

# **On Dreams Study Guide**

## **On Dreams by Sigmund Freud**

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## Plot Summary

*On Dreams* is published by Sigmund Freud in 1900, only a year after the longer, all encompassing *Interpretation of Dreams* was published. Freud wishes to give readers a more concise summary of his conclusions regarding dreams. Before Freud's investigations, little is known about dreams. Many do not believe that dreams really mean anything to the dreamer. Freud sets out to prove the opposite.

Unfortunately for us, dreams are not often presented in a clear, straightforward fashion. The dream language or content of the manifest dream is put together by several steps in the dream process or transformation. First, the latent content is condensed so that it is almost hidden in the dream. Secondly, the content has its main emphasis or importance shifted, thereby distorting the dream to the dreamer. Lastly the dream is put through revision so that the material can be organized into a more coherent structure. Freud then points out to the reader that sometimes the wishes in our dreams are further pressed. Our unconsciousness tries to purposefully repress things that we would rather not know about ourselves or let others know. This is similar to some phobias and mental disturbances.

Throughout the book, Freud analyzes a dream he has. He refers to this dream as the specimen dream. In the dream, Freud is with a woman (not his wife) at dinner. The woman tells him he has beautiful eyes and places her hand on his knee. She also tries to feed him spinach. Freud continually references this dream. Through dream work, Freud insists he has found the dream's real meaning. He wishes to attain love for the cost of nothing. Freud comes to this conclusion by writing down all of the manifest content of this dream. He then pulls in experiences from his waking life and draws connections between the occurrences. As the book progresses, Freud uses this mode of dream work to decipher patients' dreams. This is a form of analysis the Freud uses in other patients also.

In this book, Freud briefly discusses dream symbolism. Symbols have long been thought as an accurate way to diagnose dreams. While he agrees that dream symbols can be helpful, they should not be the only way that we interpret dreams. We should also still use dream interpretation because it allows us a unique view into the dreamer's own individual world. While others could argue that free interpretation leaves a lot of guess work up to the doctor or therapist, Freud thinks this is the most useful way to understand the point and purpose of dreams.



# Chapter 1 (pp. 5-7)

## Chapter 1 (pp. 5-7) Summary and Analysis

On Dreams is published by Sigmund Freud in 1900, only a year after the longer, all encompassing Interpretation of Dreams is published. Freud wishes to give readers a more concise summary of his conclusions regarding dreams. Before Freud's investigations, little is known about dreams. Many do not believe that dreams really mean anything to the dreamer. Freud sets out to prove the opposite.

In Chapter 1 Freud explains that from the very beginning of time, people have had dreams. In more prehistoric times, people believed that dreams were associated with a higher power or gods. Dreams were sent down from these deities as a way to communicate with the lesser humans. In Freud's time, almost all people believe that dreams happen in the mind of the dreamer. However, because people have begun rejecting the thought that dreams are signs sent from higher powers, dreams have need of more of an explanation. What is their origin? What is their relation to our everyday life? How much does outside stimuli affect them while they are dreaming? Also, why are dreams so transitory? These are all questions that people always pose with dreams. However, Freud insists that until now, there is no satisfactory solution for the question of dreams.

Freud further asserts that it is important to discover whether or not dreams are even significant to our everyday lives. If dreams are important, then there is a need to interpret them. If there is no significance to our everyday life, what is the point of investigating our dreams? Can dreams actually have a meaning?

In Freud's time, one sect of thinkers decides that dreams are a state of mental activity that elevates a person to a higher state of consciousness. Another group of people insist that dreams are mental impulses that our brain is not allowed to explore during the day. The last camp during Freud's time thinks that dreams are byproducts of the body's organs. Therefore, the dream life has no meaning and it is not made by the brain which is sleeping.

Although there are different camps, there is still curiosity about dreams. Freud promises to delve more in the subject to find an answer for his avid reader.



## Chapter 2 (pp. 8-17)

### Chapter 2 (pp. 8-17) Summary and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 2, Freud reveals that he has learned that the view of dreams that comes nearest to the truth is that of public opinion. In his past practice, Freud used psychoanalysis to cure phobias, obsessions, and delusions. Since this process has worked so well for other issues with the psyche, it will most probably work to help investigate dreams. In his rationalization, Freud thinks that phobias and obsessions are as different from normal consciousness as dreams are from waking consciousness. So, it makes sense to start the investigation with psychotherapy. This might have been different had Freud lived in a different time, but psychoanalysis is all he had to go off of.

