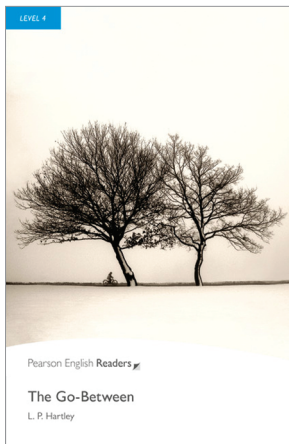


# The Go-Between

L. P. Hartley



## About L. P. Hartley

Leslie Poles Hartley was born in 1895 near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, England, the son of a solicitor who became a director of a factory. He was educated at Harrow and Oxford University and was an officer during World War I in the Norfolk Regiment. He started writing as a reviewer for various journals in the 1920s and published a collection of horror stories in 1924.

His first full-length novel was *Simonetta Perkins* (1925), which was based in Venice where he spent much of his time. But it was with *The Shrimp and the Anemone*, published in 1944 as the first part of a trilogy about a brother and sister growing up, that he achieved critical acclaim. His biggest success was with *The Go-Between* in 1953. This novel was made into a film by Joseph Losey in 1970, with a screenplay by Harold Pinter, a well-known British playwright, starring Julie Christie, Alan Bates and Michael Redgrave.

Hartley was awarded a CBE in 1955. He died in 1972.

## Summary

An elderly man, Leo Colston, finds an old diary he wrote when he was twelve. The diary makes Leo remember events which took place in the summer of 1900 when he stayed with Marcus Maudsley, a boy he had met at school. The events affect him for the rest of his life.

## Chapters 1–5

Leo Colston finds his diary and begins to recall his school days. The young Leo is beaten by bullies at his school and writes magic spells in the diary to protect himself. One boy, Maudsley, invites him to his family's home for the summer and Leo's mother agrees to let him go. The Maudsleys live in a large house, Brandham Hall, and Leo

is attracted to their rich, upper-class world. Leo meets the members of Marcus' family, including his beautiful sister Marian. The weather is hot and Leo is uncomfortable in his thick clothes, so Marian takes Leo to buy light ones. In town Leo sees Marian talking to a man in the street, but when they return Marian tells her mother they didn't meet anyone.

## Chapters 6–8

Marcus tells Leo there will be soon a village cricket match and a dance at Brandham Hall. At church, Leo meets Lord Trimingham, a young man with a terrible war injury on his face. Trimingham asks Leo to deliver a message to Marian but he is disappointed at her lack of response. As Marcus is ill, Leo goes off to play alone. He jumps off a haystack at the farm of Ted Burgess and hurts his leg. Ted helps him and sends him back with a letter for Marian. At Brandham Hall, Leo gives the letter to Marian, who warns him he must not tell anyone about it.

## Chapters 9–11

Leo continues to play on the haystack and carries more letters between Marian and Ted. Marian tells Leo they are 'business letters'. Leo wonders about the letters but doesn't read them. The day before the cricket match Marian slips a letter into Leo's pocket and Leo goes to the farm. The envelope has been left open and on the way, Leo reads a bit of the letter and learns that Marian and Ted are lovers. He is disappointed because Marian has lied to him but he delivers the letter to Ted.

## Chapters 12–15

At the cricket match, the Maudsleys let Leo play in the team from Brandham Hall. In the match against the villagers, Ted Burgess plays very well, and Marian is excited watching him. But Leo catches Ted's ball and wins the match for the Hall. At the concert after the match, Marian plays the piano and Ted sings well, but the crowd likes Leo's singing best. After the concert Marcus tells Leo that Marian is going to marry Lord Trimingham. Leo thinks he won't have to deliver any more messages. He writes to his mother and asks if he can stay longer. Lord Trimingham tells Leo about his relative, the fifth Viscount Trimingham, who was killed in a fight over a woman.

