Girl With a Pearl Earring

Tracy Chevalier
Johannes Vermeer’s famous painting

- Main focal point is the pearl earring
- Referred to as:
  - “the Mona Lisa of the North”
  - “the Dutch Mona Lisa”
Setting

- Delft, Netherlands
- 17th C.
- Protestant vs. Catholic society
Historical Context

- Historical novel
- Fictionalizes the circumstances of the painting’s creation
- Based on Chevalier’s friend Georgia Kendall whom Vermeer hired as an assistant and then eventually painted wearing his wife’s pearl earring
Characters

- Griet
  - 16 years old
  - Raised in a religious Protestant family
  - Conservative
  - Always keeps her hair covered
  - Works as a maid for Vermeer when her father loses his eyesight
Characters

- Vermeer
  - Famous painter

- Catharina
  - Vermeer’s wife
  - Jealous of her husband’s connection with Griet
  - Has 5 children when the novel begins
Characters

- Agnes
  - Griet’s sister
- Tanneke
  - Maid at Vermeer’s
- Maria Thins
  - Catharina’s mother
- Pieter & his son
  - Butchers
- Van Ruijven
  - Patron of Vermeer’s
Symbolism

- The Pearl Earring Symbolizes:
  - Ownership (Catharina)
  - Love between Griet & Vermeer
  - Vermeer leaves the earrings to Griet in his will
- The Painting
  - Griet’s choice to marry Pieter
Conflict

- Griet leaving her family to work for the Vermeer’s
- Living in a Catholic household, seeing the crucifix in her room
- Hiding the fact that she becomes Vermeer’s assistant
- Then is painted by Vermeer
- Forces Griet to choose between two lives
  - Life back home
  - Marriage to Pieter
Themes

- Role of Women
  - Social class
  - Subservient to men
    - Catharina is not allowed in Vermeer’s studio
    - She never questions Vermeer
    - Griet feels helpless to refuse Vermeer’s request to be painted
  - Strict social code of women
  - Griet always keeps her hair covered
Point of View

The person/character telling the story

- **1st Person**
  - Narrator is usually a character in the story. (uses the pronouns “I” or “we”).

- **3rd Person**
  - Most common
  - Narrator may or may not be a character in the story. (uses the pronouns “he,” “she,” or “they”)

- **Omniscient (all knowing)**
  - When a character/narrator knows everything about the other characters (especially what they’re thinking)
Point of View

- 1st person
- Narration and dialogue
- Griet’s perspective
  - Internal narration (exposition) – show’s Griet’s growing infatuation with Vermeer
- Limited omniscience
  - Griet’s thoughts and emotions
- Past tense narration
Language & Meaning

- Conversational
- Voice of a 16 yr. old
- No formal education
Structure

- 4 sections
- Outlined by their dates
  - 1664, 1665, 1666, 1676
- Chronological order
  - Griet leaves her parents
  - Lives with the Vermeers
  - Leaves Vermeers and marries Pieter
Structure

First 3 sections
- Years Griet works for Vermeer
- 1664 – Leaves home
- 1665 – Year before the painting
- 1666 – Year after the painting

Last section
- 1676 – ten years later
- Closure to the lives of the characters