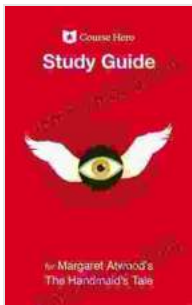


# Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale: A Comprehensive Study Guide

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a powerful dystopian novel that explores themes of gender oppression, religious extremism, and the dangers of totalitarianism. Published in 1985, the novel has become a classic of contemporary literature and has been adapted into a successful television series.



## Study Guide for Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (Course Hero Study Guides) by Course Hero

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 1991 KB

Screen Reader : Supported

Print length : 36 pages

Lending : Enabled



This study guide provides a comprehensive overview of *The Handmaid's Tale*, covering its major characters, themes, symbols, and literary devices. Whether you're a student studying the novel for class or a general reader looking to deepen your understanding, this guide will help you unlock the complexities and appreciate the enduring legacy of this literary masterpiece.

## Character Analysis

### Offred

The protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred is a young woman who has been forced into sexual servitude under the oppressive regime of the Republic of Gilead. Despite the horrors she endures, Offred retains her inner strength and resilience, becoming a symbol of resistance and hope.

### **Serena Joy Waterford**

Offred's Commander's wife, Serena Joy is a devout believer in the Republic of Gilead's patriarchal ideology. However, beneath her pious exterior lies a complex and conflicted character, haunted by her own infertility and longing for connection.

### **Commander Waterford**

Offred's Commander, Waterford is a high-ranking official in the Republic of Gilead. He is a ruthless and manipulative man who exploits Offred for his own selfish desires. Yet, moments of vulnerability reveal a deeper layer to his character, hinting at the toll the regime has taken on him.

### **Nick**

A mysterious and enigmatic character, Nick is an Eye, a member of the Republic of Gilead's secret police. His relationship with Offred is fraught with danger and uncertainty, but it also provides a glimmer of hope in the face of oppression.

## **Themes**

### **Gender Oppression**

*The Handmaid's Tale* is a powerful indictment of gender oppression. The Republic of Gilead reduces women to reproductive vessels, stripping them of their identities and autonomy. Atwood explores the devastating

consequences of this patriarchal system, highlighting the importance of women's rights and empowerment.

## **Religious Extremism**

The Republic of Gilead is a theocratic society that uses religious fundamentalism to justify its oppressive policies. Atwood warns of the dangers of religious extremism, showing how it can be used to manipulate, control, and divide people.

## **Totalitarianism**

The Republic of Gilead is a totalitarian regime that uses fear, surveillance, and propaganda to maintain its power. Atwood exposes the insidious nature of totalitarian governments, showing how they crush individual freedoms and destroy the human spirit.

## **Symbols**

### **The Red Robes**

The Handmaid's distinctive red robes symbolize their enslavement and fertility. The color red evokes both blood and passion, highlighting the dual nature of their existence as both victims and potential revolutionaries.

### **The Wall**

The Wall that surrounds the Republic of Gilead represents both physical and psychological barriers. It isolates the regime from the outside world and creates a sense of claustrophobia and oppression.

### **The Eyes**

The Eyes are the secret police of the Republic of Gilead. They symbolize the constant surveillance and fear that permeate the society, creating a chilling atmosphere of mistrust and paranoia.

## **Literary Devices**

### **Flashback**

Atwood uses flashbacks to reveal Offred's past and the events that led to the rise of the Republic of Gilead. These flashbacks provide context and depth to the characters and help readers understand the complex history of this dystopian society.

### **Metaphor**

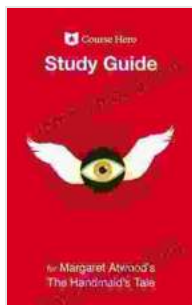
Atwood employs metaphors throughout the novel to create powerful images and convey complex ideas. For example, the Handmaids are often referred to as "two-legged wombs," highlighting their reduced status as reproductive vessels.

### **Allegory**

The Handmaid's Tale can be read as an allegory for various oppressive regimes and ideologies throughout history. Atwood's exploration of gender oppression, religious extremism, and totalitarianism resonates with readers across time and cultures.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that continues to captivate and challenge readers decades after its initial publication. This comprehensive study guide provides a deeper understanding of the novel's characters, themes, symbols, and literary devices, enhancing your appreciation of this dystopian masterpiece.

Whether you're a student or a general reader, this guide will help you unlock the complexities and enduring legacy of The Handmaid's Tale.



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