Many of James's novels explore the ideals, illusions, and failures of manners and morals which lay behind confident exteriors. His observers are usually slightly detached, and often preoccupied with "the American personality," but also removed from it. Aspects of the pattern of "Daisy Miller" are sometimes repeated--an innocent narrator or character meets Europeans whose slightly sinister sophistication and guile is too much for the American protagonist/observer. The device of using a narrator who is neither entirely American nor entirely European enables James's narrator to criticize several cultures from a seemingly neutral position. Virtue and love are viewed through a veil of innuendo and skepticism. Much of the plot interest turns on the narrator's effort at understanding the puzzle of others’ lives, determining the degree to which the characters understand their own fate, and deciding on the extent to which he (always he) should mete out or withhold judgment on them, and less often, on himself. His characters are cultured, comfortably off, and free to devote their lives to affairs of the emotions or heart, and they often use this leisure for unwise or disappointing ends.

1. What forms of pride might this story have evoked in American readers of James's time? What anxieties about the nature of their own society might it have evoked?
2. To which aspects of the plot and characterization do you think James's British readers might have responded favorably?
3. What are the implications of the story's subtitle, "A Study"? Of the names "Winterbourne" and "Daisy"?
4. To what degree do you think the character of Daisy Miller might have embodied traits of a wealthy American girl of her day? Are there unrealistic or uncharacteristic aspects of her character, and if so, do these matter?
5. Henry James was always interested in children and young adults, and Daisy Miller is one of his most successful creations. She is more vibrant than sophisticated, "a child of nature and of freedom," as James describes her. Some have argued that her plain name (the unpretentious flower, the common profession) symbolizes her simplicity. Do you agree with this? Why does Daisy Miller make a full-blooded protagonist? Is Daisy Miller an innocent, unaffected young woman? Are there hints of her self-awareness? Does she demonstrate a desire to manipulate others?
6. To what extent is this story organized around stereotypes? Are these stereotypes still current? Would they have bothered readers of the time?
7. To what extent is the plot determined by the fact that the title character is a young, attractive woman? Would the attitudes conveyed by Winterbourne have been relatively tolerant, restrictive, or typical for his day?
8. How would you characterize James's style? His descriptions?
9. What do we learn about Daisy, her brother and mother from their first meetings with Winterbourne? What are his first judgements of Daisy? ("in her bright, sweet, superficial little visage there was no mockery, no irony"). What seems unusual to Winterbourne about her manner of greeting him and her reaction to his invitation to the Castle of Chillon?
10. To what degree is Daisy intelligent? Interested in other cultures? Perceptive about other people? What are her social preferences? Does she seem to have friends of her own sex? What are her motivations in Europe? Which aspects of her portrayal seem critical? (e. g., "her light, slightly monotonous smile"). Can you tell when she makes mistakes of language?
11. Henry James is as much an international writer as an American. Shortly before his death he became a British citizen in protest of America's unwillingness to come to the defense of Britain and France in the early years of World War I. He spent much of his adult life abroad, observing Europeans, Americans in Europe, and what he called "Europeanized Americans," those who had lived for so long in Europe that they had taken on many—although not all—European traits and values. Many of Henry James's novels and stories depict these three types of characters in interplay. Can this story be read as a comment on the expectations for wealthy young women of the period? On the lack of formal education or active endeavors for women?
12. Are Daisy and Winterbourne temperamentally well-suited to become friends?
13. How is Mrs. Costello characterized? Mrs. Walker? Whose opinions do they represent? To what extent are their opinions founded on evidence? What does Mrs. Costello mean by saying, "But she is very common."
14. In what sense is Mrs. Costello correct/or incorrect when she warns Winterbourne, "You have lived too long out of the country. You will be sure to make some great mistake. You are too innocent"?
15. How does Daisy react to the news of the varied stages of her social rejection? To what extent does it distress her? ("You needn't be afraid. I'm not afraid!")
16. According to the values of his society, should Winterbourne have accompanied Daisy to Chillon? Is their trip a sign of flirtation? How does Daisy react to the news that he must return to Geneva?
17. What is the reader supposed to think of Giovanelli's character and intentions? ("He had practised the idiom upon a great many American heiresses") Why is Winterbourne annoyed that she is content to accompany both men?
18. What is Daisy's definition of "flirtation"? ("Did you ever hear of a nice girl that was not [a flirt]?") On what grounds does she criticize Winterbourne? Does she seem sincere? What advice does Winterbourne give her? ("When you deal with natives you must go by the custom of the place.")
19. Why do you think she is offended at the mention of a possible love for Giovanelli? What does Winterbourne seem to mean when he says that she seemed a person who would never be jealous? of whom he could never be afraid? What personal lack does he regret in himself ("his want of instinctive certitude")?
20. What is the significance of our final piece of knowledge, that Winterbourne continues to live in Geneva without known occupation as before? What has he learned, if anything, from this encounter? What has the reader learned? Are we expected to judge him, or her, or Europeans and Americans, or all of the above?