
“A Rose for Emily” Study Guide

Vocabulary:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>remit</u> – pardon• <u>mote</u> – speck• <u>gilt</u> – gold-edged• <u>pallid</u> – pale• <u>hue</u> – color/shade• <u>temerity</u> – courage• <u>teeming</u> – swarming• <u>diffident</u> – shy• <u>deprecation</u> – derogatory (belittle) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>tableau</u> – scene• <u>cabal</u> – secret intrigue• <u>impervious</u> – not able to pass through• <u>acrid</u> – bitter• <u>thwart</u> – to keep from happening; to stand in the way• <u>august</u> – magnificent; inspiring awe• <u>cuckold</u> – husband of an adulterous wife |
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Characters:

Identify each of the following characters.

- Emily Grierson
- Colonel Sartoris
- Tobe
- Judge Stevens
- Homer Barron

Questions:

- What had Colonel Sartoris done for Miss Emily in 1894?
- What did the next generation of town leaders do on the first of the year?
- At the beginning of Part II, how long had Miss Emily’s father been dead?
- What are the neighbors complaining about? What does Judge Stevens say probably has caused it?
- What did Miss Emily tell her visitors the day after her father’s death?
- Why did the townspeople not think she was crazy for this?
- Who began to date Miss Emily in Part III? Why was he in town?
- What did the townspeople think of Miss Emily and her new boyfriend?
- Miss Emily is thirty at this time and holds her head high in spite of the rumors she must be aware of. How does she show she has kept her dignity (thinking she is better than the other townspeople) when she visits the druggist?
- In Part IV, who do some of the ladies go to see about Miss Emily’s situation? Why?
- What does Miss Emily do that makes the townspeople think that she and her boyfriend have wed?
- Why do the townspeople believe her boyfriend/husband has left?
- When was the last time the townspeople saw the boyfriend/husband?
- Why had the men sprinkled the lime around her house in Part II?
- When Miss Emily was about forty, what had she done to earn money?
- There is a room upstairs that no one has seen for forty years. After Miss Emily’s funeral, the door to it is broken down. What do the townspeople find there?
- What is noticed about the second pillow on the bed in the last paragraph?
- What had happened to Homer Barron?
- What is the point of view of the story?
- What does the title of the story suggest about the townspeople’s feelings toward Miss Emily? Why do they feel this way about her?
- Describe and discuss the symbolism of Miss Emily’s house.

- What is the role of “the smell” incident in the story. What other problems has Miss Emily caused the local authorities?
- How do the townspeople know what they know about Miss Emily’s life? What is the source of their information?
- Consider the mixed quality of the townspeople’s reactions to Miss Emily’s “failures.”
- What is the significance of Miss Emily’s actions after the death of her father?
- What role does Homer Barron play in the story? Is there anything ironic about a match between him and Miss Emily?
- Look closely at the second paragraph in section five. What does this paragraph suggest about the nature of people’s memories of the past?
- What is the horrible revelation about Miss Emily that the story ends with? How is this related to the overall meaning of the story?

rustling of craned silk and satin The reference is to women in high-necked silk and satin dresses, "craning" their necks to spy on Miss Emily and Homer Barron.

what Jones calls “minimal and minor” changes in *These 13* (1931), the contract for which, at one point, referred to the volume as “A ROSE FOR EMILY And Other Stories” (Jones 89; Blotner 1974, 692). Cowley included the story in *The Portable Faulkner*, Saxe Commins chose it for *The Faulkner Reader*, and hundreds of anthologies contain reprints of it. In addition to the critical approaches outlined above, Faulkner’s possible literary and local sources for the story have come in for a good bit of attention, and the story’s title has prompted several interpretations. Diane Brown Jones, whose own summary of the criticism runs forty-seven pages, says “the critical canon of ‘A Rose for Emily’ has become as bloated as the character herself,” and she observes that “there is little evidence to suggest a tapering off of published responses to the text” (133). We may conclude, then, that the story and its commentary, also like Miss Emily herself, promise to remain “dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse” (CS 128).

119:TITLE Enigmatic at least, the title seems to anticipate the “rose-shaded lights” (129:31) of the story’s final pages. At the University of Virginia, Faulkner responded to a question about the meaning of the title: “Oh, it’s simply the poor woman had had no life at all. Her father had kept her more or less locked up and then she had a lover who was about to quit her, she had to murder him. It was just ‘A Rose for Emily’—that’s all” (*Faulkner in the University* 87–88). The title, then, is metafictional, Faulkner’s “rose,” his tribute to his character.

119:1 **our whole town** Jefferson, Mississippi. The narrator’s use of “our” might imply a communal narrative voice, but later passages seem to indicate a single narrator speaking on behalf of others in the town, since the narrator has some information (129:23–25) that the whole town does not.

