



my homeschool

Year Ten

Novel Study Guide:

The Guernsey

Literary and Potato

Peel Pie Society

By Jo Lloyd

My Homeschool – Year 10A – Novel Study Guide: The Guernsey Literary and  
Potato Peel Pie Society

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All enquiries to My Homeschool Pty Ltd.

## Table of Contents

Introduction to Parents .....	4
Welcome to Students.....	5
Lesson 1: An Island Introduction.....	6
Lesson 2: The Society Forms .....	10
Lesson 3: Facing German Occupation .....	14
Lesson 4: A Trip to Guernsey .....	18
Lesson 5: Island Life .....	21
Lesson 6: Tension Rising.....	25
Lesson 7: Carpe diem.....	28
Lesson 8: The Movie Adaptation .....	31

## Introduction to Parents

In the English Channel, not far off the coast of France are the Channel Islands. This group of islands are a part of Britain and include the islands of Jersey, Alderney, Sark, Herm and Guernsey. It is on the island of Guernsey that the novel your teenager will study during Term 1 of Semester One in their Year Ten course is set, back in 1946, after the end of World War II.

The book itself was written by a 70 year old librarian, Mary Ann Shaffer, though the review and editing was undertaken by her niece, Annie Barrows, due to Shaffer passing away after her manuscript was accepted. It is presented in a series of letters between an author, her friend, and islanders who would become her friends and family. It is likely to be the first epistolary novel that your teenager has studied and this style presents a new format for them to enjoy and analyse.

Given its epistolary style, it isn't divided into chapters, so chapters cannot be allocated. Instead, your teenager can check the page allocations that they need to read each day in the Weekly Planner. Do ensure that they are keeping in line with these: if they read too far ahead the lessons included in this Novel Study Guide may prove difficult to appreciate, but likewise, if they are too far behind in their reading it will also be a challenge. While this Novel Study Guide will guide them to understand and examine the book, if you wish to read alongside them, please do so and enjoy! You can have your own little literary society as you read together.

An optional Lesson 8 is provided for those families interested in watching the film adaptation of the book. This isn't designed to be onerous or difficult, but some guiding questions, film reviews, and points to consider are included for those families who wish to enjoy a movie too.

*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* is not only a great choice for English but will also complement the work being progressed by your teenager in ***A Window into World War II***. One of the beautiful aspects of home education is how you can examine aspects of one subject in another, offering an integrated approach to learning and My Homeschool courses are founded on Living Books, allowing your family to gain wisdom, new perspectives and insights while enjoying a great book.

## Welcome to Students

In 1912 author Jean Webster published a novel titled *Daddy-Long-Legs*. In the novel orphan girl Jerusha Abbott (“Judy”) writes a letter to a mysterious benefactor (“Daddy-Long-Legs”) while she attends college. The letters she writes are funny and heartfelt, offering her honest perspective and opinions on a range of goings-on. It was warmly received at the time of publication and continues to be a popular book as readers like to read these private letters to enjoy the story.

*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows is, like *Daddy-Long-Legs*, told through a series of letters. It is likely to be a different format of a novel than you are used to, but, like Webster’s novel, you will enjoy learning about the characters and the stories they share through their letters.

Some books you warm to immediately, while others can take a little while to hook you in, being tempted to put it down too soon. Don’t be tempted to put this one down too quickly if you take a little while to “get into it”. Some readers have commented that it took them a little while to warm to *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* which is why you will see in the Weekly Planner that, in the first couple of weeks, the daily readings aren’t that long. You will also notice that page numbers are given in the reading allocations. The intention is that you finish reading the letter on that page, so keep that in mind. You may also find that as you start you may want to jot down the list of correspondents as you begin to read their letters. While information on the characters is included in this Novel Study Guide, this may help too.

So, grab a cup of tea (or coffee) and find a quiet place to crack open this book. Take a trip back to 1946 and to the island of Guernsey through the beauty of this book.

## Lesson 1: An Island Introduction

### The Story

By this point in your reading, you have been introduced to the author Juliet Ashton, her publisher Sidney Stark, friend Sophie Strachan, and a couple of residents from the island of Guernsey. You are also aware that the novel is set between Guernsey and London and occurs in post-war times.

### A Post-War Setting

Readers learn that Juliet's flat in Oakley Street was bombed, and that she appreciates travelling at night again now that the black-out curtains are no longer required, the war being over. Juliet's need for a haircut, make-up, new clothes and shoes are also included, down to the feature of her buying *a jar of face cream, a lovely scented hand lotion, a new lipstick and an eyelash curler* (which makes her cross when she uses it) are also shared, but also the detail of stringent rationing even once the war has ended given the need to clothe, feed and house hundreds of thousands of people.

Dawsey shares that in Guernsey ships are arriving to bring *food, clothes, seeds, ploughs, animal feed, tools, medicine – and most important, now that we have food to eat, shoes*. Some items are wrapped in newspaper allowing the islanders to read news, obituaries, recipes and more, not having had news from outside the island for the last few years, and readers learn that islanders didn't receive any letters or papers from England.

