

Reading Guide to Sigmund Freud's  
FIVE LECTURES IN PSYCHOANALYSIS (1910)

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is well-known as the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis. He distinguished himself as a medical student at the University of Vienna in the 1870s., where he worked on neurology. After advanced work with Charcot in Paris, Freud established his own practice as a neurologist in 1886. During these years, Freud established a close working relationship with Josef Breuer, who was experimenting with the “cathartic” method of treating hysterical patients. This led to their collaboration in 1895 on Studies in Hysteria. Freud eventually abandoned hypnosis for the method of “free association” in therapy. The period 1895-1900 was an extremely productive time for Freud, yielding (among other writings) his famous book, The Interpretation of Dreams. Meanwhile, psychoanalysis was becoming institutionalized in European science. Carl Jung organized the first International Psycho-Analytical Congress in Salzburg in 1908 and two years later the participants formed the Psycho-Analytical Association.

Freud enters the American scene on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Clark University in Worcester, Mass., in 1909. Clark President G. Stanley Hall, a founding father (with William James) of American scientific psychology, invited Freud, Jung, and a score of distinguished psychologists to lecture at Clark. Freud delivered (in German) the Five Lectures you are reading for class; they were published in English in the Journal of Psychology in 1910. This was Freud's only visit to the United States, but Hall and others saw to it that Freud became well-known to the American audience.

These lectures are a lucid introduction to Freud's ideas as of 1910, and they are (as are all of Freud's writings) full of his humor. The First Lecture recalls his work with Breuer and hysterical patients. Pay attention to the description of the patient's symptoms and to the treatment. What sort of model or analogy does Freud use here to describe the working of the mind? Be sure you understand such terms as “conversion,” “conscious,” and “unconscious.”

The Second Lecture introduces the crucial concept of “repression.” What does he mean by the awkward term, “unpleasure”? Note his use of analogy (i.e., the room); this is an instance of Freud's analogical reasoning, part of the rhetoric typical of his writing. The crucial term, “symptom,” recurs.

The Third Lecture looks to the several types of symptoms that are part of everyday life, including jokes, dreams, and “faulty actions.” Freud shows how the processes of “condensation” and “displacement” convert some kinds of symbolic materials into others.

The Fourth Lecture presents what easily was Freud's most controversial idea—namely, that of infantile sexuality. The Fifth Lecture steps back from the individual, therapeutic focus to speak more generally about mental processes and civilization.