Freud confusingly explains the process a therapist uses to perform psychoanalysis on a patient. If a patient has a phobia, first the therapist asks the patient to direct his attention to a phobia and notice what occurs in his mind and report it to the doctor. The doctor must try to get the patient to not judge his thoughts. As soon as the patient judges himself, it will be hard to help him. Freud then insists that this book is not the place to go into detail about the process of psychoanalysis.

Freud decides to use psychoanalysis on himself. Upon waking, he writes down a dream he has. Frau E. L. is sitting beside him. The two are at dinner eating spinach. Frau's hand is on his knee in an intimate way. She tells him that his eyes are beautiful. Then suddenly a drawing of spectacles appears.

The dream shocks Freud because He has never been on friendly terms with Frau E. L. Freud reflects that to understand, he cannot judge the dream. Last night Freud and a friend took a taxi cab home. The taxi had a meter. Freud comments to his friend that he hates these types of taxi's because they always show how much money or debt he has towards someone else. Freud then realizes that, a couple of days ago, he and his wife were out to dinner. His wife continued to talk to people that he did not wish her to. Freud had wanted her full focus during the meal. In his dream Frau E. L. tunes her entire attention to Freud. Freud realizes that the familiar manner in which Frau E. L. touched him is the way his wife passed him a letter under the table as the two lovers were courting one another. Freud asserts that his wife was replaced by Frau E. L. in his dream. Frau E. L. is the daughter of a man to which Freud had once owned money. Freud insists that he has always been in debt to someone and tried to pay his debt at once. The friend, an eye doctor, who Freud takes a cab home with has a habit of putting Freud in his debt. Only recently Freud did not repay his debt. At dinner the previous night, Freud asked his eye doctor friend about a female patient he had sent to him for glasses and thus the meaning of the spectacles are tied into the dream! Lastly, Freud wonders why he was eating spinach in his dream. As it turns out, a week prior, one of his sons (his son with the prettiest eyes) refused to eat spinach at dinner.



Freud points out that the dream itself was unemotional, detached, and unintelligible. The meaning behind the dream however, was rich with logical chains of thought and impulses. Freud says he chose this dream to interpret because it would not reveal so many of his secrets to the public. His unwillingness would therefore not make his interpretation completely truthful. Freud further asserts that it would be difficult to say that dreams have no psychical meaning. Two other things become evident:

- 1) the contents of the dream are much shorter than the meaning behind the dream;
- 2) the instigator of the dream was an unimportant event of the night before.

Freud ends the chapter by saying that he shall call the actual dream (what we remember when we wake) manifest content of a dream. Latent content of a dream is the analysis or hidden meaning of the dream.



## Chapter 3 (pp. 18 - 25)

### Chapter 3 (pp. 18 - 25) Summary and Analysis

Freud opens Chapter 3 by explaining that it is important to discover how latent content is transformed into manifest content of a dream. Dreams can be divided into three categories:

- 1) dreams that make sense but are intelligible;
- 2) dreams that have a clear sense, but have a bewildering affect because they do not make sense in our mental life;
- 3) dreams without sense or intelligibility—these dreams seem confused, disconnected, and meaningless, noting that most dreams seem to have these qualities.

Freud asserts that children's dreams happen to be significant and not puzzling. In studying the dreams of children, he decides that many of children's dreams are concerning wish fulfillment. For example, Freud cites several different dreams. In one instance, a young girl spends the night at her aunt's house and is put to sleep in a very large bed—one that is much too big for her to fit. The girl then dreams that she is sleeping in the same bed, but it is too small for her. She is now too big and cannot fit it. Freud cites that being bigger is a common wish for many children. Many of the children's dreams have a direct relation to what happened the previous day.

Freud further points out that adults have dreams about wish fulfillment, but their dreams seem to be more complicated than that of children. Many times adults may dream about a trip they have yet to take. The dream is a fulfillment of the trip that has yet to happen. While Freud's revelation in this chapter are interesting, they can become confusing to the reader. The translation seems to be lacking and leaves an English reader uncertain of the true meaning of this chapter.



