who is guilty of deception, and who appears untouched by it all? Is this fair?

pp. 117-122 FACT, FICTION, FANTASY

1. Imagine that Griet writes to you - the advice columnist of the 'Dear etc.' section of a young person's magazine. Griet's letter to you begins, 'I liked sleeping in the attic ...' and ends with, 'It must be hard for a wife to accept such an arrangement.' Write your letter of advice to her, explaining what she should do, and why.
2. Write one sentence to describe what you think of Cornelia.
3. Write one sentence to describe what you think of Tanneke.

pp. 122-125 SPINNING KNIFE

1. Why does Griet ask, 'Where was my master when this happened?'
2. 'I was shaking from my thoughts a picture of the knife spinning on my mother's floor.' What does her memory signify?

pp. 125-126 BLOOD AND BONE

1. Compare and contrast the reactions of the mother and the father upon learning that Pieter had come to their church.
2. Describe Griet's purpose in looking at Pieter's hands.

pp. 126-131 ANOTHER GRIET

1. How would you describe Pieter's behaviour towards Griet's parents?
2. 'they must have been feeding him as a way of filling our own stomachs in the future ... A little hunger now would bring a heavy stomach eventually.'
 - a) Compare this situation with that of the mother's earlier refusal to accept free meat from their old butcher. What, if anything, is different between the two situations - what has changed, at least from the mother's perspective? And do you approve of the mother in this?
 - b) Consider Griet's tone - somewhat bitter? Yet this was not how she felt

about being 'given away' to the Vermeer household, was it? What is the difference? Consider also Griet's tone: 'I felt as if ... a deal had been made ... At least he is a good man ...even if his hands are not as clean as they could be.' Of course, 'his' hands are different.

3. 'That was why I kept my hair completely hidden - so there would be no trace of that Griet.'
 - a) Which Griet? Write a brief paragraph which explores the nature of the Griet of the alley. In what ways does this Griet differ from the other Griet? Consider appearance (clean, tidy, loose hair, tight-lipped?), behaviour (measured, in control?), and allegiances.
 - b) Write a brief paragraph which explores the nature of the Griet under her cap. Illustrate your ideas in the form of a delft tile.

pp. 131-134 MISCHIEF

1. What difference is there between the ways that the baker and van Ruijven respond to the paintings?
2. 'It was in her nature to be sly.' Is this a fair judgement?

pp. 134-135 MAID IN RED - GIRL WITH A WINE GLASS

1. 'His words froze my blood.' Explain why the meaning of these words and why they have this effect upon her.
2. Having heard these chilling words, of what is Griet now reminded, and what does she begin to realize?

pp. 135-138 TEMPTATION

1. What is Griet's sudden desire, and do you think that perhaps she should have acted upon this desire?
2. 'As they gazed at each other I felt as if I were not there.' Is there any difference between the two gazes - what is his purpose, his status, his will when compared to hers?

pp. 138-140 PITY

1. Analyse and comment upon van Leeuwenhoek and Vermeer watching Griet through the camera obscura.
2. 'Griet, you may go now.' On how many previous occasions has this form of dismissal occurred, and when, precisely, were these occasions? Discuss the kinds of relations that are evident in such interactions - equal? Just? Or are these dismissals a way of marking a re-entry from the world of art into that of the everyday world?

pp. 140-146 SMILING IN THE DARK

‘Something to snag the eye.’ Why had Griet wanted to do this - what was the artistic impulse that motivated her, and how did she achieve an artistic effect?

pp. 146-150 ART

1. Give one word that would capture the emotional state in which Frans finds himself.
2. In what terms, what metaphorical imagery, does ‘he’ explain the significance of a painting in a church? And how does Griet respond? Does this encounter somehow clarify some of the basis of the period’s sectarianism?

pp. 150-153 REPUTATION

1. Historically speaking, what was the reputation of maids? Have things changed?
2. Provide a quotation from this section which summarises van Ruijven’s attitude towards maids.
3. ‘He didn’t say anything.’ Should Griet have been hurt by this? And can you name the other such and similar occasions where he behaved likewise?
4. ‘No chance of beauty or colour or light in my life ...’. What does she fear?
5. ‘... he was my escape ...’ Who was, in what way, and what has happened to cause Griet to have this view?
6. ‘Perhaps I was not so different from my parents ...’ In what way?

