Jamaica Inn

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 people such as J.M. Barrie and Edgar Wallace 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 Daphne and her two sisters became adolescents, their father became very possessive, discouraging friendships with boys and demanding their attention. Daphne wrote several short stories about women being used by men, that reveal the strong influence of her dogmatic father. Daphne, fiercely independent and embarrassed by her indulgent upbringing, was determined to support herself, and in 1931 her first novel *The Loving Spirit* was published. This brought her fame and her husband, Major Frederick Arthur Montague Browning, known as ‘Boy’ in his regiment, and ‘Tommy’ to his friends. He was 34 years old when he sailed in to Fowey harbour in October 1931 to find the author of the book he so much admired. They had a quiet wedding, after which they sailed to the Helford River and moored for the night in Frenchman’s Creek. Daphne was not happy when her first and second children were girls, and immediately employed a nanny to look after them. When her son, Kits, was born, she doted on him, forming a strong bond unknown to her daughters. Daphne and Tommy spent a lot of time apart during and after the war, when Tommy worked for Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace. Daphne hated formal socializing, and the couple found it difficult to share each other’s lives. Daphne was attracted to women as well as men, and had a deep friendship with the actress Gertrude Lawrence. Despite her writing success, Daphne 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. Daphne lived in Cornwall until her death in 1989.

Summary
Written in 1936, *Jamaica Inn* is a historical, romantic story. In 1939 Alfred Hitchcock co-produced a film of the book with Charles Laughton, who also starred in the leading role. *Jamaica Inn* is set in eighteenth century Cornwall, when the moors were a wild place. Lonely farmhouses provided good hideaways for smugglers and robbers. The deadly bogs were treacherous places. It is all very different from the lush gentleness of the Helford Valley that has been home to the book’s heroine, Mary Yellan for her 23 years.

Chapters 1–2: Now that her mother is dead, Mary Yellan has to go and live with the only family she has left – her Aunt Patience and her husband Joss Merlyn, landlord of Jamaica Inn. As she travels to her new home, the people she meets tell Mary that Jamaica Inn has a bad name and that respectable people do not go there any more. They tell her that it is ‘no place for a girl’. The landscape she crosses is also very unwelcoming and Mary feels very alone when the driver leaves her at the door of her new home. Mary finds little comfort at Jamaica Inn where her uncle terrifies everyone around him. Her aunt, whom Mary remembers as being a happy person, now looks very sad and anxious – she cowers, a piteous shadow of her former self. Her uncle – a heavy drinker and a giant of a man – tells her that on some nights she will hear strange things happening at the Inn, but that she must not leave her room when she does. He tells her not to ask him any questions or he will break every bone in her body. Her room is dirty and uncomfortable, but Mary resolves to stay at Jamaica Inn so that she can take care of her aunt.

Chapters 3–5: Mary discovers a locked room in Jamaica Inn, but when she asks her aunt about it, the poor woman is very afraid. She tells her niece that Joss and his friends use the room to carry out mysterious business, but that she is not to try to find out more. Mary has not been living at Jamaica Inn long when the first wagons, laden with stolen goods, arrive in the middle of the night. Mary thinks she overhears her uncle threatening to kill a man.
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One day while she is alone at the inn, Mary meets Joss’s younger brother, Jem, who tries to impress her by telling her he is a horse thief. Although she disapproves of him, she realizes she is attracted to Jem.

Chapters 6–7: The local magistrate, Mr Bassat, comes to Jamaica Inn, seeking proof of Joss’s illegal trading, but the goods have already been taken away. When he asks Mary if she has seen anything, she lies and says she hasn’t in order to protect her aunt. Later on, she tries to follow her uncle to find out more about his activities, but she gets lost on the moor until she is found by the Vicar of Altarnun. She feels she can trust the vicar and she tells him about the things she saw and heard the night the wagons came to the inn. The vicar tells her he will help her if she is ever in need and escorts her back to Jamaica Inn.