119:7 **frame house** a wooden house, as opposed to a brick one or a shack; a marker of Emily’s class status

119:8–9 **cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies** ornate gingerbread-style trim typical of Victorian-era homes of the 1870s

119:11 **cotton gins** buildings in which the seeds are removed from raw cotton, by means of a cotton gin, the fiber then formed into bales

- 119:13 **coquettish decay** the house as a metaphor for its last mistress, whose brief life as a coquette decays into the final passages of the story
- 119:16–17 **cedar-bemused cemetery** so crowded with cedar trees that one could get lost or confused from the repetition of the trees and the cedar smell. According to James Crockett, many trees are informally known as cedars because of their aromatic smell, but there are only five “true cedars and only three [of these] grow in the United States” (*Evergreens* 91), all in Mississippi.
- 119:18–19 **Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson** Faulkner may have been thinking of the Battle of Holly Springs, which occurred on 20 December 1863, about 30 miles north of Oxford. The battle involved CSA Major General Earl van Dorn, who “recapture[d Holly Springs] and [a] massive Union military supply depot, forcing Gen. Ulysses Grant to retreat to Tennessee” (“Bibliography—Military Actions in Mississippi”).
- 119:23–120:1 **the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron** Slavery was abolished in 1865 with the adoption of the thirteenth amendment; five years later, in 1870, the fifteenth provided that rights, including the right to vote, were not to be denied on the basis of race or past servitude. In the South, and in Faulkner’s Jefferson, these constitutional amendments made few changes to the reality of racial inequality and the local laws instituted to ensure this inequality. Colonel Sartoris’s “edict” marks black women as inferior—and, in fact, as “black,” regardless of their skin color—much as the *tigue* did in New Orleans.
- 120:7–9 **Only a man of Colonel Sartoris’ generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it** Sartoris’s generation was used to taking care of troublesome females, and they in turn were used to being taken care of by the man in charge.
- 120:17 **paper of an archaic shape** not a present-day, standard-size piece of stationery
- 120:23–24 **china-painting lessons** China painting, embroidery, musical training, and other “feminine arts” were particularly important in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and were collectively known as “accomplishments,” skills that young women of the upper and middle classes perfected to enhance their character and increase

their marriage potential (see Theobald, for example). In Miss Emily’s case, the occupation must serve as her source of income in the absence of a husband and his support.

120:33 **crayon portrait** not an oil painting but a chalk or conte crayon drawing; another indication of class pretense carried out with limited means

121:24 **by the**— “books” or “law”

121:27–28 **Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years**
Colonel Sartoris died in about 1917, according to this timeline.

121:30 **horse and foot** all of them, cavalry (horse) and infantry (foot) alike

122:19 **that nigger of hers** Tobe (121:29). The epithet characterizes Judge Stevens’s racial views; the narrator has been scrupulous to use the then-current polite term “Negro,” with the exception he makes at 124:16.

122:25 **graybeards** old men

122:28–29 **if she don’t . . .** then we will fine/sanction her

122:31 **lady** In Faulkner’s South, the term carries racial as well as class and gender connotations. A “lady” was by definition white, and the protection of her honor by (white) gentlemen a trap for both races and sexes. As Diane Roberts has argued, Faulkner was “fascinated” in the 1930s by “the white woman’s burden” of repressed sexuality: “Miss Emily is an interrogation, a parody, and a celebration of the Confederate Woman . . . but above all she is a lady” (158, 160).

122:33 **slunk** past-tense version of *slink*; similar to *snuck* (instead of *sneaked*)

123:1–4 **one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings**
The men are strewing quicklime on Miss Emily’s property (the main house as well as the dependencies) in order to hasten the process of decomposition of whatever small animals they believe have died on the grounds and thus produced the offensive odor.

123:8 **locusts** trees, in this context, not insects

123:13–14 **held themselves a little too high for what they really were**
an accusation that the Griersons are pretentious