## Chapter 4 (pp. 26-32)

### Chapter 4 (pp. 26-32) Summary and Analysis

Freud opens Chapter 4 by insisting that even in confused dreams, some sort of transformation has occurred in order to fulfill some kind of wish. The occurrences from Freud's specimen dream can again be analyzed. Freud wished his wife would turn her attention to him at dinner. In his dream, the opposite happened and a woman he cares nothing for turns her attention to him. The dream is fulfilled because a disagreeable situation gives rise to an unsuitable wish fulfillment. Freud further presses on to assert that dream work involves compression and condensation on a large scale. The deeper Freud delves into his dream work, the more impressive dream analysis becomes. Furthermore, dreams seem to be composed of more than one experience or impression.

Freud reveals that he once had a dream of being at a swimming pool. At the pool, swimmers were scattered in all directions. On one side of the pool, someone was helping another person out of the pool. This dream reminds Freud of an experience he had in puberty of seeing two paintings. Freud had seen a Schwind's paintings of water nymphs. The other painting was by an Italian Master. It was of the Deluge. Lastly, Freud had a memory of seeing a swim instructor help a woman out of the pool when it was time for the men to swim. Interestingly, this dream is different than the specimen dream. This most recent dream Freud describes is actually very close to the experience he had in real life. In his specimen dream, however, elements in the dream were sourced in two different memories.

Freud continues in his analysis by creating a rule for dream analysis. If an uncertainty in a dream can be resolved with an "either" or an "or" we must consider both alternatives and consider them new starting points for interpretation. He further asserts that the easiest way to bring together two dream thoughts that have nothing to do with each other is to figure out their verbal meaning and then bring the two ideas together. Freud calls this "meeting half way." While Freud admits that this may seem farfetched, he thinks it is the only way to form a link between the two different dream thoughts. This process of condensation also happens with images. For example, two different forms or features can make up one person in a dream. The combined meaning of each person can only be discovered through dream work.

From this section, we learn that condensation is the result of non-related, representative elements coming together. Each element of a dream can be related to each dream thought.





## Chapter 5 (pp. 33-38)

### Chapter 5 (pp. 33-38) Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5, Freud insists that another factor is present in dream work. As we already know the manifest content of the dream deals with different material than the latent content of dreams. Freud introduces a new idea called dream displacement. This process aides in concealing the true meaning of the dream. Sometimes, the physical intensity associated with the dream is transformed into sensory vividness. Often we assume that the most important part of a dream is the most distinct element. However, it is often the most indistinct part of the dream that turns out to be the most revealing part of the dream.

Freud points out that there are dreams that come about that have no displacement. These are undisguised wishful dreams. On the other hand, there are dreams that make absolutely no sense. There are also dreams that exist across the spectrum. The specimen dream does have examples of displacement. The content of the dream seems to have a different center than the dream thoughts. Almost every dream is related back to an impression that occurred a couple of days before the dream. The impression may be very important, so we see it in our dream. Sometimes the impressions are insignificant events—so small they are hard to recall. So even if the dream is intelligible or nonsensical, the dream might seem very insignificant and we would not be interested in our waking lives.

However, analysis can help to make the reader understand why the event is important. Analysis can show that the trivialities are connected with important physical memories and feelings. So, displacement is the process by which important material is replaced by trivial material. Freud concludes that trivialities that do not affect us will not show up in our dreams. So while we think something may have no affect on us, it might!

Freud then asks what the instigator of his specimen dream was. He insists that it was the cab ride home he took the night before his dream. In the cab, Freud commented to his friend that cabs remind him of paying and debts. This trivial statement relates to another experience. A couple of days earlier Freud lent money to a family member he adores. If his relative were to feel grateful to him, it would be as though he was paying for their love. So an indifferent impression was a dream instigator!

Freud further asserts that condensation and displacement can work together to produce a result in dreams. However, Freud thinks that displacement is more important and earnest than condensation in dream work.



## Chapter 6 (pp. 39-47)

### Chapter 6 (pp. 39-47) Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Six, Freud insists that displacement is the culprit that keeps people from being able to recognize the dream thoughts in the dream content. Dream thoughts often strike us because they are presented in an unusual ways. They are represented by similes and metaphors instead of clear language. As stated before, the psychological material of dreams includes impressions that happen in our everyday lives. So, often there are reproductions of everyday life in the dream. The reproductions, however, are not always that straight forward.

Dream thoughts remain extremely complex in structure. Each train of thought has a counterpart. The material is submitted to condensation, internal fragmentation, and displacement which creates new constructions of the dream material. So, it seems as though a regression of sorts has occurred. During transformation we have lost the clearest, easiest way to understand the dream. Analysis is the restoration of connections in the dream meaning.