Chapters 8–10: Joss Merlyn spends several days in a drunken stupor and tells Mary of how he has nightmares about the man he has killed coming back to haunt him. Mary goes out to explore the moors again, and she meets Jem for the second time. She agrees to go to Launceston with him on Christmas Eve when he goes to sell some stolen horses. While they are in Launceston, Jem disappears and Mary has to return home alone. On the road, she once again meets the Vicar of Altarnun and he offers to drive her home. The vicar leaves the coach before they reach Jamaica Inn, and her uncle finds her and forces her to go to the coast with him and his gang. When she gets to the coast, Mary is witness to the wrecking of a ship by Joss and his gang.

Chapters 11–14: Joss makes plans to escape from Cornwall with his wife and Mary, but during the night Mary makes her way to Altarnun in search of the vicar so she can inform on Joss. The vicar is not at home so she goes to the house of Mr Bassat, the magistrate. When she returns to Jamaica Inn with the magistrate’s servant, they discover that Joss and Patience have been murdered.

Chapters 15–16: The Vicar of Altarnun tells Mary the truth about the real identity of the man behind the wreckings and the killings; it is he himself. The vicar attempts to escape with Mary by heading across the moors, but bad weather forces them to stop. The vicar is shot dead by Jem Merlyn and Mary goes to live with Mr Bassat’s family.

Chapter 17: Mary meets Jem on the road. She decides to go away with him rather than return to her quiet life in Helford.

Background and themes

When Daphne du Maurier wrote Jamaica Inn, Europe was still recovering from the shock of the First World War, the Spanish Civil War was raging, and fascism was on the rise. Many contemporary writers were concerned with subjects such as war, poverty, psychology, fascism and religion. Authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, began to use the new ‘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 reader.

Adventure, romance, sexuality and mystery: Daphne du Maurier recognized very quickly 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. Jamaica Inn was Daphne du Maurier’s fourth novel, and her first major financial success. After just three months, more copies of Jamaica Inn had been sold than all the other three novels put together. Each of these novels was very different from the one that went before. Jamaica Inn is a Gothic, melodramatic tale, packed full of smugglers, mystery and suspense. The treacherous, violent atmosphere of the eighteenth-century Cornish moors oozes from every page. It is a novel full of violence and death. The drama of the windswept countryside and the turbulence of the stormy coastline mirror the violence of the human lives scattered on the sea and land.

Sexual inequality: One theme that runs consistently through du Maurier’s first four books is the inequality between the sexes, showing the plight of women who are the victims. In Jamaica Inn Daphne du Maurier develops this theme further. Mary Yellan is a victim from the very beginning of the novel. First she is a victim of circumstance when her mother dies and she is forced to move to the only relatives she has. Mary also becomes a victim at the hands of Joss Merlyn, who treats her roughly, threatens her, and involves her as an unwilling witness to his murderous activities. Mary’s Aunt Patience is also a victim to the brutality of her husband. She has changed from a happy, smiling woman in delicate silk dresses to a frightened, drab old lady since her marriage. But despite the cruelty of her husband, and her knowledge of the murders he commits, she stands by him and refuses to leave or go to the law. When Mary meets Joss’s brother, Jem, she understands the attraction of the Merlyn boys. Reluctantly, she finds that she enjoys Jem’s company and...
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is excited by his disregard for the law and his adventurous spirit. Her head tells her that the Merlyn boys have no respect for their women, but her heart leads her to believe she is in love.

Loyalty and courage: As Aunt Patience is loyal to her husband, so Mary is loyal to her aunt. Mary has courage and strength of character which prevents her from running away from Jamaica Inn. She stays to protect her aunt from Joss Merlyn, and tells him on their first evening that if he ever hurts Patience she will set the law against him. This show of courage saves her from the bully.