- 123:15-19 **We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horse-whip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door** a striking image of Emily's repression at her father's hands, and reminiscent of her appearance before the aldermen at 121:1-12.
- 123:28-29 **a penny more or less** being poor to the point that every penny makes a difference
- 124:10-11 **her hair was cut short** probably a result of being treated for a high fever. According to Dr. Victor Wilson and Dr. M. Wayne Cooper, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries physicians knew that fever patients radiated heat through their scalps; historian of medicine Sue Lederer adds that in the late 1800s there was a public health campaign to raise awareness of germ theory that included the shaving of men's beards. Her hair was probably cut in a belief that it would cool her brain, or as Dr. Wilson adds, to keep her hair from matting.
- 124:12 **colored church windows** stained glass windows
- 124:14 **let** awarded
- 124:16 **niggers** This passage is the first time that the narrator has used the word "nigger" to identify the black population in Jefferson; previously, the narrator has used "Negroes" (119:23; 120:25; 120:27; 120:29; 121:30; 122:7). He thus makes a class distinction between town-dwelling blacks, including house servants, and the gang of black laborers.
- 124:20-21 **the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks** Possibly convict labor, the gang sings to relieve the backbreaking and monotonous work of breaking the earth for the sidewalks to be laid.
- 124:25-26 **the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable** a flashy rented driving rig; the horse equivalent of a sports car, with two lookalike reddish-brown horses
- 124:30-125:2 **But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*—without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her" *noblesse oblige*.** French term meaning "nobility obliges"; the moral obligation of those with high birth

to treat the lower classes with kindness and generosity. The older folks seem to think that Emily is not a “real lady,” that in consorting with Homer Barron at all she has revealed this fact and now, apparently sexually involved with him, stands in need of her kinfolks’ protection.

125:8–9 **“Do you suppose it’s really so?” they said to one another. “Of course it is. What else could . . .”** keep a man like that with her?; keep them together?; keep him seeing her? The townspeople believe that Emily and Homer are having a sexual affair at Homer’s insistence; they never entertain the notion of Emily’s desires.

125:14–15 **even when we believed that she was fallen** no longer virgin, and so lacking an important qualification for an unmarried lady

125:18 **arsenic** an easily obtained and common poison. According to Stewart Harvey, “the symptoms would be made to develop insidiously and to simulate disease; arsenic compounds have little taste and, consequently, could easily be administered in food without detection. . . . Arsenic is still used in certain insecticides and rat poisons” (Goodman 947). A potent capillary poison, arsenic affects the visceral area most dramatically; plasma seeps through the pores, blood volume drops, and, ultimately, “arteriolar damage occurs, and the blood pressure falls to shock levels. The heart muscle also becomes depressed and this may contribute to the circulatory failure” (946). It is a painful way to die.

125:30 **The druggist named several** According to David Fincannon, an expert on pest control and its history, the druggist would use the chemical names of these poisons, which would have included arsenic trioxide, strychnine sulphate, strychnine alkaloid, zinc phosphide, and thallium sulphate (see Truman). Emily seems to seize upon the arsenic, probably because she has heard it mentioned, but perhaps because he named it early in his litany.

125:31 **But what you want is—** Arsenic would indeed kill an elephant. He seems to want to sell her a less-potent poison for her “rat.”

125:33 **Is . . .** He is trying to finish his sentence at 125:31, not listening to Emily.

125:33 **But what you want—** is something less strong

- 126:3-4 **the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for** Fincannon (see 125:50) notes that the druggist might well have had arsenic in stock because, starting in 1910, it was an element in one cure for venereal disease.
- 126:8-9 **the druggist didn't come back** Perhaps embarrassed that he has compromised his professional ethics—and apparently broken the law—by selling her the poison without hearing her say what she will use it for, the druggist will not face her.
- 126:10 **the skull and bones** the symbol for poisonous materials, a skull with two crossed bones underneath
- 126:18 **a marrying man** the kind of man who wants to marry
- 126:23 **it** the unchaperoned buggy rides
- 126:26 **Baptist** denomination of Protestant Christians that believes in baptism only for its believers and practices baptism through total immersion
- 126:26 **Episcopal** members of the Episcopal Church, the Anglican church of the U.S.
- 127:1-2 **So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments** With the proper chaperones in place in Emily's house, the town settles into moral complacency and takes up its customary voyeurism.
- 127:5 **man's toilet set** grooming items, such as a mirror, brush, and comb
- 127:7 **including a nightshirt** They who watch Emily and Homer assume that an unmarried woman would not order sleeping garments for a man.
- 127:0-10 **more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been** more "high and mighty"; see 123:13-14
- 127:13-14 **a public blowing-off** a dramatic, public break-up
- 127:27-28 **Then we knew that this was to be expected too** **this** = the abandonment by Homer Barron
- 128:10-11 **Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted** Emily is giving china-painting lessons in 1894 (119:22), when she is "about forty" (128:4); this would place her birth at around 1854 and her death, at age seventy-four (128:1), in 1928.
- 128:15-16 **pictures cut from the ladies' magazines** patterns for her pupils to copy onto the china

