# Girl With a Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier

## Synopsis

The novel centers on Griet, the Protestant daughter of a Delft tile painter who lost his sight in a kiln accident. In order to bring income to her struggling family, Griet must work as a maid for a more financially sound family. When Jan Vermeer and his wife approve of Griet as a maid for their growing Catholic household, she leaves home and quickly enters adult life. The Vermeer household, with its five children, grandmother and long-time servant, is ready to make Griet's working life difficult. Vermeer's wife Catharina, long banished from her husband's studio for her clumsiness and lack of genuine interest in art, is immediately wary of Griet, a visually talented girl who exhibits signs of artistic promise. Taneke, the faithful servant to the grandmother, proves her protective loyalty by keeping a close eye on Griet's every move.

The artist himself, however, holds another view entirely of the young maid. Recognizing Griet's talents, Vermeer takes her on as his studio assistant and surreptitiously teaches her to grind paints and develop color palettes in the remote attic. Though reluctant to overstep her boundaries in the cagey Vermeer household, Griet is overjoyed both to work with her intriguing master and to lend some breath to her natural inclinations—colors and composition—neither of which she had ever been able to develop. Together, Vermeer and Griet conceal the apprenticeship from the family until Vermeer's most prominent patron demands that the lovely maid be the subject of his next commissioned work. Vermeer must paint Griet—an awkward, charged situation for them both.

## Discussion questions

1. Do you think Griet was typical of other girls her age? In what ways? How did she differ? Did you find her compassionate or selfish? Giving or judgmental?
2. In many ways, the primary relationship in this novel appears to be between Griet and Vermeer. Do you think this is true? How do you feel about Vermeer's relationship with his wife? How does that come into play?
3. Peering into 17th century Delft shows a small, self-sufficient city. Where do you think the many-pointed star at the city's center pointed toward? What was happening elsewhere at that time?
4. Discuss the ways religion affected Griet's relationship with Vermeer. His wife? Maria Thins?
5. Maria Thins obviously understood Vermeer's art more than his wife did. Why do you think this was the case? Do you think she shared Griet's talents?
6. Do you think Griet made the right choice when she married the butcher's son? Did she have other options?
7. How is Delft different to or similar to your town or city? Are the social structures comparable?
8. Though *Girl with a Pearl Earring* appears to be about one man and woman, there are several relationships at work. Which is the most difficult relationship? Which is the most promising?

*Discussion questions from https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-reading-guides/fiction/374-girl-with-a-pearl-earring-chevalier?showall=1*