



***READING AND WRITING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF  
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: MODERNISM AND MODERNITY***

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## 4.4. Virginia Woolf, “Kew Gardens” (1919)

### Reading Skills

#### I

1. What is the full title of the place in which the story is situated and where is it? [Check: <http://www.kew.org>]
2. How is the reader introduced into Kew Gardens?
3. What sense (of the five senses) predominates in the opening paragraph?
4. What other senses are found in the story?
5. What time of year is it?
6. What is the weather like?
7. The story is structured through focussing on a number of couples. How many?
8. The story also focusses on a particular representative of the insect world. What is it and why might the particular insect be appropriate for the storyteller’s purpose?
9. What is predictable about the description of the woman and man as represented in the second paragraph of the story?
10. Time is an important aspect of the story. What time are Simon and Eleanor used to evoke?
11. Comment on the difference in Simon and Eleanor’s recollections.
12. Eleanor’s experience of a kiss possesses a bathetic quality. What does the bathos consist of?
13. The elder of the two men who are next described refers to “this war”. If one understands that the time in which the story is situated is contemporary, what war is being referred to?
14. What may we gather about the elder man and what leads us to draw a particular conclusion about him?
15. We are told that the “two elderly women” who are next described are “of the lower middle class”. How is their class status registered in their speech?
16. What do the young man and young woman share which is not highlighted in any of the previous couples?
17. Do you see any predictable behaviour in the representation of the young man and woman?
18. The story is unequivocally situated in the twentieth century. How may we deduce that this is the case?
19. In the final paragraph, reference is made to the butterflies’ “flakes”. What is being referred to and why is “flakes” appropriate for the description at this point?
20. What does the climax reached in the final paragraph of the story particularly consist of?

#### II

1. The story focusses attention on people as well as plant and insect life. What effect is achieved through the juxtaposition?
2. What tempo does the story possess and how is it forged?

3. The story may be seen to have a circular structure. How is this achieved?
4. Woolf is renowned for writing poetic prose. Comment on the use of poetic resources in the telling of the story.
5. Comment on similarities and/or differences between Eleanor and Trissie.

### Writing Skills

1. "To let the perspective shift from high to low, from huge to microscopic, to let figures of people, insects, aeroplanes, flowers pass across the vision and melt away – these are devices common to another form of art. These are the tricks of the cinema." (Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Memoir*. London: Continuum, 2007 (1932)). Would you agree with Holtby's claim in relation to "Kew Gardens"? Argue your case.
2. "Kew Gardens" was hand printed by Leonard and Virginia Woolf and illustrated with woodcuts by Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister. Research The Hogarth Press and comment on the impact it had on Virginia's development as a writer.
3. "Kew Gardens" has been described as being organised like a post-Impressionistic painting. Research post-Impressionism and elaborate on the similarities between the story and the painting.
4. "The juxtaposition of snail life with human life is both comical and compelling." (Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.) Would you agree with the above claim? Argue your case.
5. "Kew Gardens" was originally published by The Hogarth Press together with "The Mark on the Wall". Read "The Mark on the Wall" and comment on both stories in relation to experimentation within narrative form.