One type of reproduction is by logical connection and combines the whole material into a single situation. A casual relation is a type of reproduction in which two dream thoughts are left unrepresented. The either or is not represented, instead, both ideas are presented as one sequence.

Dream formations call on similarity, consonance, and the possession of common attributes. Dream work makes use of this by bringing together everything into a new unity. Freud asserts that if a dream is unreasonably absurd it is intentionally made so by dream formation. Absurdity of the dream signifies the presence of contradiction, ridicule, and derision in the dream.



## Chapter 7 (pp. 48-54)

### Chapter 7 (pp. 48-54) Summary and Analysis

Freud opens Chapter 7 by discussing considerations of intelligibility. For some reason, Freud does not want to spend an overwhelming amount of time on this part of dream work. This is the final step of the dream. This is where an actual dream composition occurs. This process arranges it as it perceives the dream content. Consideration of intelligibility can cause a beautifully crafted dream to be made or a heap of nonsense.

Freud lays out that dream work consists of condensation, displacement, reproduction and revision (considerations of intelligibility). Dream work is the the process of transforming the dream thoughts into dream content. It does not judge or make any conclusions. A conclusion drawn in dreams is no different that the conclusion made in the dream thoughts. Dream calculations may produce many different results. The example of this is when there is a speech in a dream. It is not one coherent speech but a compilation of many different speeches.



## Chapter 8 (pp. 55-58)

### Chapter 8 (pp. 55-58) Summary and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter Eight, Freud asserts that dream work is a very peculiar process. It gives insight to other phobias, obsessions, and delusions. To him, condensation and displacement are processes of these other psychological disorders. Modification of the pictorial form is specialized to dream work. The heart of the problem with dreams is the process of displacement. With the specimen dream, Freud confesses that it may be hard to describe other dreams because they would alarm other people and embarrass him in front of his friends, family, and colleagues. However, if Freud publishes and analyzes his dreams without a thought to how it might affect others, he will discover new parts about dreams that he would want to refute and disagree with. Freud will wish to repress those parts of the dream. Thus, we begin the process of dream distortion.

Freud again refers back to his specimen dream. Through dream analysis he learns that one day he would like to experience love that costs him nothing. Freud slowly realizes that he wishes he would not have made the expenditure. At the time Freud lent his family member the money, he never had a second thought about giving his loved one the money. It is not until the dream interpretation that the regret becomes conscious to him.

Freud further asserts that if he is dealing with a healthy person, he can help them discover what the repressed thought of the dream is but he cannot help them accept the repressed thought. If Freud is dealing with an unhealthy patient, he takes more extreme matters by forcing the patient to recognize and accept the repressed thoughts. Once a patient accepts, it can help to relieve emotional and physical symptoms of the phobia or hysteria.



## Chapter 9 (pp. 59-61)

### Chapter 9 (pp. 59-61) Summary and Analysis

Freud feels that once he has connected the concepts of repression and dream distortion, he can now in more general terms, express the principal findings of dream analysis. Intelligible dreams with meaning are undistinguished wish fulfillments. In this case the wish is consciously known by the dreamer and of interest to them. Thankfully, Freud says that analysis allows us to understand confused dreams. The dream represents a wish fulfilled, but the wish is hidden from consciousness.

Dreams are often thought to tell the future. This is because a dream is what the dreamer would like to occur. There are three types of wish fulfillment:

1. Unrepressed wish is undisguised. These are extremely rare for adults.
2. Repressed wish is disguised. The majority of all dreams that adults have.
3. Repressed wish with no disguise. These dreams are accompanied by anxiety. In these dreams, anxiety takes the place of dream distortion.

While there are dreams with distressing content they are instead well disguised fulfillments of repressed wishes. For example, Freud explains he had a patient who dreamed that her sister's second child died. The patient was not secretly wishing that her sister's child to die, but a couple years ago, her sister's first child died. At the funeral, the patient met an attractive man. The patient longed for such a meeting, not for the death of her sister's baby. However, in order to disguise the situation, the situation was displaced in the client's dream.



## Chapter 10 (pp. 62-64)

### Chapter 10 (pp. 62-64) Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 10, Freud asserts that there are two processes that go on during dreams. The first is unconscious and can only be reached through the second agency. When the first passes over the the second, censorship occurs. This allows only what is agreeable to the dreamer to pass through while other things are withheld. Censorship is never really eliminated, only reduced. Therefore repression becomes the relaxation of the censorship and the formation of a compromise in dreams.

