



Ulysses (SparkNotes Literature Guide)

SparkNotes , James Joyce

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J_BlueFlower says

Very helpful when trying to understand what is going on in Ulysses.

Chris Linehan says

Ok, so the Spark Notes gets three stars and the novel only gets two? What gives?

Honestly, Ulysses was not that enjoyable. Some of that, a lot of that, lack of enjoyment stemmed from how difficult it was for me to follow. This little guide made a lot more of Joyce intelligible to me. I'm not saying that I would have loved Ulysses had I read the Spark Notes first, only that I have a deeper understanding and thus, appreciation for it now. My plan was to read another interpretation of this book and then Dubliners by Joyce but I feel I need a break. I'll try and get back to Joyce quickly though, while it's still somewhat fresh in my mind.

Daniel says

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John says

Normally I stay away from things like Sparks Notes because I feel as though it could potentially influence my own reading of a novel. However, in the instance of Joyce's Ulysses I would highly recommend this tiny guide to any who are perplexed. Having said this, let me qualify it a bit more: I would recommend it to anyone who has ALREADY READ the book.

The reason I say this is because of what I've already mentioned in my first sentence - I believe reading this little book WITH Ulysses would influence a reader too much. That being said, Ulysses is deserving of its reputation as the toughest of tough classics and even the most studious reader is going to find themselves utterly and completely lost at some points in the novel (I cite as the best example the episode whose subject is the birth of a child and whose narration is divided roughly into 9 sections, each of which is supposed to reflect both the birth of the child itself and the 'birth' of the English language [including conception thereof], moving chronologically through the styles leading up to American advertising, which for Joyce is about 1.5 pages of pure nonsense - the 'sensations' of a newborn language in the world).

My personal belief is that a person should read the book with perhaps a quick glance here and again at outside source material to orient you (in the Sirens episode, for instance, its hard to figure out right away

where the narration is taking place) and then afterwards consult Sparks Notes to get another view of what happened in the novel and to help tie it all together again. In so doing, the reader will get the experience of Ulysses without any heavy outside influences AND afterwards see the structural themes holding all this pandemonium together. Sparks Notes does this beautifully, offering just the right dose of review - not too much, not too little - to help walk the reader back through the novel to make sure that nothing was missed and that all things were understood.

Ideally, after the initial read and the review with these Notes, I would then recommend a re-read to get the full effect...
