

Reading Instructions for Day 9

James Joyce, “The Dead”

James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”

For this class, you will read two works that explore the relationship between **personal experience, family history, social identity, memory, and death**. Although Joyce writes fiction and Baldwin writes a personal essay, both authors examine how individuals are shaped by forces larger than themselves.

1. Required Reading

Please read both works in full:

1. James Joyce, “The Dead”
2. James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”

Read each work at least once before class. During your second reading, annotate the text by marking important passages, recurring images, changes in tone, and moments when the narrator or main character gains a new understanding.

2. Reading “The Dead”

As you read Joyce’s story, pay attention to the difference between the social atmosphere of the party and Gabriel Conroy’s private thoughts.

Consider the following questions:

1. How is Gabriel presented at the beginning of the story? What does he think about himself and the other guests?
2. Why does Gabriel feel uncomfortable in his conversations with Lily and Miss Ivors?
3. What do Gabriel’s interactions with women reveal about his personality and assumptions?
4. What is the significance of music, especially “The Lass of Aughrim”?
5. How does Gretta’s memory of Michael Furey change Gabriel’s understanding of his marriage?
6. What does Gabriel realize about love, mortality, and his own emotional life at the end of the story?
7. What might the snow symbolize? Pay attention to where it falls and whom it connects.

Close-reading preparation

Choose **one passage** from one of the following moments:

- Gabriel’s conversation with Lily

- Gabriel's conversation with Miss Ivors
- Gabriel's dinner speech
- Gretta listening to the song
- Gretta's account of Michael Furey
- The final paragraph describing the snow

Annotate the passage carefully. Identify:

- the narrative point of view;
- significant images or repeated words;
- changes in tone;
- the relationship between external events and Gabriel's thoughts;
- what the passage contributes to the story as a whole.

3. Reading "Notes of a Native Son"

As you read Baldwin's essay, notice how he connects three levels of experience:

- his relationship with his father;
- his experience of racism;
- the wider social and political conditions of the United States.

Consider the following questions:

1. How does Baldwin describe his father? What contradictions appear in this portrait?
2. How does Baldwin's understanding of his father change after his father's death?
3. How are the father's personal anger and suffering connected to racial oppression?
4. What happens to Baldwin during his time in New Jersey?
5. How does Baldwin describe the development of anger, hatred, and fear within himself?
6. How does the Harlem riot affect the structure and meaning of the essay?
7. Why does Baldwin reject both passive acceptance and destructive hatred?
8. What does the essay suggest about the difficulty of understanding one's parents and inheriting their history?

Close-reading preparation

Choose **one passage** from one of the following sections:

- Baldwin's description of his father

- Baldwin's experiences in New Jersey
- the restaurant incident
- the account of his father's illness and death
- the description of the Harlem riot
- Baldwin's concluding reflections on hatred and injustice

Annotate the passage by identifying:

- changes in tone;
- the movement between personal memory and social commentary;
- important contrasts or repetitions;
- the narrator's emotional conflict;
- the central idea developed in the passage.

4. Comparative Preparation

Although the two works belong to different genres, they can be compared through their treatment of memory, family, death, identity, and historical inheritance.

Before class, prepare brief notes on **one** of the following comparative questions:

1. How does the death of another person produce self-knowledge in both works?
2. How are Gabriel and Baldwin affected by histories that they do not fully understand at first?
3. How do the two works connect private family relationships with wider social or national histories?
4. Compare Gabriel's response to Michael Furey with Baldwin's response to his father.
5. How do resentment, shame, anger, or emotional distance shape the central relationships?
6. How does each writer move from a specific personal experience toward a broader reflection on human life?
7. Compare the use of setting: Dublin in "The Dead" and Harlem/New Jersey in "Notes of a Native Son."
8. How do the endings transform the meaning of the events narrated earlier?

Your comparison should identify both **a meaningful similarity and an important difference**.

5. What to Bring to Class

Please bring:

- copies of both works;
- your annotated passages;
- brief notes answering the reading questions;
- one comparative claim;
- at least two pieces of textual evidence, one from each work.

Be prepared to read your selected passage aloud, explain why it is important, and discuss it with a small group.

6. Short Pre-Class Response

Write **250–300 words** in response to the following prompt:

Both Joyce and Baldwin show a character or narrator confronting a past that cannot be changed. Compare how this confrontation alters Gabriel’s understanding of himself and Baldwin’s understanding of his father, his society, or his own anger.

Your response should:

- present one clear comparative claim;
- refer to both works;
- include at least one specific textual detail from each work;
- discuss both similarity and difference;
- avoid merely summarizing the plots.

Bring the response to class. It will be used as the basis for discussion rather than collected as a formal essay.