pp. 153-158 CAT IN THE POULTRY HOUSE

1. ‘... a vague distrust ...’ Is this distrust misplaced?
2. What is the significance in the scene: ‘She was waiting, furious, in the studio doorway.’ (Why would she remain waiting in the doorway?)
3. Draw the comb.
4. ‘But he has backed you, in his way ...’ Has he - what, precisely, has he done?
5. ‘I tried not to let my face show what I felt ...’ Should Griet have expected anything different, or are her expectations unrealistic?
6. ‘Another?’ What is revealed in this question?

pp. 158-161 INDEBTED

1. ‘... my help would help him paint more, and support the child she carried, as well as those she had already.’ How is the reader positioned, here, regarding Vermeer? Regarding Catharina? And how does this positioning come about? (Consider, for example, who is ‘worthy’, and by what measure?)

2. 'I tried to ignore them ...' What is there to ignore?
3. Vermeer's painting, *The Procuress*, is alluded to later in the novel, yet it is nevertheless directly relevant to this particular section. What is it 'to procure'? Who is the procurer/procuress? Who is being procured? To what end is the procuring?
4. After close examination, discuss any interrelatedness you notice in the images below. Two paintings are by Vermeer, one by van Baburen. Who painted which, do you think?



Painting 1



Painting 2



Painting 3

See Appendix A for information and acknowledgements.

pp. 164-171 GOSSIP

1.
 - a) What is the gossip about Griet?
 - b) What fears does Griet's mother have in regard to the gossip?
 - c) Pieter the father?
 - d) Pieter the son?
2. What solution does Pieter present to Griet, and what response does he receive?

pp. 171-173 RABBITS

'Van Ruijven had us all ... running like rabbits before dogs.' Why is Maria Thins helping Griet in this regard?

pp. 173-177 PUNISHMENT

'You see, we're not so different ...' Discuss the ways that this is so.

pp. 177-180 PROCURED WITH A PROMISE

1. Examine again the painting of *The Procuress* owned by Maria Thins. Discuss the characters in the painting, and their roles, and then consider: in what ways is van Baburen's painting representative of Griet's situation?
2. 'He was going to paint me.' For 'him', what does this decision represent - does it, for example, represent an artistic intention? Or are there other aspects to his decision? Will the decision disadvantage him in any way?

And for Griet: what are the implications in this decision for her? Consider aspects such as ownership, looking, gaze, subject, object. Consider also other implications involving e.g. envy, hardship, deceit.
3. What is your impression of the tone in the exchange between Griet and the painter - how would you describe it? Provide quotations to substantiate.

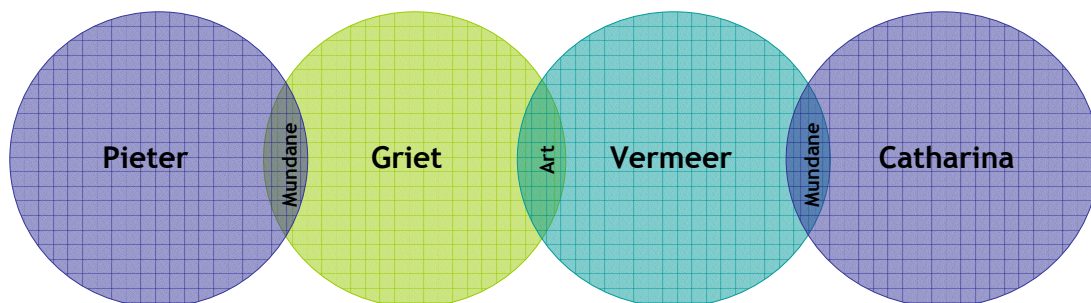
1666

1. Name the painting that 'he' is working on at this stage.
2. Why do you think Griet agrees to the encounters with Pieter in the alley near Rietveld Canal?
3. 'He did not notice that I avoided looking at his face and hands.' Consider:
 - a) why she would avoid looking at his hands
 - b) why she would avoid looking at his face
 - c) why she would think of things to do with painting

