

# [Plot carrie settles into her new living](https://assignbuster.com/plot-carrie-settles-into-her-new-living/)

PlotThe novel, Sister Carrie, written by Theodore Dreiser commences in1889 with Caroline Meeber, an innocent, naive eighteen-year-old girl, departing from her home in Columbia City to reside with her sister Minniein Chicago. While on the train, Carrie encounters a young man by the nameof Charles Drouet, whom she hopes to visit with once she settles into hernew residence. Unfortunately, Carrie learns that she will be unable toreceive Drouet as a houseguest at her sister’s flat. Carrie is encouragedto search for employment in order to facilitate her sister and brother-in-law in paying their rent.

She manages to hold down a job for a shortperiod of time but then falls ill. After regaining her strength, Carriehas trouble locating another job. Coincidentally, she reencountersDrouet and takes him up on an offer to move in with him. Soon after Carriesettles into her new living arrangement, Drouet invites his friend, Hurstwood, over to meet her. Carrie and Hurstwood fall in love despite thefact that he is married and believes that she is Drouet’s wife. Upondiscovering that Hurstwood is married, Carrie becomes upset and refuses tocontact him any longer.

Drouet moves out after his discovery that Carriehas been meeting with Hurstwood behind his back. Subsequently, Hurstwoodsteals ten thousand dollars from the safe where he works and tricks Carrieinto traveling to Canada with him. The pair settles in New York andHurstwood begins a fruitless search for employment. A long period of timeelapses and Hurstwood, who had been a member of high-society in Chicago, isunable to obtain a job. Carrie abandons him and pursues her dream ofbecoming an actress, while living with her friend, Lola Osborne, who isalso an actress. Carrie becomes successful, yet she never achieves thestate of happiness based on material possessions that she left ColumbiaCity to pursue at the commencement of the novel. Rather, she discoversthat her ideal happiness is merely an unattainable illusion. CharactersCaroline Meeber, often referred to as Carrie by most other characters, serves as the character whose actions the reader follows throughout thecourse of the novel.

Carrie represents the opportunity for advancementwithin the class system that Dreiser creates for the novel. She believesthat becoming a part of high-society will allow her to obtain the happinessthat she so desires. She begins as part of the lower stratum of societyand climbs higher through her relationship with Drouet. Although Carrieenjoys her improved social standing, she still wishes for more. She wishesto be part of the high-class society that Hurstwood represents.

Her goalthroughout the novel remains to achieve happiness by acquiring enough moneyand status in order to gain access to “ high society.” Carrie alsoacknowledges that she does not desire to return to where she came from.” She could possibly have conquered the fear of hunger and gone back; thethought of hard work and a narrow round of suffering would, under the lastpressure of conscience, have yielded, but spoil her appearance?-be oldclothed and poor-appearing?-never!” (Dreiser 81) Rather than achievinghappiness, at the conclusion of the novel, after Carrie has obtained boththe money and independence she so desired, she realizes that she is stillalone. “ Amid the tinsel and shine of her state walked Carrie, unhappy.”(399)Minnie Hanson, Carrie’s sister in Chicago, represents the beginning ofCarrie’s search for something “ better.

” The sisters do not have much incommon. “ Minnie was no comparison for her sister-she was too old.” (41)When Minnie greets her in Chicago, Carrie, “…feels cold reality takingher by the hand.

” (8) Minnie serves as Carrie’s transition between livingat home with her family and living alone with a man in the “ real world.” George Hurstwood epitomizes the achievement of the “ American dream,” even still today. He possesses money and a seemingly perfect family; however, as is often the case, “ Hurstwood’s residence could scarcely besaid to be infused with this home spirit.” (68) To Carrie, Hurstwoodrepresents everything that she desires to be and to have. She falselyinfers that he must be happy; for he has everything that one could possiblydesire.

