About the author

Margaret Mitchell was born in 1900, in Atlanta, Georgia. Her great grandfather on her mother's side had owned a large plantation before the Civil War, but Margaret's own parents were relatively ordinary middle class Atlantans. She grew up listening to stories about the Old South and the Civil War. Her grandmother was a fiery woman who had been born on a plantation, and her husband had fought for the southern 'Cause'. Added to her grandmother's stories were those of all her other relatives and their friends who had survived the war, and these tales became the basis of Margaret's life-long fascination with the Civil War and Georgia's part in it. She also loved writing and story-telling from a very early age, and began to dream of being a writer. She then found a job with a local magazine. By the time she left the magazine in 1926, she was writing historical articles for her editor. She had written short stories in her spare time while working, but now she turned to a novel. In 1927, she was writing the novel that was to become Gone with the Wind. Eight years later, Mitchell had written 600,000 words. In its first year of publication, the novel became the best-selling American novel of all time.

Summary

Gone with the Wind, first published in 1936, is one of the most powerful historical novels ever written. It is set against the background of the American Civil War of 1861–65, and the ‘reconstruction’ period in the defeated southern states after it.

Chapters 1–2: In Chapter 1, Scarlett O'Hara is shattered when she learns that Ashley Wilkes, the man she is head over heels with, is going to marry his own cousin, Melanie Hamilton. Convinced that Ashley is secretly in love with her, Scarlett will try to prevent him from getting married. In Chapter 2, Scarlett goes to a dance at Twelve Oaks, in which Ashley and Melanie will announce their marriage, determined to flirt with many men so as to make Ashley jealous. There she meets Rhett Butler, a mysterious cunning man with a very bad reputation to whom she will feel attracted.

Chapters 3–4: In Chapter 3, Scarlett stages a secret encounter with Ashley and confesses to him that she wants to marry him. Yet, he turns her down telling her that they are too different. She is so broken-hearted that she accepts to marry her all-time suitor, the brother of Melanie, Charles Hamilton. The war breaks off and Charles dies of typhoid leaving Scarlett alone with a child. In Chapter 4, Scarlett, now a widow, moves to Atlanta with her relatives. She works as a nurse and thus attends the local dance to raise money for the local hospital and especially for the 'Cause'. There she meets, once again, Rhett Butler who eagerly pays a substantial amount of money to dance with her. Soon all eyes in town are set on Scarlett.

Chapters 5–6: In Chapter 5, Scarlett and Rhett's friendship continues to develop but she keeps it secret, since she knows her family would not approve of it. Rhett is always in the limelight due to his critical stance against the war. Scarlett's relatives and in-laws unanimously decide they should not be on speaking terms with Rhett Butler any more. Yet, to everyone's surprise, and especially to Scarlett's amazement, Melanie refuses to do so arguing that Ashley sees eye to eye with Rhett about the war. In Chapter 6, Ashley comes back to Atlanta for Christmas and Scarlett once again fails to notice his rejection when she declares her love for him. Ashley returns to the battlefield and is held hostage by the Yankees. He is given the chance to join them for two years and be set free, but he turns it down.

Chapters 7–8: In Chapter 7, as the Yankees keep advancing, the Confederates are weakened and the South is increasingly in danger. Scarlett decides to leave for Tara but Melanie begs her to stay with her, since she is about to give birth to the baby. Scarlett is reminded of her pledge to look after Melanie while Ashley is in the battlefield. As Scarlett prepares to help Melanie deliver her baby, she is shocked by the terrible news that her mother and sisters are ill with typhoid. In Chapter 8, Scarlett and Prissy are helplessly looking for a doctor or a mid-wife for Melanie.
Gone with the Wind – Part One

The army is leaving town because the Yankees are coming closer and all doctors are saving injured men at the railway station or in the streets. Prissy confesses to Scarlett that she has lied about her knowing how to deliver a baby. For the first time in her life, Scarlett hits a slave. She tries to recall what Mammy and Ellen did when Wade was born and gets ready to help Melanie herself.

Chapters 9–10: In Chapter 9, aware that the Yankees are coming into town and that the Confederates are burning all guns, Scarlett is determined to return to Tara. She sends for Rhett Butler who soon turns up with a stolen horse and wagon. Rhett gives a ride to the women and children up until a secret wagon path that will take them back home, unnoticed by the Yankees. To Scarlett’s astonishment, Rhett has decided to join the Southerners in war. In Chapter 10, Scarlett struggles her way back to Tara and is shattered to see that all plantations have been burned down. She is surprised to find that Tara is still standing but a bit upset to learn that Yankee soldiers have been living there. Scarlett will have to be stronger than ever now. Her mother has died of typhoid and they are broke, since the slaves have run away and the cotton has been burned by the Yankees.

Chapters 11–12: In Chapter 11, Scarlett is very worried about the lack of food and the extreme poverty of the O’Haras. A Yankee soldier barges in and Scarlett shoots him dead. She and Melanie search the soldier and find, money, gold and jewels. Scarlett feels shattered about having killed a man, but she knows that she now has to provide for the family. In Chapter 12, the war is over and the Confederacy has lost. Many soldiers returning home stop by at Tara for food, aid and shelter. The women look after, and even save, the life of many soldiers. One of them, Will, decides to stay at Tara so as to pay back for their having saved his life. Scarlett and Melanie are amazed by the news that Ashley has survived the war and when he finally returns home they both feel happy and moved. Yet, Scarlett is shattered, since she now knows that Ashley will never be hers.