When sleep has finished, censorship becomes much stronger. Freud insists that this must be a reason we forget dreams after we wake up. This observation has been confirmed on many occasions. During analysis, forgotten pieces of dreams can be remembered. Parts of the dream are probably forgotten because they are further suppressed.



## Chapter 11 (pp. 65-69)

### Chapter 11 (pp. 65-69) Summary and Analysis

Dreams must be the guardians of sleep. Especially in the case of children's dreams, it must not be difficult to understand this idea. Children sleep through the night because they are forced by parents or fatigue to do so. When a child is put to bed, his mother will kiss him and read to him. However, eventually the child is promised that the kisses and other attention will continue tomorrow. The wish fulfillment is contingent on sleep. Children cannot yet distinguish between reality, hallucinations, and dreams. Adults have learned to make the distinction. On the other hand, adults postpone wishes and desires all the time.

While adults know how to suppress different thoughts, the consciousness holds down repressed thoughts during the day. Even during sleep, there is some stimuli that influences our dreams. This is why we can be woken up by many stimuli while in a slumber. The person's attention is diverted, but it is now that diverted attention that is directed towards wishful stimuli. Sleep is allowed to continue thanks to the practice we get as children. As external stimuli start to intrude on our dreams, they are interpreted into your dreams in different ways. There are several ways in which a dreamer might react to different stimuli. He or she may wake up or incorporate the items from their sleeping disruptions into their dreams.

## Chapter 12 (pp. 70-74)

### Chapter 12 (pp. 70-74) Summary and Analysis

In the beginning of Chapter 12, Freud asserts that many dreams of adults must actually be erotic wishes. Sometimes the dreams may seem to be perversions. Other dreams where the dream content is in no way erotic, can be revealed to be erotic dreams through dream interpretation. He further thinks that it is often sexual desires that our brains make allowances for. Often infantile sexual wishes are overlooked and not understood. Furthermore, infantile sexual wishes can provide the strongest forces in creation of dreams.

The only way that a sexual dream can be seen as non sexual is for the content of the dream to be replaced by symbols. Symbols are interesting because people who speak the same language often use the same symbols for dreams. If Freud can codify symbols in dreams, then we can interpret dreams without having the dreamer free associate about every part of the dream content. Using symbols is how the ancients once decided the meaning of a dream.

Many symbols appear in dreams that stand for male and female genitals and intercourse. Freud insists that stiff objects, weapons, tree trunks, and branches can stand for male genitalia while boxes and ovens can symbolize a uterus. Going up or down stairs is often in reference to intercourse. Some symbols can be universally accepted while others only apply in the scheme of one's culture. Freud further asserts that we cannot only use dream symbolism to tell us everything about the dream. Free association is still important in helping us understand what dreams "mean."





## Chapter 13 (pg 75-76)

### Chapter 13 (pg 75-76) Summary and Analysis

Freud insists that he does not address all the problems of dreams. If anyone wants to know the entire truth of dreams, he says they should read his entire book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In researching and studying dreams, Freud thinks that he has opened the world of dreams onto more problems. He has asserted that in dreams, dream thoughts exist. Freud cannot help but think that dream thoughts are inherent to everyone.



# Characters

## Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud was born in what is now the Czech Republic. He attended the University of Vienna where he decided to go into psychology and neurology. Freud began studying different scientific methods as well as creating his own method of researching, analyzing and understanding psychological brain disorders. As his life progressed, Freud dove even further into psychoanalysis. This led him to further question the point or meanings of dreams. Freud released his book the Interpretation of Dreams in 1899. Freud decided to release this companion book as a more concise version of his masterpiece.

While Freud spends much of the book describing what dreams are and how to analyze them, the reader also gains insight to his character because he describes his specimen dream. As Freud peels back the layers of the dream, he reveals to the reader his softer side. At first he thinks he is simply having a dream about a woman he has never liked. She is paying him so much attention. Freud quickly realizes that the true meaning of the dream is that he wishes he could get love for no cost. So often in his life, Freud is in debt to others. When he is finally more successful, he offers to help family members he dearly loves. Although he never once hesitates at the idea of giving money to relatives he cares for, his unconsciousness wishes to get some true love from a family member without giving anything but love in return.

## Frau E L

This is the woman who is present in Freud's specimen dream. In the dream she acts in an intimate manner with Freud by touching his leg and whispering in his ear. She says that she loves the way his beautiful eyes look. In real life, they know each other and Freud does not think kindly of this woman. At one point, her father gives Freud a large sum of money. He is in debt to Frau L's father for a very long time. Freud never exactly says what he owes Frau E L's father or why they dislike each other so much. He probably keeps it a secret because he does not wish to reveal who Frau E L and her father are.