Misjudging others: Another theme running through the novel is that you cannot judge someone on first impressions. Mary herself seems like a fragile young girl, but is actually full of strength, courage and determination. Joss Merlyn is known as the worst of the Merlyn boys, a horse thief and a scoundrel, but by the end of the book he proves that he has some moral values. The man that Mary trusts throughout the book, however, the Vicar of Altarnun, with his gentle voice and kind manner, hides the heart of a cold-blooded murderer.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss: Show students a map of the British Isles and ask them to find Cornwall. On a piece of paper, have the students write two headings: What I know about Cornwall and What I would like to know about Cornwall. Give the students a few minutes to write down what they can under the two headings. Then put the students into small groups and have them share their information. After a few minutes, conduct a feedback session. You may try to answer any questions they have about Cornwall, or set them the homework task of finding out the answers themselves.

2 Guess: Ask the students to look at the front cover of the book. Working in small groups, ask them to write down five words or expressions to describe the picture on the cover. Then ask each student to write one sentence about what they think is going to happen in the story. After a few minutes, ask each group to read out their sentences.

Chapters 1–5

After reading

3 Pair work: In Chapter 1, the driver of Mary’s coach tells her that Jamaica Inn is ‘no place for a girl’. Working in pairs, ask the students to imagine why he says that. Tell them to consider the following questions: What do you think goes on at Jamaica Inn? What would you have done if you were in Mary’s place?

After a few minutes, ask a few of the pairs to report back to the rest of the class.

4 Discuss: On page 4, as Mary crosses the lonely moor in the coach, she has the thought that ‘no human being could live in this country and remain like other people … Their minds would be twisted … their thoughts evil, living as they must among rough bushes and hard stone’. Tell the students to think about their reaction to this short passage. You may need to focus their attention by asking them the following question: What effect does the environment have on people’s character? Working individually, the students write a sentence or two describing their opinion on the matter. Then put the students into small groups and have them exchange their views. You might like to broaden this out into a whole-group discussion, depending on how interested the students are in the topic.

5 Role play: Put the students into groups of three and have them write out the dialogue in Chapter 2 in the form of a stage play. When they have finished, each student in the group takes one of the roles of Joss, May and Aunt Patience. Ask them to practise reading the dialogue out loud. After ten minutes or so, call upon one or two of the groups to perform the dialogue in front of the rest of the class.

6 Pair work: Tell the students to re-read the passage on page 10, where there is a description of Mary’s sleepless first night at Jamaica Inn. Conduct a quick class survey to find out how many of the students have ever had a sleepless night. Then put the students into pairs and have them compare their experiences of not being able to sleep. Ask them to share any advice they have about how to get to sleep. After ten minutes, each member of the pair reports back to the whole class, summarizing what their partner has told them. You might like to write up some of the students’ sleeping advice on the board.

7 Guess: Put the students into pairs and tell them to answer the following questions: What is behind the locked door at the end of the passage described on page 11? After a few minutes, ask some of the pairs to present their ideas to the rest of the class.

8 Discuss: Put the students into pairs and ask them to consider their answers to the question that Mary Yellan asks herself on page 18: ‘Smuggling was dangerous; it was dishonest; it was strictly forbidden by the law of the land; but was it evil?’ Working in their pairs, ask the students to write down their opinions. After ten minutes or so, ask one of the pairs to volunteer their opinions and invite the rest of the class to react to them. Continue for as long as the class remains interested in the topic.

9 Write: Ask the students to imagine that after she has witnessed the events described in Chapter 4, Mary decides to keep a record of her thoughts in her diary. Working individually, the students write the entry for
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the night the wagons came to Jamaica Inn. After they have finished, invite some of the students to read their text out loud. You may also like to get the students to exchange their texts with each other so that they can comment and/or correct the vocabulary and grammar of each other’s writing.

10 Guess: Put the students into small groups. Working individually, the students write out one sentence that describes a character who appears during the first five chapters, but without mentioning that character’s name. Then one student in each group reads out their sentence and the other members of the group must guess who the person is. If the others cannot find the right answer immediately, they can ask yes/no questions until they do. The student who guesses correctly then goes on to describe another character.