Background and themes

American Civil War, the most destructive war in its history, was a battle between two ways of life. The economy of the southern states was largely based around cotton and an old colonial style of life. White families owned vast plantations, which were worked by black slaves, and lived life according to the old European, aristocratic values. The northern states were much more industrial and democratic. Many had already made slavery illegal, but there was a growing move to abolish it throughout the entire United States. The South felt this as a threat, and eleven states decided to withdraw from the Union and create, in 1861, an independent country called the Confederate States of America. This led to war when the North decided to fight to keep the Union. At first the war went well for the Confederacy (the South), which won battles in Virginia through to 1863. But after the Battle of Gettysburg, in Pennsylvania, in July 1863, the much less powerful Southern forces had to retreat. The Union (the North) general William Sherman began his march through the South, deliberately destroying everything in his path. The Battle of Atlanta, in Georgia, in 1864, was one of the hardest-fought battles of the war, and resulted in a fire which destroyed a large part of the city. In April 1865, the South surrendered.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1. Discuss: Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following: What do you know about the American Civil War? Who was it between? What was it about? How would it feel to be a plantation worker and a plantation owner at the time?

If students do not know about the Civil War, give them information (see Background information above).

2. Group work: Bring in a map of the United States. Point out where Atlanta, Georgia, (where the story is set) and Washington DC are. Encourage students to use a map as they read on.

3. Predict: Gone with the Wind has been made into a world-famous film. Divide the class into those who have/haven’t seen it. Ask each group to retell or predict what the story is about using at least ten of the words below:

   plantation slave war battle blockade typhoid pray missing shell death sadness lose win widow danger

   Ask students to look up the words they do not know in the Word List at the back of the book.

4. Tie in with films: If you have access to video or DVD, watch the first three to five scenes of Gone with the Wind with the sound off. Tell students to choose one of the scenes and imagine what the characters say. Play the film again and check whose guess was closest to the original.
Gone with the Wind – Part One

Chapters 1–2
While reading
5 Discuss: Tell students to read pages 1–4 with a lot of attention and discuss these questions: How popular is Scarlett? Is she happy? Why (not)? Does Ashley really love her? Why?

6 Role play: Ask students to work in pairs and prepare to dramatise a scene after carefully reading pages 5–6: Imagine you are Scarlett and her father. Role play their conversation.

7 Write: Tell students to write a diary entry in pairs. Guide them with these instructions: Imagine you are Scarlett on the worst day of life. Write down how you feel about Ashley, the Tarleton twins, Melanie, Tara, etc.

After reading
8 Guess: Tell students to work in pairs and to imagine they are one of the characters: Choose a character. In pairs, say what you are like, what you do and how you feel so that the other student finds who you are.

9 Research: Explain to your students what a civil war is. Then ask them to work on the following: In groups, find more information about what happened during the Civil War in the United States and how this made the life of plantation owners and workers very difficult. Make notes so that you then read them to the class.

Chapters 3–4
While reading
10 Pair work: Students work in pairs after reading Chapter 3: Re-read Chapter 3 and discuss these questions: Are Scarlett and Rhett similar in any ways? If so, what ways? Do you think they will get to know each other better?

11 Role play: In their pairs, students then role play the conversation between Scarlett and Rhett. Guide them with these instructions: Act out Scarlett and Rhett’s conversation after Rhett overhears Scarlett when she tells Ashley that she loves him.

After reading
12 Role play: Ask students to work in groups and think of the two chapters they have read: You are a group of Atlanta gossips who are shocked by Scarlett’s behaviour in town (her ideas, what she does, the way she looks) and particularly at the dance. Criticise her!

Chapters 5–6
While reading
13 Pair work: Ask students to re-read pages 24 and 25 and to do this in pairs: Imagine you are Melanie on pages 24 and 25. Write down what is actually on her mind and she cannot tell. How does she feel about the war?

14 Role play: Ask students to re-read pages 28 and 29 and to imagine the conversation goes on: You are Scarlett and Ashley on pages 28 and 29. How would their conversation go on? Act it out.

After reading
15 Group work: Tell students to work in groups and discuss the following: Do you think Rhett is sensible not to fight? Discuss with another student or write a paragraph.

Chapters 7–8
While reading
16 Write: Ask them to read pages 32–35 and do the following: What else do you imagine the letter that Gerald writes to Scarlett says? Write it down with a lot more detail.

After reading
17 Pair work: Put students into pairs and tell them to discuss the following: How does Scarlett feel throughout the day as she realises that she may have to deliver the baby? Find examples in Chapter 8 to support your opinions.

18 Pair work: Ask students to work in pairs: Scarlett goes to find Dr Meade to ask him to help with Melanie’s baby. What does she see in the streets? Describe the scene to another student.

Chapters 9–10
While reading
19 Discuss: Tell students to work in groups: In Chapter 9, Rhett says: ‘Scarlett, anyone as selfish and strong-minded as you is never helpless.’ Do you agree with Rhett that Scarlett is selfish?

After reading
20 Discuss: Ask students to discuss these questions in pairs and to write a paragraph: What do you think of Rhett after reading Chapter 9? Why?

21 Write: Ask students to do the following writing activity: Write a letter from Scarlett to Ashley, telling him about the journey home and the baby.

Chapters 11–12
While reading
22 Discuss: Ask students to discuss in groups: As you read the chapter, discuss how Scarlett stays strong when she has so many pieces of bad news. What does she think?

After reading
23 Predict: Ask students to get into groups and to discuss the following: What do you think is going to happen in Part Two of Gone with the Wind? How will Scarlett’s life change? What about Rhett’s feelings for Scarlett? Will Scarlett’s feelings for Melanie and Ashley change?

24 Write: Tell students to summarise their predictions: Now write a paragraph with all your predictions in activity 28.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.