## Chapters 16–18

Marian asks Leo to deliver another letter to Ted but he refuses. Marian becomes angry so Leo takes the letter. He cries because he thinks Marian's friendship with him was false. Ted also loses his temper with Leo. Returning to

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Brandham Hall, he writes another letter to his mother. He tells her about the messages, which he thinks are 'rather wrong', and says he wants to come home. He and Marcus go to look at the deadly nightshade in the hut. Marcus tells him that Marian is going to buy him a green bicycle for his birthday because she thinks Leo is 'green'. Although this angers Leo, he still wants the bicycle. They hear two people in the hut. Leo knows it is Ted and Marian but Marcus doesn't recognise the voices.

### Chapters 19–21

The next day Marian goes to London. Leo receives a letter from Ted saying he is sorry for losing his temper. He hears Trimington and Mr Maudsley discussing Ted. Mr Maudsley calls Ted a 'lady-killer' and Trimington says that he has suggested to Ted that he join the army. Leo goes to see Ted and agrees to deliver another message to Marian – to meet at half past six on Friday. He receives a letter from his mother saying he should stay with the Maudsleys until after his birthday at the end of the month. When Marian returns to Brandham Hall Leo tells her that Ted may join the army. She is upset and tells Leo she is marrying Trimington only because she has to. Leo agrees to be her messenger again. He gives her Ted's message, but changes the time to six o'clock, thinking she will not wait for Ted and will return to Trimingham.

### Chapters 22–25

Leo decides to use a magic spell to end the relationship between Marian and Ted. He goes to the hut at night to get some deadly nightshade for the spell, but becomes frightened and destroys the plant. The next day is Leo's birthday. Marian asks Leo to take one more letter to Ted and then disappears. Mrs Maudsley sees the letter and guesses that Leo knows where Marian is. She takes Leo with her to look for Marian. They discover Marian and Ted together. Leo becomes ill from the deadly nightshade and is taken home, but learns that Ted has killed himself. After reading the diary, the adult Leo goes to visit Brandham Hall again. He meets Marian and agrees to deliver one last message to her grandson – the son of her child with Ted.

### Background and themes

**The past.** In the prologue to *The Go-Between*, L. P. Hartley says: 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' *The Go-Between* paints a detailed picture of rural England at the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Social class.** At this time the social classes were rigidly divided. But it was possible for people to move up the social ladder by marrying into a family of a higher class. Thus Marian is pressured by her mother into marrying Lord Trimingham so that the family will gain entry into the aristocracy. Mrs Maudsley's horror when she discovers Marian's relationship with the farmer, Ted Burgess, can be explained partly by the idea of her daughter moving down the social scale.

**Friendship, trust and betrayal.** Leo longs to be accepted by the seemingly superior Maudsleys, especially the beautiful Marian. He takes their kindness at face value, only to learn later that he is being used. Yet he continues to deliver their messages, torn between his disapproval of their actions and his need for their affection.

**Adolescence.** The novel explores the mind of a boy on the threshold of adolescence. Leo is an intelligent, imaginative boy. He is still a child who makes magic spells. Yet he is fascinated by the adult world and desperate to learn what life is really about. Unlike the world of school, however, Leo misreads the adult world. When he cannot control events, a tragedy occurs, and the sense of failure he feels lasts throughout his life. Hartley seems to offer a psychological explanation for why a man might choose to live a lonely, unmarried life.

## Discussion activities

### Before reading

- Write, Pair work:** Most of the events in *The Go-Between* occur in 1900. Tell students to imagine what life was like in 1900 in England, and what life is like today. Ask them to write some sentences comparing the two. For example, *In 1900, people wore more formal clothes than they do today. In 1900, far fewer people used telephones than they do today.* They can then compare their sentences with a partner.
- Discuss:** Tell students to look at the pictures in the book. Talk about these things: *What year do you think the story is set in? What kind of people are in the story? Are they rich or poor? What kind of house is Brandham Hall? What kind of clothes did men, women and children wear?*
- Art work:** Ask students to draw a scene from what they imagine is a typical day in a home such as Brandham Hall.
- Predict:** Make predictions from the title of the novel. Tell students that a 'go-between' refers to a person. Then ask them to guess the answers to these questions: *What do you think a go-between does? Who*

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is the go-between in this story? Who is this person 'going between'? What do you think might happen to the go-between? To the other people? They can read the back of the book and look at the pictures in the book to help them make their predictions.