Freud often mentions how weird the dream content seems to be in this particular dream. For instance, he hates Frau E L. However, as Freud develops the dream process, he begins to understand that he does not desire for Frau E L to be attracted to him. Frau E L represents the attentions he wants from his wife. When they are out to dinner one night, his wife fails to give all of her attention to him, Freud wants nothing more than to spend the night with only his wife and not have other people bother them. As the dream continues to uncoil, Frau E L is shown to represent the feeling of unease that Freud feels when he owes other people money. This is not only seen through the character of



Frau E L, but also in the fact that it is revealed that Freud is owed money by a relative. He feels he must pay to get love or anything in return.

## **Frau Freud**

In the book, Freud describes a situation in which he and his wife attend a dinner. At the dinner, his wife is giving her attention to people Freud does not like. While the two are at dinner, he wishes that he could have all of his wife's attention.

## **Little girl who wishes to be older**

Freud recounts a dream of one of his child patients. The little girl wishes to be taller (bigger). As a result, she has a dream that she grows so large that she cannot fit in her bed.

## **Woman at funeral**

Another patient of Freud's. This woman has a dream that her sister's second child dies. While she does not really wish for the death of the second child, it is the situation of the funeral that enables her to meet a man she really likes. She wishes to again be in the situation where she can again see the man.

## **Herr M.**

Herr M is one of Freud's friends that becomes present in a dream. Herr M is presented in the manifest content of the dream because Freud had just read an article in which his friend's ideas were rejected.

## **Freud's friend who rides home with him in a cab**

Previous to the night of his specimen dream, Freud goes out with one of his friends. Freud owes some money to this friend. He and the friend also discuss how much they hate taking cabs because the meter shows time ticking down and how much you are in debt to someone.

## **Freud's Beloved Relative**

Freud's specimen dream reveals that he wishes he could get some love for the cost of nothing. This is because he gives money to a relative he loves very much. Freud never names the relative, but they must mean a lot to him because he has loaned them such a large amount of money.



## **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

Goethe is a German writer who makes an appearance in a friend's dream. In Freud's friend's dream, Goethe's essay on nature contains a negative review of his new research.

## **Woman patient who wishes for a divorce**

Another one of Freud's patients. Her dreams reveal to her that she wishes she would not have gotten married so early. She thinks that if she would have waited until later to marry, she would have found a better husband.



# Objects/Places

## Condensation

Condensation is the act of parring down one, two, three or more experiences or happenings into one idea or situation.

## Displacement

Displacement is the act of shifting the emphasis of the dream away from the main subject.

## Secondary Revision

All dreams undergo some form of revision. The dream is put in some type of chronological order or situation in the manifest dream.

## Repression

Sometimes, the dreamer will repress their true wishes within their dreams. They do not wish to know the truth of their feelings.

## Wish Fulfillment

Freud feels that all dreams are based in wish fulfillment. The dreamer takes events and stimuli from waking life and has their deepest desires fulfilled in the dream world.

## Dream Work

This is the process of analyzing dreams.

## Latent Dream

The latent dream is the deeper, more disguised meaning of the dream.

## Manifest Dream

This is the actual dream the sleeper experiences. The Latent material has been transformed into the manifest dream.



## **Transformation**

The process by which outside stimuli are made into dreams.

## **Anxiety dreams**

A subdivision of dreams. These types of dreams are akin to nightmares.



# Themes

## Wish Fulfillments

A large portion of Freud's explanations of Dreams have to do with wish fulfillment. As human beings, much of our personality, conscience, and unconsciousness are built around the desires to have a wish come true. As with many things, the wishes of children and adults are very different.

When children dream, their dreams are a lot more straightforward. Their wishes and desires are clearer and more easily fulfilled. For instance, in the young female patient who wished that she was tall enough to fill her aunt's bed, she had a dream in which she is too large for the bed. The dream fulfilled her wish. As children, we do not know how to distinguish between reality, hallucinations, and dreams. Thus, when a child desires something such as more time with a parent at bedtime, they only understand that by going to sleep their wish will be fulfilled.

Adults, on the other hand, have much more of the dream process and outside stimuli interrupt their dreams and influence their wishes and desires. Adults' wish fulfillments are also a lot more complicated. In the case of Freud's specimen dream, he discusses how through analysis he discovers that his wish is to have love with no cost. Through much weird, circumstantial, and situational dream content, Freud arrives at his true wish and desire.