- 128:17–18 **When the town got free postal delivery** According to the United States Postal Service, free city delivery was begun in 1863, and free rural delivery was instituted in 1902. Clearly, it took a while to reach Jefferson.
- 128:26 **she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house** The townspeople must infer this from observing her only in the downstairs windows.
- 129:3–4 **a heavy walnut bed with a curtain** an old-fashioned four-poster bed, curtained for warmth and privacy
- 129:8–9 **He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again** Tobe, the only source of what “Already we knew” at 129:23–25, leaves the house because he knows what the town will find in the upstairs room, as a rejected passage from Faulkner’s early manuscript and typescript drafts makes plain (see Millgate, *Achievement* 263–64; Volpe 103–04). He clearly wants to avoid the uproar, gossip, and possible danger to himself.
- 129:15 **brushed Confederate uniforms** The old war veterans have dressed up for Miss Emily’s funeral and thus claimed her as their own, a remnant of the vanquished South.
- 129:23–25 **Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced** see 129:8–9
- 129:25 **They** presumably the town elders or Board of Aldermen, but obviously including the narrator
- 129:30 **valance curtains** border of drapery around either the bed, the windows, or both
- 129:30–31 **faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights** the only hints in the story of its title
- 130:11–13 **the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him** Death, rather than another man, has taken Emily from Homer—an interesting inversion of what we might expect, since Emily sent death to him in the first place.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

You may use your book to help you answer the questions below.

Holt Literature and Language Arts

pages 645–656

“A Rose for Emily”

A. Write C or I next to each sentence to tell if the underlined word is used correctly or incorrectly.

1. He was a modern guy, updated with archaic information. ____
2. The pauper begged for food on the street. ____
3. We were the only people at the quiet, tranquil beach. ____
4. The sweet chocolate cake had a delicious acid taste to it. ____
5. We sent word that we would arrive that night. ____

B. Write a number on each line to put the following story events in chronological order.

- ____ Homer Barron arrives in town to oversee the paving of the sidewalks.
- ____ Emily Grierson dies and is buried.
- ____ The city authorities go to Emily’s house to collect her taxes.
- ____ The townspeople find the remains of a body hidden in Emily’s house.
- ____ Emily’s father dies.
- ____ Emily buys arsenic at the drugstore.

C. Answer the following questions.

1. Why does Emily Grierson buy arsenic?

2. What do the indentation and the gray hair on the second pillow reveal in the last paragraph of the story?

Additional Vocabulary Practice

You may use your book to help you answer the questions below.

Holt Literature and Language Arts

pages 645–656

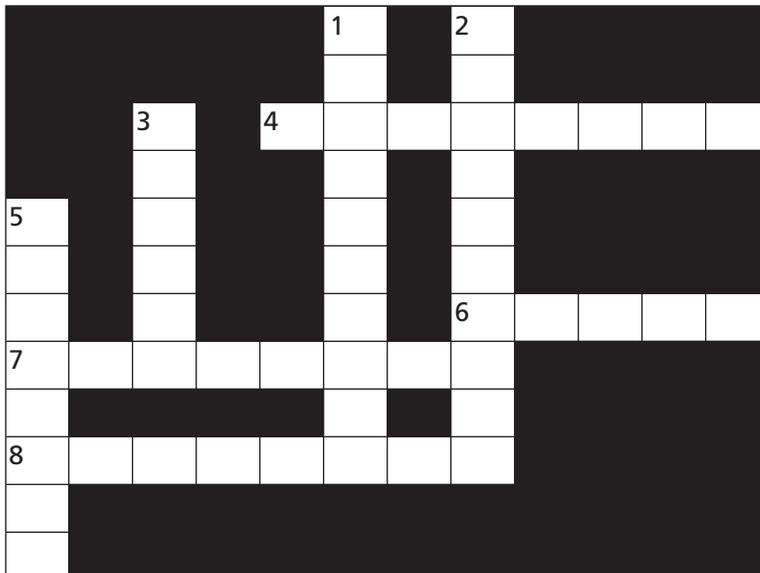
“A Rose for Emily”

A. Use the words from the Word Bank to complete the following sentences.

1. Emily sometimes seemed _____ and nasty towards the townspeople.
2. Emily’s house had an _____ smell inside it.
3. People thought Emily was _____ because she preserved her lover’s corpse.
4. Over many years, Emily became calmer and more _____.
5. Emily did not pay taxes; Colonel Sartoris _____ them.
6. When the townspeople’s suspicions about Emily were confirmed, they were _____.
7. After her father died, Emily was poor and became a _____.
8. The townspeople helped Emily _____ her cousins.

Word Bank	
remitted	circumvent
virulent	acid
vindicated	perverse
tranquil	pauper

B. Complete the crossword puzzle with the words in the Word Bank. Use the clues beside the puzzle to help you.



Across

4. calm
6. bitter
7. full of hate
8. cancelled

Down

1. to avoid
2. proved correct
3. very poor person
5. odd; contrary