She falls in love with him and until they are in New York does notrealize that underneath all of his possessions and wealth, he hasimperfections similar to those of Drouet, or any other man. After he losesall of his money and has no prospect of future employment, “ Constantcomparison between his old state and his new showed a balance for theworse, which produced a constant state of gloom or, at least depression.”(260) Unwilling to contend with the prospect of impending poverty, Carriemoves out to live with an actress friend of hers. Charles Drouet is Carrie’s first experience with a man in her life. She does not particularly have any affection for him, but she feels thatshe owes him something for assisting her in her time of need. Hefacilitates her by giving her money and a place to live when she is unableto locate a job, although he is only this generous in order to make herfeel dependent on him. She greatly appreciates his efforts, “.

.. feeling asthough a great arm had slipped out before her to draw off trouble.

” (50)Drouet functions as a static character, upon which one can measure theprogress of Carrie and Hurstwood throughout the novel. He does notrepresent as high of a class in society as does Hurstwood, but he stilllives comfortably, with money to spare. “ His clothes were particularly newand rich in appearance.” (78) Drouet becomes disturbed when he learns ofCarrie’s relationship with Hurstwood but is actually more disturbed by thefact that she prefers another man over him than the fact that he loves her. Julia Hurstwood epitomizes a woman living the life of luxury. Shestays out of her husband’s business matters, and he compensates byproviding her with everything materialistic that she could ever need orwant.

Julia is very concerned with appearances and desires to have onlythe best of everything, both for her and for her children. After shediscovers Hurstwood’s relationship with Carrie, she demands money to go ona trip with her children and does not wish to see Hurstwood ever again. Jessica Hurstwood palpably follows in the footsteps of her patricianmother, Julia. Her main goal throughout the novel is to search for asuitable husband.

She acts supercilious and believes that she is superiorto anyone possessing less money than her, a belief undoubtedly spurned byher mother’s example. Jessica succeeds in locating a wealthy husband andwill likely continue to follow in her mother’s footsteps throughout heradult life. Mrs. Vance and Mrs. Frank Hale represent another example of whatCarrie believes will make her happy.

Mrs. Frank Hale lives in the samebuilding as Carrie and Drouet and opens Carrie’s eyes to the class aboveher in society. Mrs. Vance, who lives in the flat next door to Carrie andHurstwood in New York, serves a similar purpose. “ Both flats were good tolook upon, though that of the Vances tended somewhat more to theluxurious.” (243) These women set standards for Carrie that outline herdesires for the future. Bob Ames, a cousin of Mrs. Vance, who the latter introduces to Carrie, impresses the young girl very much.

She enjoys his company, finding valuein what he has to say. In comparing him to both Hurstwood and Drouet, shenotices, “ He seemed wiser than Hurstwood, saner and brighter than Drouet.”(257) Carrie believes that Ames may have even discovered the elusivehappiness that she, herself, is unable to locate.

Lola Osborne gives Carrie the courage to move out of Hurstwood’s flat, and life. The two women live together as roommates until Carrie begins tomake more money, at which point they both move into a hotel. Lola is alsoan actress and encourages Carrie to reach her potential in the theater. Lola also seems to possess the happiness that Carrie searches for. Shetells Carrie, “ There’re lots would give their ears to be in your shoes.”(363) Yet, Lola does not seem unhappy.

Major ConflictsMany of the conflicts in Sister Carrie are motivated by the desirefor money, status, or happiness. One such example is Carrie’s conflictbetween herself and society, pertaining to her search for happiness. Itseems that society repeatedly shows Carrie something out there thatrepresents more affluence than she has access to, which in her mindsignifies more happiness. This conflict is never resolved, for Carrienever reaches that state of happiness, which she searches for throughoutthe novel. Near the conclusion, Carrie realizes that money does not assurehappiness.

“ She had learned…in her own present state, was nothappiness.”(399)Hurstwood engages in a conflict of the type man versus man with hiswife, Julia, motivated by the desire for money once she decides to divorcehim. She believes that she should be able to obtain his money, especiallysince he was unfaithful to her. Hurstwood obviously disagrees with thistrain of thought and fights to keep his money.

Julia files suit withMcGregor, James, and Hay, who send Hurstwood a note saying, “ We beg toinform you…before filing suit against you…for divorce and alimony.”(192) Unfortunately for Hurstwood, Julia ends up with all of his money.

