



[The Secret Life of Walter Mitty](#), by James Thurber

In A Nutshell

James Thurber is most famous as a cartoonist and writer for *The New Yorker* in the 1930s and 40s. He published "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" in *The New Yorker* in March of 1939. It tells the story of an aging man who, though inept and bumbling in real life, passes his day with a series of fantasies in which he takes on the role of any number of powerful, bold, decisive men. The story has become an American classic, and Mitty a famous literary character. The word "Mittyesque" can even be found in *The American Heritage Dictionary*. (It refers to someone who is an absent-minded dreamer.)

Visit Shmoop for much more analysis:

- [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty Themes](#)
- [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty Quotes](#)
- [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty Summary](#)
- Also: literary devices, characters, trivia, audio, photos, links, and more

Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 "Walter Mitty" was published in 1939, the year after World War II began. Can you see the influence of this major event in the story at all?
- 2 Is "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" ultimately a funny or tragic story? Does it have to be one or the other?

Visit Shmoop for full coverage of [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty](#)
Shmoop: study guides and teaching resources for literature, US history, and poetry



Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0

This document may be modified and republished for noncommercial use only.
You must attribute Shmoop and link to <http://www.shmoop.com>.

- 3 One point of view on this story is that it's not meant to be analyzed or picked apart in terms of symbols or metaphors. Instead, it's just a cute story that reflects something we've all experienced at one time or another in our lives: the need to escape into fantasy. What do you think of this argument?

Visit Shmoop for many more [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty Study Questions](#)

Visit Shmoop for full coverage of [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty](#)
Shmoop: study guides and teaching resources for literature, US history, and poetry



Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0

This document may be modified and republished for noncommercial use only.

You must attribute Shmoop and link to <http://www.shmoop.com>.