11 Write: After they have read Chapter 5, hold a brief whole-class discussion about how meeting Jem Merlyn has affected Mary. Ask individual students to volunteer an opinion and to justify it from the text. After a few minutes, put the students into pairs and have them write another entry in Mary’s diary in which she describes Jem and the way she feels about him. When they have finished writing, have some of the pairs read their texts out loud to the class.

Chapters 6–7

After reading

12 Role play: Put the students into pairs and have them imagine the conversation that takes place between Mary and Joss Merlyn on page 31, after Mr Bassat’s visit to Jamaica Inn. Tell them to write ten or twelve lines of dialogue. Then have the students practise their dialogue for a few minutes, taking turns to play Mary and Joss. After five or ten minutes practice, call on some of the pairs to perform their dialogue for their classmates.

13 Discuss: Working individually, ask students to consider the following question: Is Mary right to trust the Vicar of Altarnun? After a few minutes, put the students into small groups and ask them to come up with reasons why they think Mary trusts the vicar. Then write up some of their suggestions on the board. Working in pairs, the students discuss whether they approve or disapprove of her behaviour towards Jem. After a suitable length of time, invite the groups to report back to the class.

Chapters 8–10

14 Read carefully: On pages 34–35, we can read a description of Mary’s journey from the vicar’s house back to Jamaica Inn. Tell the students to re-read this passage, and then ask them to write a similar description of a journey they have made themselves. When they have finished, put the students into pairs and have them comment on each other’s texts.

15 Discuss: How much have the roles of men and women changed over the past century and a half? On page 38, Mary meets Jem Merlyn again and immediately sets about cleaning his house. Ask one or two students to say how they feel about Mary’s reaction here. Put them into small groups and have them discuss whether they approve or disapprove of her behaviour towards Jem. After a suitable length of time, invite the groups to report back to the class.

16 Pair work: In Chapter 8, Joss tells Mary that he has killed people. Ask the students to imagine how Mary must feel when she hears this. Write up their suggestions on the board. Working in pairs, the students decide on what they would advise Mary to do next. After ten minutes or so, each pair presents their advice orally to the rest of the class.

17 Discuss: Put the students into pairs and ask them to consider their response to Mary Yellan’s thought on page 46 that Aunt Patience was a murderer too. She had killed by her silence.’ Working in their pairs, ask the students to write down their opinions. After ten minutes or so, ask one of the pairs to volunteer their opinions and invite the rest of the class to react to them. Continue for as long as the class remains interested in the topic.

18 Discuss: In Chapter 9, as she is riding in Jem’s cart, Mary looks at him and comes to the realization that ‘love and hate ran side by side; that the borderline was thin between them’ (page 47). Give the students a couple of minutes to consider whether they agree with this statement. Then, put the students into small groups and have them exchange their ideas.

19 Role play: Ask the students if they have ever bought or sold anything at a market. Teach them the word ‘haggle’. Have they ever haggled over the price of anything? Put the students into groups of two or three and have them study the dialogues on pages 49–51 during which Jem tries to sell the black horse. The students choose one of the dialogues and then practise reading it out loud in their small groups. After a few minutes’ practice, some of the groups act out the dialogue for the rest of the class.

20 Role play: After doing Activity 19, you can organize a role play in which the students practise ‘haggling’ over the price of a second-hand car (or some other agreed object or animal). First divide the class into two halves – the buyers and the sellers. Then put the students into pairs, and give them ten minutes or so to prepare for the role play. Each pair of sellers imagines what sort of car they’re selling, what its good points are, and how much they want to sell it for. Each pair of buyers decides what sort of car they want and how much they are willing to pay. After this preparation phase, create new pairs with one buyer paired with one seller and have the students act out the negotiation. At the end, conduct a feedback session to find out who got the best deal.

