Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

The Woman in Black

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Plot

- Arthur Kipps, now older, writes about events from his youth. As a young solicitor, he was sent to Crythin Gifford to sort out the papers of the late Mrs Alice Drablow.
- At her funeral he sees a woman in black. Eel Marsh House can only be reached by the Nine Lives Causeway at low tide, and there he hears a pony and trap sink in the marsh with a child's cries.
- He learns that Jennet Humfrye, Alice's sister, was forced to give up her son Nathaniel, who died in a trap accident on the marsh. Her ghost appears, and each time a child dies. Samuel Daily and his dog, Spider, help Arthur.
- Back in London, Arthur marries Stella and they have a son. In a park he sees the woman in black; a pony and trap crashes, killing his son, and Stella dies later from her injuries.

Themes and context

- Grief, revenge, isolation, the **supernatural**, and motherhood.
- Susan Hill published it in 1983 as a Victorian-style **Gothic** ghost story, with a remote house, fog and a haunting.

Form

- Told in the first person by an older Arthur, so the reader knows from the start that something terrible happened.

How to get top marks

- Use the framing: Arthur Kipps is telling this story years later, and that dread hangs over everything.
- Write about ghost story conventions: isolation, the marsh, sounds that can't be explained, and suspense that's built slowly.
- Have an idea about grief and revenge: the haunting is driven by pain, which is what makes it frightening.

Key terms

Gothic	A genre of mystery, horror and dark settings.
Pathetic fallacy	Weather reflecting mood, such as fog.
Foreshadowing	Hints of what is to come.
Supernatural	Beyond the natural world, such as ghosts.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who narrates The Woman in Black?
2. Why does Arthur go to Crythin Gifford?
3. How is Eel Marsh House reached?
4. Who is the woman in black?
5. What happens when the woman in black is seen?
6. Who helps Arthur, along with his dog Spider?
7. How does the novel end?
8. When was The Woman in Black published?

Answers

1. Arthur Kipps
2. To sort out the papers of Mrs Alice Drablow
3. By the Nine Lives Causeway at low tide
4. The ghost of Jennet Humfrye
5. A child dies
6. Samuel Daily
7. Arthur's son and then Stella die after a pony and trap crash
8. 1983

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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