### An Incident with a Teapot

By page 17 readers also learn that Juliet was nearly a war widow herself as journalist Gilly Gilbert has investigated issues of her past, presumably in an attempt to discredit her pseudonym, Izzy Bickerstaff, yet Juliet gets hot-tempered and throws a teapot at him in response.

The information of the incident is shared with Sidney by Susan Scott, whom readers learn is a part of the publishing company, Stephens & Stark, because she takes responsibility for the incident on a part of her being the one who granted Gilbert the interview with Juliet. However, the support from Stephens & Stark to Juliet is clear in a subsequent letter and many readers will presume the nature of the relationship between Juliet and Sidney from the way they sign off their letters. The story behind Juliet not marrying is revealed, along with her love for literature and readers are starting to get a fuller picture of this author.

## Charles Lamb

When Dawsey Adams and Juliet Ashton are connected through a letter it is the author Charles Lamb that brings them together, specifically his *The Selected Essays of Elia*. From the very beginning Dawsey is open about his love for this author and how his words made him laugh in the harshness of German Occupation during World War II. A book that once belonged to Juliet now belongs to Dawsey, and, given her name and address written in the front of the book provides him with her contact details, he is seeking more titles by Lamb.

You are likely to know of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* which Charles co-authored with his sister Mary early in the nineteenth century. While Mary re-told the comedies into language more easily understood by young people, Charles re-told the tragedies and they both tried to retain some of Shakespeare's original wording while making it easier for children to understand and enjoy. While they don't feature all of Shakespeare's plays, they do include twenty of them and it is possible that you have read their *Tales* to better understand the plot of a Shakespeare play before reading and studying the play in its entirety. The book was first published in 1807 and has never been out of print since given its popularity.

In 1820 *Essays of Elia* began to be published in *The London Magazine* and proved to be very popular due to Lamb's conversational tone. The name "Elia" was actually a pseudonym for Charles Lamb himself and he referred to his sister Mary as "Cousin Bridget" within the essays. The essays were so popular that they were published in book form over two volumes: *Essays of Elia* in 1823 and *Last Essays of Elia* in 1833.

When Dawsey notes that he laughed about the roast pig Lamb wrote of, he was referring to his essay titled *A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig*. This is provided in the Complementary Links for you to enjoy too and you will learn that in this essay Lamb appreciates the taste of pork crackling and other aspects of feasting, drinking and having an appetite for the good things of life. Dawsey connects this writing to the experience of enjoying a secret roast pork dinner during a time of hardship and Juliet connects to his appreciation of Lamb's writing and arrangements are made to give Dawsey the opportunity to enjoy further titles from Lamb's. It is a sweet highlight of how reading can bring people together; and as Juliet writes to him:

*That's what I love about reading: one tiny thing will interest you in a book, and that tiny thing will lead you on to another book, and another bit there will*

*lead you on to a third book. It's geometrically progressive – all with no end in sight, and for no other reason than sheer enjoyment.*

### The Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society is Founded

It is Dawsey that shares the story of the beginning of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, all over the enjoyment of a secret roast pig dinner, and the quick thinking of Elizabeth McKenna making up the title of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* when the group was found after curfew by a German soldier.

Juliet is intrigued by the Society and wishes to include them in a piece she is doing for *The Times*. Thus, she starts to communicate with more members of the Society, including Amelia Maugery alongside Dawsey. However, first Amelia wishes to know more about Juliet and so she offers a copy of a biography she wrote on Anne Brontë and referees in the form of Reverend Simon Simpless and Lady Bella Taunton.

### Markham V. Reynolds

Readers are introduced to Markham Reynolds and his intentions towards Juliet seem clear given the bunches of flowers he sends her and his requests for dinners together. He refers to “Lend Lease” in one of his letters to Juliet. It is likely that this is a term you will know from your studies into World War II, referring to the American policy of lending and leasing equipment to Great Britain at the commencement of World War II to help them in their fight against the Germans (and before the USA had entered into the war themselves). This highlights the nationalities of Markham and Juliet too: one being from the United States of America and the other from Great Britain.

### Notebook Entry

At this point in the book, it is a good idea to ensure that you know who is who when it comes to the characters. You are still just learning who they are and their interests and quirks and further characters will be introduced, so this is a great time to include a Character List in your notebook. Creating one is the focus for your Notebook entry for this lesson.

Simply dividing A4 pages into quarters is an easy way to create a Character List, with the character's name as the heading for each box. Then, add the details you know about each character. For example, it may include detail such as:

Juliet Ashton

- Author of *Izzy Bickerstaff Goes to War* and *Biography of Anne Brontë*



- Lives in London

#### Sophie Strachan

- Lives in Oban, Scotland
- Has a son Dominic

Setting your Character List up in this way allows you to add further details as you progress through the book. You can even add drawings of the character if you wish, note the books that they like to read, and copy any of their quotes that you particularly like. This is a straight-forward method that can be used with any book and is particularly helpful when there are a number of characters in a book, such as in an Agatha Christie novel.

For those keen on Geography, for this lesson you may also wish to include a map of the island of Guernsey or an excerpt of the English Channel showing where it lies in relation to France and Germany.