- d) what all this reveals about her and Pieter.
4. Keeping in mind that her encounters with Pieter in the alley are of a sexual nature, what is the significance of her determination to have control over her cap so that her hair remains hidden?
 5. ‘... his power over us.’ What is the basis of that power, and do you think the situation is being exploited?

pp. 187-191

1. ‘Griet, you are not looking at me.’ Why is it important to have Griet meet his gaze rather than have her merely looking at his face? Give several plausible explanations.
2. Any comments about the church bell - how often, and what, has it tolled? So how long has the gaze been sustained?
3. Discuss the following: what happens to Griet from the perspective of the painter? What happens to Griet from her own perspective? Who is objectified in this artistic encounter? (And is it significant that ‘at last he looked away ...’?)
4. How does this encounter end? Would you say that it is a predictable end, based on previous observations?
5. In view of your analysis above, do you agree there exist at least two different realities: the world of art and of the artist; and the world of daily life involving functionality, the ordinary, the mundane? Who, then, belongs to Vermeer’s art world and who to his everyday world? You might also like to consider all this in terms of that which is sacred - art, beauty, desire; and that which is profane - the mundane, the ordinary, love (i.e. romantic love versus desire).
6. Draw your own Venn diagram set, and note comprehensively those aspects of the lives of the characters that intersect, and those that do not.



pp. 191-194

What title would you give this section? Explain your decision.

pp. 195-197 THE ARTIST

1. Which people know Griet is being painted?
2. 'I could no longer be sure of how they were looking at me.' Why is she uneasy?
3. 'Griet, you have moved.' Explain the possible meanings here.

pp. 197-201 GUILT

Write a journal entry in which you, as Griet, consider why it is that you are made to feel guilty for having Vermeer paint you.

pp. 201-203 ALONE

1. 'With his eyes on only me for those hours ... Sometimes he simply sat and looked at me ...' how many ways can he look?
2. '... looking at something ... waiting for me to do something ...' - can it be said that this is definitive of Griet and 'desire'? If so, how?

pp. 203-208

1. 'On his face was his painter's look.' What does he see?
2. Does Griet see the same thing in the same way?
3. In what ways was Griet ' beholden to him'?
4. 'At last he let me go with his eyes.' What happened, what has changed, and in what ways is this significant?

p. 208 REVEALED

1. What do you think of Griet's decision, and why do you think she made it? Could it be that, at one level, there is something of a restorative intention in her determination to encounter Pieter?
2. Griet recalls 'loose hair around my shoulders ...' What difference does this recollection make? Comment?
3. What do you make of the addition to the painting of a wisp of hair beneath the cap?
4. Is this section about Pieter or about 'him'?

pp. 208-209 RUINED

1. What is the predominant colour he is mixing? For what is this colour intended?
2. What suggestion does Griet make regarding his painting of the earrings?

3. What exactly does he reply to Griet's suggestion, and what do you think about him in this context?
4. 'You have ruined me.' How so? Discuss the ways.

pp. 210-212 CLOVE OIL

1. How does the boss's wife describe Frans?
2. Are there any parallels in the respective situations of Frans and Griet - how might their experiences be seen to be the same or different? And what can be said about the prevailing social values involving class and gender - e.g. who is it that seems to be culpable?

pp. 212-213 PIERCING

1. To what extent, if any, do you think it can be argued that Griet's piercing of her ear lobe for the sake of art is symbolic of her desire of Vermeer?

pp. 214-215 OWNERSHIP

1. 'I will have you anyway when I get the painting.' Explain the ambiguity here, and comment on how he does eventually have her.
2. In retrospect, and in view of Griet's position in relation to both Vermeer and van Ruijven, does her somewhat desperate intimacy with Pieter now make some sense?

pp. 215-222 BLEEDING

1. 'My blood chilled.' What fear does this reveal?
2. Maertge asks, 'Why is eighteen important?' What answer would you give her?
3. 'You know why.' Why?
4. 'Here you are Griet.' What is he offering, and of what is this scene reminiscent?
5.
 - a) What makes this painting session different?
 - b) What happens to interrupt the session, and what is expected of her now and on what basis?
 - c) How does Griet react to the new and proposed situation - whom does she choose?
 - d) By what derogatory term does Tanneke refer to Griet, and to what extent would you agree with her?
6. 'When he turned at last to face me, his eyes were masked.' What has happened to cause this change in the gaze?
7.
 - a) Vermeer holds out the earring for Griet to wear - yet what is involved in order that she be able to wear the earring?