21 Pair work: Put the students into pairs and ask them to imagine the dialogue between the old fortune-teller at Launceston and either Mary or Jem (see page 51).
Go round the class as the students work to help them if necessary. When they have written their dialogues, they practise acting them out until they can do so without reading their text. Finally, call upon some of the pairs to perform their dialogues in front of the whole class.

22 Guess: What has happened to Jem Merlyn? Put the students into pairs and give them ten minutes to come up with a plausible explanation for Jem Merlyn's disappearance on page 52. After ten minutes, one member of each pair presents their ideas to the rest of the class. Note down the main points on the board. When all the pairs have presented their ideas, have the class vote on which was the best one.

23 Discuss: Ask the students to think about the Vicar of Altarnun. What is their opinion of this character? Why? On the board, write 'I think that the Vicar of Altarnun …'. Working individually the students complete the sentence. Then ask one of the students to read their sentence out loud. Then invite another student to respond – they may agree or disagree, but they should also add their own opinion. Continue in this fashion around the class until everybody has given their opinion.

24 Write: Divide the class into small groups. Allocate one of the Chapters 6 to 10 to each group. Each group writes down six questions about that chapter. Groups then exchange their questions and write answers to the questions they have received without looking at the book. When they have finished writing, conduct a feedback session with each group reading out the questions they received along with their answers. The group that set the questions say whether the answers are the ones they expected.

Chapters 11–12

After reading

25 Pair work: Put the students into pairs. Ask them to imagine what is going through the mind of Harry, the pedlar, while he is locked in the store room. Tell them to come up with a plan of escape for Harry. Give them ten minutes to think and then call on each pair to present their plan to the rest of the class.

26 Role play: Put the students into pairs and have them write out the dialogue between Joss Merlyn and Mary Yellan on pages 74 and 75, down to and including ‘Tomorrow may be too late.’ Tell them to practise the dialogue, paying particular attention to their pronunciation. Ask one or two of the pairs to read the dialogue out loud to the whole class.

Chapters 13–14

After reading

27 Pair work: At the bottom of page 83 we learn that Richards, the servant of Mr Bassat, wants to know everything about Mary’s story while he drives her back to Jamaica Inn, and that Mary gives him only short answers. Working in pairs, the students try to imagine as many questions as they can that Richards would have asked Mary during the journey. Once they have prepared the questions, they act out the conversation in their pairs.

28 Guess: Who killed Joss and Patience Merlyn? Ask the whole class to suggest the likely suspects and write up the names on the board. Then put the students into small groups. Each group must take each of the suspects in turn and talk about the case against them and the case in their favour. Tell them to be prepared to present their findings to the rest of the class. After fifteen or twenty minutes, conduct a feedback session during which each of the groups presents the results of its deliberations. Hold a class vote to decide who the most likely murderer is.

Chapter 15

After reading

29 Write: Conduct a survey around the class, asking the students to say how they imagine how Mary Yellan feels by the end of Chapter 15. Then set the students the following writing task: each student writes a letter from Mary Yellan to the magistrate, Mr Bassat, telling him the truth about the Vicar of Altarnun. Allow fifteen minutes for them to complete the task. When they have finished writing, collect their work and distribute the texts around the class so that each student reads somebody else’s text. The students now review the letter for grammatical and factual errors.

Chapter 16

After reading

30 Role play: Put the students into pairs. Tell them to imagine they are television journalists. They are going to interview Mary Yellan after she is saved at the end of the story. They can ask a maximum of eight questions. Tell the students to prepare a list of questions they would like to ask. After a few minutes, get the students to act out the interview – with one member of each pair playing the journalist and the other playing Mary. Tell them to practise it a few times and then to switch roles. Finally ask different pairs to perform their interview in front of the class.

Chapter 17

After reading

31 Pair work: Write the following questions on the board: Do you think the book has a satisfactory ending? Can you think of a better way to end the book? Put the students into pairs and tell them to discuss their answers to these questions. They must give their reasons. After ten or fifteen minutes, stop the discussions and ask a few of the pairs to share their opinions with the whole class.

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