### Chapters 1–5

#### While reading

- 5 **Predict:** In class or as homework, get students to write on the following.  
*Read the conversation the old Leo Colston has with himself as a boy (pp. 7–8). Then write down three or four things you think will happen later in the story.*

#### After reading

- 6 **Write:** Ask students to choose to write one of the following.
- a *Imagine you are Leo and it is the night before you go to Norfolk to stay with the Maudsley family. Write an entry in your diary. Say how you feel and what you think will happen.*
  - b *Imagine you are Leo and it is the night after you have arrived at Brandham Hall. Write an entry in your diary. Describe what has happened, who you have met, what you think about them and how you feel.*
- 7 **Predict:** Write five questions you would like to know about how the story goes on. Make sure each question is about a different character.

### Chapters 6–9

#### After reading

- 8 **Pair work:** Ask students to work in pairs to discuss these questions: *Why does Mrs Maudsley want Marian to marry Trimingham? How do Marian and Lord Trimingham feel about each other? What is the relationship between Ted and Marian? Then have a whole-class discussion.*
- 9 **Guess:** Have students play this game:
- a *Choose one of the characters in chapters six, seven, eight or nine (Leo, Marcus, Marian, Ted Burgess, Lord Trimingham, Mrs Maudsley, Mr Maudsley)*
  - b *Then walk around the class and describe yourselves and what you do. The others must guess who you are.*
- 10 **Write:** Get students to retell part of the story changing the point of view.  
*In Chapter 8 Leo hurts his leg and is helped by Ted Burgess. Imagine you are Ted. Say what happened from his point of view. What did he think when he heard Leo cry? How did he feel when he saw Leo? Why did he ask Leo to carry the letter? What was he thinking when Leo left?*

### Chapters 10–13

#### Before reading

- 11 **Discuss, research:** Cricket  
*In Chapter 12, Leo plays in a cricket match. What do you know about the game of cricket? Where is it played? How is it played? Who wins a cricket match? If you do not know, use the library or Internet to find out.*

#### After reading

- 12 **Pair work, write:** Ask students to work in pairs to write a letter from Marian to a magazine. In the letter Marian describes her problem and asks for advice. Then each pair exchanges their letter with another pair and writes an answer.

### Chapters 14–17

#### After reading

- 13 **Pair work, discuss:** Ask students to work in pairs to discuss these questions. *Until Chapter 16, in what ways has Leo's stay at Brandham Hall been successful for him? What is your opinion of Marian's and Ted's treatment of Leo?*  
 Then have a whole-class discussion.
- 14 **Write:** Leo describes a letter he writes to his mother on page 83. Ask students to write the complete letter. Then ask them to compare their letters with another student.

### Chapters 18–21

#### After reading

- 15 **Pair work:** Ask students to work in pairs to discuss the character of Leo. They can ask questions like these: *Do you like Leo? What do you think makes him happy or unhappy? Is Leo 'green'? Leo thinks that he controlled the 'business' between Marian and Ted. Was he right?*
- 16 **Discuss:** Have students talk about the message Leo gives Marian at the end of Chapter 21. *What was Ted's message? Why did Leo change it? Has Leo changed messages before? Why? What do you think will happen as a result?*

### Chapters 22–25

#### After reading

- 17 **Pair work, discuss:** Write these words on the board.  
*growing up – magic – horoscopes – love – social class – money – children – illness – sport – imagination – lies – jealousy – war – control*  
 Ask students to check any words they don't know in their dictionaries. Then have students work in pairs or small groups and arrange the words in order of most to least important in the story. Then have a class discussion asking students to explain their decisions.
- 18 **Discuss:** Have students talk about the deadly nightshade. *Why does Leo destroy it? What is the result?*