- b) Knowing what is required that she wear the earring, what request does Griet make of 'him'?
 - c) How does he respond?
 - d) Is desire fulfilled, and has sexual intimacy occurred?
8. 'I wanted him to think of me, not of the painting.' What is the difference?
 9. 'You must wear both.' What is your opinion of him in this context - is he being ruthlessly wilful, or is he being intensely artistic in so far as 'art is truth'? For example, would it have been false, a lie, were Griet to have worn only one earring?
 10. 'It is done.' What is?
 11. 'I waited for a moment, my hair out over my shoulders, but ...' Complete this sentence, as in the text, and then comment on its implications.
 12. 'I always regretted that decision.' What is the outcome of that decision, and what is there to regret, particularly in terms of ownership, of looking, of power?

pp. 223-229 CHOICES

1. 'When he returned ...' what does she hope for?
2. Compare the self-composure of Griet to that of Catharina's lack of composure, and comment on how these differences reflect inner characteristics.
3. a) 'I might say ... I might say ... Or I might simply say ...' What three accusations might Griet have levelled at the Vermeers?
b) If Frans had levelled similar accusations in his situation, how would he have expressed these?
4. 'She knew the real matter was not the earrings.' What, then, was the real matter?
5. 'Why,' she asked, 'have you never painted me?' Analyse his reply, and note the meanings implied.
6. Discuss the significance of the knife in this section, both in terms of its figurative aspects as well as in terms of the way it unifies narrative elements.
7. 'Only thieves and children run.' Again, which, if either, is she, and what makes you say so?
8. Design your own eight-pointed star, and inside each point write out Griet's possible actions, together with an explanation of the pros and cons of each action.

1676

pp. 233-236 WHAT A MAID IS WORTH

1. What is a maid worth, and how did it happen that she had 'cost' this amount?
2. What had happened soon after on the day that Griet left ten years earlier?
3. 'My mother stepped back ...' From what did she step back, and what is the irony here?

pp. 237-239 EIGHT-POINTED STAR

1. What has happened to the eight-pointed star - how many points remain, and how so?

pp. 239-247 GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING

1. 'Only now my eyes were not so wide and innocent.' Has Griet changed much, do you think?
2. 'It didn't help matters here, I can tell you.' What is the object of Maria Thins' comment? And why, do you think, this object of her comment had caused conflict in the Vermeer household?
3. 'I became fully aware that he was dead.' What seems to be her greatest regret in the fact that he had died? Does her regret bespeak romance or art, the sacred or the profane, love or desire?
4. 'Van Leeuwenhoeck was standing ... studying a painting of soldiers drinking in a tavern.' Name this painting.
5. 'I took them.' What right had she to the earrings?

pp. 247-248 KEEPING SECRETS

1. What price does Griet receive for the pearls?
2. How much had the Vermeers owed Pieter?
3. 'I would hide them somewhere that Pieter and my sons would not look ... I would never spend them.' Explain the significance of her act of secrecy.

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

- Chevalier, in *Girl with a Pearl Earring* explores the essential nature of desire and of art. Discuss.
- In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Chevalier reflects upon the extent to which individuals are free to make choices. Discuss.
- In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Griet is the true artist. Do you agree?

Appendix A

- **Painting 1**
 - The Concert, Jan Vermeer van Delft, 1665-66 (stolen)
 - Oil on canvas,
 - Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

- **Painting 2**
 - The Procuress , Baburen, Dirck van, 1622, oil on canvas,
 - Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The painting was owned by Maria Thins, mother-in-law of Johannes Vermeer, who reproduced it within two of his own paintings.
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- **Painting 3**
 - The Procuress, Jan Vermeer van Delft, 1656
 - oil in canvas
 - Gemäldegalerie, Dresden
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