## Manifest vs Latent Content

Freud spends much of the book explaining the difference between these two types of dream content. The manifest content of the dream is what we actually dream. So in Freud's specimen dream, it is exactly how he recalls the dream to us. Latent content of a dream is the hidden wish that is unfulfilled. In the book, Freud struggles to explain exactly how the latent dream has been transformed into the manifest dream. It is through dream work that he can analyze the dreams of himself and his patients.

Unfortunately for us, dreams are not often presented in a clear, straightforward fashion. The dream language or content of the manifest dream is put together by several steps in the dream process or transformation. First, the latent content is condensed so that it is almost hidden in the dream. Secondly, the content has its main emphasis or importance shifted, thereby distorting the dream to the dreamer. Lastly the dream is put through revision so that the material can be organized into a more coherent structure. Freud then points out to the reader that sometimes the wishes in our dreams are further repressed. Our unconsciousness tries to purposefully repress things that we would rather not know about ourselves or let others know. This is similar to some phobias and mental disturbances.

## Dream Analysis

Freud makes it clear from the beginning of his book that he wants to know the purpose of dreams. The only way to discover what dreams are and why they happen is to see if they mean anything. This is why dream analysis becomes so important. Freud first starts his analysis by discovering exactly how dream content is made. He discovers that there is latent content and manifest content. Freud then gathers that a transformational process occurs between the two forms of content to create a dream.

Freud does all this by asking patients to recall dreams. Freud even does this with his own specimen dream. After a dream has been notated, Freud picks apart the dream, discovering different elements that do not seem to go together and breaking them apart so that he may better understand what each individual dream element represents. He finds that often, dreams are made up of many stimuli from either right before we go to sleep or lingering outside stimuli that bother us. By taking each one of the elements and figuring out the connections, Freud pieces together what a dream means.





# Style

## Perspective

It is interesting that the book is told from Freud's first person perspective. As he is trying to establish the importance of dreams and dream work, the most scientific presentation of the material would be to use a third person perspective. Normally in scientific books and journals, writers try to take an unbiased stance. Sometimes, however, even the best textbook writers blur the lines of objectivity and truth.

Freud must have used first person because he needed to describe his own dreams. During these explanations Freud is very open about his feelings to his readers. He openly admits that he should not like to tell the reader all of his dreams because it might cause harm to himself or other people he knows. Throughout the book he speaks about his specimen dream and inserts his feelings and experiences into the book. Freud is not shy about sharing his experiences or his opinions. He writes down exactly what happens in his patients' dreams, but then takes their events and creates what he thinks their dream means. While Freud insists it is done through dream work, these are methods that he has developed himself. He does not yet know if they are truly legitimate, but must be confident in his findings and assumptions.

## Tone

The tone throughout the book is informational. Freud wishes to present his findings in the most scientific way possible. He wants his discussion of dreams to be taken seriously by the reader. Just as behavioral disorders and psychological abnormalities are taken more seriously by the scientific community after many years of investigation and proof that they exist, dreams and dream work must go under the same scrutiny. Luckily for Freud, he develops a way to analyze dreams. The dream work allows him the ability to establish a way to, in his eyes, legitimately examine dreams.

Freud also attempts to bring in a sense of fragility into the descriptions of the specimen dream. His descriptions of his own dreams are written with a sense of tenderness and awareness that he is not able to give to other dreams. As he describes his longing to be loved without cost, the reader can sense that he feels nervous about sharing his thoughts with millions of strangers. While Freud explains other people's dreams, his tone takes on a much more objective view. Yes, he does draw his own connections and assumptions about what he had recorded, but his tone is very calm and unemotional.

## Structure

This short book is divided into thirteen short chapters. Freud wastes no time in describing his intention for the dreams. Freud breaks up the book by first explaining his desire to discover what dream are about. He then begins to describe his specimen



dream and what latent and manifest content of dreams are. As the book progresses, he begins to explain that first dreams go through condensation (the breaking down of events), then the emphasis is shifted through displacement, the dream is then revised and put into some sort of chronological order. Finally the dream can be repressed because of outstanding psychological problems with the dreamer. Freud takes quite a bit of time to describe these elements of dreams. When he has completed his explanation, he makes his conclusions for the book. This is most probably because *On Dreams* is a shorter summary of Freud's larger book. He states that if someone really wants his full commentary and conclusions, they will read the entire book, *Interpretation of Dreams*.