Drouet and Hurstwood join in a conflict motivated by the desire to” win” Carrie and her affection. It is not particularly clear whethereither Drouet or Hurstwood actually love Carrie. Drouet lives with Carriefor an extended period of time and never wishes to marry her, yet whenHurstwood appears in the picture, Drouet suddenly must have his preciousCarrie around. “…his attitude had been that of the jealous lover.

Nowhis feelings were a mixture of anger at deception, sorrow at losing Carrie, misery at being defeated.” (181) Hurstwood does not want to change hisstatus in society or mar his reputation, but still wishes to have Carrieall to himself. It seems as if Hurstwood wins her affection, but this isonly temporary. Although they marry, it is not legal. In the end, theconflict is resolved when Carrie goes off alone and does remain with eitherman. An alternate example of a conflict between man and society is thatbetween Hurstwood and society. Hurstwood begins as an opulent man inChicago. When he and Carrie travel to New York, he discovers that,” Whatever a man like Hurstwood could be in Chicago, it is very evident thathe would be but an inconspicuous drop in an ocean like New York.

” (232)Without a job, Hurstwood succumbs to society and emerges as the loser inthis conflict. Society pushes him down farther and farther until he isunable to reach back up again. Symbols and MotifsThe rocking chair represents a significant symbol in Sister Carrie.

From her sister’s flat in Chicago, to her suite in a fancy hotel Carriefinds a rocking chair in almost every room. In Minnie’s flat, Carrie,”…

drew the one small rocking-chair up to the open window, and sat lookingout upon the night and streets in silent wonder.” (11) Also, in Carrie’sbeautiful hotel suite in the Waldorf, “ In her rocking-chair she sat, whennot otherwise engaged–singing and dreaming.” (398) The ubiquitous rockingchairs illustrate Carrie’s ride to “ Dream Land,” or high society.

Additional symbols in the novel exist in the form of the theaters, hotels, restaurants, and other buildings. As Carrie strolls down Broadway, she notices these buildings and determines what she believes will bring herhappiness. Upon visiting a restaurant with Mr. Vance, Mrs. Vance, and Mr. Ames, Carrie muses, “ Ah, how fortunate was Mrs.

Vance; young, beautiful, and well off–at least, sufficiently so to come here in a coach. What awonderful thing it was to be rich.” (253) While walking down Broadway withMrs. Vance, Carrie longs, “…to feel the delight of parading here as anequal.

Ah, then she would be happy!” (247) Therefore, the presence ofthese symbols illustrates the theme of searching for happiness and theforeboding allusion that complete happiness may be just a dream. ThemesIn Sister Carrie, Dreiser attempts to express to the reader how themisguided search for happiness through the achievement of the Americandream of success can do more harm than good. Carrie begins as part of thelower-middle class of society and makes her way to the top. Throughout thenovel, “ In the view of a certain stratum of society, Carrie was comfortablyestablished-in the eyes of the starveling, beaten by every wind and gustysheet of rain she was safe in a halcyon harbor.

” (74) Her advances are inpart due to arduous work and in part due to her good luck. Carrie is meantto represent the, “…middle American class…”(2), Drouet, a class higher, and Hurstwood, a class higher than that.

“ Carrie was not by any means agloomy soul;” (76) however, she never feels completely happy. For theduration of the novel, Carrie searches vainly for true happiness. Thistheme remains relevant today because many people still possess the Americandream of success and happiness based on wealth and social status. Dreiserwants the reader to contemplate whether this true happiness exists at all.

Ironically, as an actress in the play, “ Under the Gaslight,” byAugustin Daly, Carrie speaks this line, “…It is a sad thing to want forhappiness, but it is a terrible thing to see another groping about blindlyfor it, when it is almost within the grasp.” (148) If Carrie would realizethat contentment in life is not simply based on materialistic possessionsand income, she could possibly become happy. Unfortunately, she nevercomes to realize this. The reader is left with the impression that thehappiness that Carrie searches for does not exist and perhaps this is true. Perhaps the American dream of happiness is just that-a dream, an illusion.” In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness asyou shall never feel.” (400) The Achievement of True HappinessAP EnglishSummer HomeworkAugust 31, 2000