

## **ENGLISH: *GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING***

**'Griet's involvement in Vermeer's world comes at a cost to herself and to others.' To what extent do you agree?**

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*Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Tracey Chevalier is a novel set in 17th century Holland that concerns a young girl, Griet, who gets caught up in the world of the famous painter Vermeer. Others in Griet's life have to pay a price for her involvement in Vermeer's world and Griet herself is cost many things. However, Griet could have paid a great deal more of her time in Vermeer's world, and was fortunate to escape as comfortably as she did.

When Vermeer begins to take an interest in Griet, he draws her into his world, a world which she finds so enticing that she cannot tear herself away. Griet finds herself lured into Vermeer's world as, no gentleman had ever taken such an interest in me before, and she finds his attention gratifying. He treats her seriously, patiently teaching her about colours, painting and art. Griet responds with great enthusiasm and passion, forgetting her place as a simple maid in the household as she spends more time with her master. She begins to find that the artistic world of Vermeer is all that keeps her working in the household, as her troubles with Catharina and Cornelia grow, if I could not work with the colours. If I could not be near him, I did not know how I could continue to work in that house. She finds herself so caught up in Vermeer's world that she cannot refuse what he asks of her, I did whatever he asked of me, as she cannot bear to leave.

Griet's inability to remove herself from Vermeer's world comes at a great cost to others. Catharina becomes unsure of herself as Griet's presence in the household grows. Griet believes that Catharina is furious with her for spending so much time with her husband, but then realises that she seemed to fear me. Catharina begins to doubt her relationship with her husband though he still displays affection for her, I had often seen him look at her, touch her shoulder, speak to her in a low voice laced with honey. Catharina feels doubt as she is not included in his artistic world and yet their maid is. She is cost her certainty in her place in her husband's life, but also her dignity in society when she discovers that Griet, the maid, wore her pearl earrings, and she is unable to bring herself to wear them again. Griet's parents also pay a great cost in losing their daughter to that world. When Griet lived at home and for the first few weeks of her time at the Vermeer household, she still cared greatly for her family. She tried her hardest to do the best that she could for them, even smuggling food out of the Vermeer household to bring to them. As time goes on however, Griet finds herself drawn more and more into Vermeer's world and loses her deep connection with her family; her mother even remarks, "Working for you has turned your head...it's made you forget who you are and where you come from." Griet begins to grow apart from her parents as she changes from her exposure to her new world. Her parents begin to feel as though they lost [her] the moment [she] became a maid, paying the price for Griet's time in Vermeer's world.

The greatest costs however, are paid by Griet herself. In order to make up for the time she spends in Vermeer's world, Griet is cost many things, including her innocence, her certainty of the world, and her family. Griet was sure of her place in life before she began working for Vermeer and she thought she understood how the world worked. However, Griet is exposed as naïve and innocent after beginning to work for Vermeer as men begin to take an interest in her; Van Leeuwenhoek questions her, "How much do you know of men?" Griet begins to feel unsure of herself and of how she should interpret the actions of others, losing her certainty of the world. Griet is pushed to grow up and become a woman by both Pieter and Vermeer. She is cost her innocence when Vermeer sees her with her hair down, as she feels that I no longer felt that I had something precious to hide and loses her innocence quite literally afterwards when it is taken by Pieter. Griet's biggest cost though, is her family, who she gives up her loyalty to when she is drawn deeply into the artistic and exciting world of Vermeer's. After beginning work with Vermeer, she notes that home had come to feel like a strange place and that she had two families now; two different worlds that she belongs to.

However, Griet had the potential to lose a lot more than just her innocence, certainty, and family, as she could have also been cost a safe and comfortable future with Pieter, her reputation in society, and her values and sense of self if she had refused to leave Vermeer's world.

Griet is enticed by the artistic world of Vermeer's and finds herself too involved to refuse anything he asks of her. Others have to pay a cost for this with Catharina losing her dignity in society and her certainty in her relationship with her husband. Griet's parents also pay the price, having to give up their daughter and her loyalty to them as she becomes more attached to her new home with Vermeer. Griet herself is cost her innocence for her time in Vermeer's world, as well as her assuredness of the world and her family. However, Griet is fortunate to leave Vermeer's world with only these costs, as she could have paid a much greater price in losing her reputation, her comfortable future, and herself.