## Quotes

"During the epoch which may be described as prescientific, men had no difficulty in finding an explanation of dreams. When they remembered a dream after waking up, they regarded it as either a favorable or hostile manifestation by higher powers, demonic and divine. When modes of thought belonging to natural science began to flourish, all this ingenious mythology was transformed into psychology, and today only a small minority of educated people doubt that dreams are a product of the dreamer's own mind." (Chapter 1, p. 5)

"There seemed, therefore, good grounds for hoping that a method of investigation which had given satisfactory results in the case of psychopathic structures would also be of use in throwing light upon dreams. Phobias and obsessions are as alien to normal consciousness as dreams are to waking consciousness." (Chapter 2, p. 8)

"Moreover, an examination of these dreams offers advantages from another standpoint. For children's dreams are of that kind—significant and not puzzling. Here, incidentally, we have further argument against tracing the origin of dreams to dissociated cerebral activity during sleep." (Chapter 3, p. 20)

"A good proportion of what we have learned about condensation in dreams may be summarized in this formula: each element in the content of a dream is overdetermined by material in the dream thoughts, it is not derived from a single element in the dream thoughts, but may be traced back to whole number." (Chapter 4, p. 32)

"First and foremost, when by means of analysis, we have arrived at a knowledge of the dream thoughts, we observe that the manifest dream content deals with quite different material from the latent thoughts." (Chapter 5, p. 33)

"If we pursue dream thoughts further, we shall keep on finding ridicule and derision as correlates of the absurdities of the manifest dream."  
(Chapter 6, p. 46)

"Analysis has taught us something entirely analogous in the case of obscure and confused dreams: once again the dream situation represents a wish as fulfilled—a wish which invariably arises from the dream thoughts, but one which is represented in an unrecognizable form and can only be explained when it has been traced back in analysis. (Chapter 9, p. 57)

"Now while this agency, in which we recognize our normal ego, is concentrated on the wish to sleep, it appears to be compelled by the psycho-physiological conditions of sleep to relax the energy with which it is accustomed to hold down the pressed material during the day." (Chapter 11, p. 65)

"The danger of sleep being disturbed by them must however, be guarded against. We must in any case suppose that even during sleep a certain amount of free attention is



on duty as a guard against sensory stimuli, and that this guard may sometimes consider waking more advisable than a continuation of sleep." (Chapter 11, p. 67)

"Adults have learned to make this distinction, they have also grasped the uselessness of wishing and after long practice know how to postpone their desires until they can find satisfaction by the long and roundabout path of altering the external worlds." (Chapter 11 p. 66)

"In the case of the complicated and confused dreams with which we are now concerned, condensation and dramatization alone are not enough to account for the whole of the impression that we gain of a dissimilarity between the content of the dream and the dream thoughts. We have evidence of the operation of a third factor, and this evidence deserves careful sifting." (Chapter 5, p. 33)

"Hitherto philosophers have had no occasion to concern themselves with a psychology of repression. We may therefore be permitted to make a first approach to this hitherto unknown topic by constructing a pictorial image of the course of events in dream formation." (Chapter 10, p. 62)



# Topics for Discussion

1. What is the difference between a latent and manifest dream?
2. How does Freud describe the two types of dreams?
3. Where does Freud get the idea of a specimen dream from? Why does he decide to focus on this dream as opposed to others?

How does the reader become more connected to Freud through the analysis of the specimen dream? Do you think this gives you more insight into the man? Why or why not? How could Freud have written the book to have readers better understand him?

Of all the patient dreams that Freud describes, which one is the most interesting to you? Describe the dream and the transformation from latent material to manifest material. Compare this dream to a dream you recently had. Was your dream about wish fulfillment? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Freud's thoughts on dreams to more recent scientific research. Does present day research show that Freud's theories were correct? Name some of the new methods that are present for dream analysis.

Discuss the theme of Dream Work/Dream Analysis. What is involved in the process of dream work? Why did Freud decide this was the best method in which to analyze dreams?

1. What are some of your own wish fulfillments?
  2. Can you recognize your own secret desires?
  3. What were Freud's wish fulfillments in his own specimen dream?
  4. Explain your wish fulfillments in terms of the theme from the book.
1. Describe the dream you had last night.
  2. Use dream work to analyze your dream.
  3. Describe how you think the transformation of your dream occurred.