



Key Vocabulary: Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys

Vocabulary Word	Definition	Context
Austerity	Sternness or severity of manner or attitude	"I took my drink and went out into the hall, where the austerity of the house struck me. It was a long, bare hall with no pictures, no ornaments. There was a tall grandfather clock with a white face and black hands which ticked solemnly."
Coquettish	Flirtatious	"And there, in the tangled vines, was the orchid with the strangely human lips. It was like a coquettish, half-open mouth."
Creole	A person of mixed European and black descent, especially in the Caribbean.	"He despised the English and the English ways... he married Annette, who was only a creole, after he had seduced her."
Ephemeral	Short-lived	"The sun began to set and the colours on the mountain changed every minute until the last light went and the ephemeral afterglow gave the impression that the peak still glowed."
Exotic	Intriguingly unusual or different	"She walked quickly, with exaggerated footsteps, like a little girl, and hummed to herself a Trinidadian tune."
Furtive	Attempting to avoid notice or attention	"She rose early and I watched her, furtive as a cat, stealing across the room, past my bed, past the open door."
Inscrutable	Impossible to understand or interpret	"That was what made her so inscrutable - I could never fathom her mood or guess her thoughts."
Languid	Displaying or having a disinclination for physical exertion or effort; slow and relaxed	"I felt languid and the smell of the gardenia made me dizzy."
Pensive	Engaged in deep or serious thought	"She was very still and pensive for a long time."
Petulant	Childishly sulky or bad-tempered	"She was sulky and petulant and didn't speak to anyone for two days."
Piquant	Having a pleasantly sharp taste or appetizing flavour; pleasantly stimulating or exciting to the mind	"The piquant flavour of the spice made the dish even more delicious."
Querulous	Complaining in a petulant or whining manner	"Her voice was querulous and her manner petulant, but she did not speak again."
Sardonic	Grimly mocking or cynical	"She laughed, a sardonic laugh that made me look at her in surprise."
Squalid	Extremely dirty and unpleasant, especially as a result of poverty or neglect	"The hotel was dirty and squalid, with peeling wallpaper and an overpowering smell of mould."



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Taciturn	Reserved or uncommunicative in speech; saying little	"Antoinette's husband was a taciturn man who rarely spoke and kept to himself."
Uncanny	Strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way	"There was an uncanny stillness about the house that made me feel uneasy."
Vexed	Annoyed, frustrated, or worried	"I was vexed by her refusal to speak to me."
Vivacious	Lively and animated	"She was a vivacious woman who loved to dance and sing."

Historical and political context of the book

"Wide Sargasso Sea" is set in the mid-19th century, during a period of significant political and social upheaval in the Caribbean. Here's an overview of some of the historical and political context that shaped the world in which the novel is set:

- Slavery had recently been abolished in the British Empire, including in Jamaica, where much of the novel takes place. However, former slaves faced significant economic and social challenges, and many continued to live and work under conditions that were little better than slavery.
- Jamaica was a British colony, and the British government was heavily involved in the island's affairs. In particular, the government was concerned with maintaining order and preventing uprisings among the island's black population.
- The novel is set during a period of significant drought and economic hardship in Jamaica, which led to social unrest and political protests.
- In the mid-19th century, there was growing interest in the study of race and racial difference, which had significant implications for the way that people in the Caribbean were viewed and treated by Europeans.
- The novel is also set during a period of significant environmental change, with the widespread destruction of Jamaica's forests and the introduction of new plant species that had significant ecological and social impacts.



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All of these factors contribute to the complex social, political, and economic context in which "Wide Sargasso Sea" is set. Jean Rhys draws on this context to explore issues of identity, power, and marginalization, and to provide a nuanced and complex portrayal of the characters and their relationships.