

# Walter's Secret Escape

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Is Walter Mitty simply a daydreamer, or does he want to escape his life?

Walter daydreams multiple times throughout the story, these daydreams can be attributed to three main characteristics. He comes across as discontent with his ordinary day to day life, which is a reason that he uses daydreaming as a coping mechanism. Others around Walter tend to push him around because he is generally a compliant man, but that compliancy seems to steal his confidence and gives him the need to find power within. His dreams are the perfect escape for him, because he is also imaginative, which allows for him to create unique and intense scenarios. In James Thurber's *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty*, Walter's daydreams combined with his peculiar characteristics allude to him having a desire to escape his reality.

Walter's discontentment and dissatisfaction with his current life proves that he would wish for a way to pause it or escape it, if only temporarily. His relationship with his wife, Mrs. Mitty, and their various problems, is a reason his life isn't all he wants it to be. They argue many times throughout the short story, and neither one of them say anything remotely nice or romantic to one another. Mrs. Mitty judges Walter for spacing out, which annoys him, and we see him finally snap close to the end when he says, "Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?"(37). When he is in his daydreams, Walter is happy, confident, bright, and respected. When he comes out of his daydreams, he is

bored and lonely. Even though he has a wife to spend time with and to talk to, he still seems alone and uninterested in most aspects of the real world. Walter and his wife's relationship is very dysfunctional, with multiple reasons for it being so. One of the reasons is that Walter is a very complaint man, and is often pushed around by others.

Walter's compliance leads him to have a lack of control in his life, which he gains back through his daydreams. All throughout the story Walter is thinking one thing, and doing the other. For example, he doesn't think that he needs overshoes, but Mrs Mitty tells him to get them, so he does, "He kicked the slush on the sidewalk. 'Overshoes,' he said to himself, and he began looking for a shoe store"(35). When we look into his mind, in the daydreams, he always comes across as brave, and very in control of situations. This is because his dreams are his way to be in control of something. Whenever he is envisioning a new experience, he is able to control what everyone thinks of him, what his skills are, and most importantly, what things and action he chooses to do. His wild imagination gives him his freedom, control, and confidence back so that he can carry on without it in his day to day life.

With this imaginative quality, he can picture the lives, and the versions of himself, that he would rather have. Walter can escape his boring reality anytime, anywhere. In every imaginary situation he finds himself in, he is always a different kind of extraordinary. Whether it's a genius surgeon, a navy captain, or even a criminal, he always stands out in a unique way that his reality based self never could. He allows himself to be swept away into a fantasy, based on the smallest things in his life. When Walter hears a newsboy talking about a interesting trial, "A newsboy went by shouting

something about the Waterbury trial.”(35) his mind uses the words he hears to guide him towards something more captivating, “‘Perhaps this will refresh your memory.’ The district attorney suddenly thrust a heavy automatic at the quiet figure on the witness stand”(35). With Walter’s vanilla lifestyle, his variety of intense dreams heavily contrast his reality, which is what provides him relief and a sense of disassociation from all the bad, boring or insignificant issues going on in his everyday life.

Walter Mitty from James Thurber’s *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty* may just be a regular man with fascinating daydreams, but evidence suggests that he utilizes said dreams as an escape from his reality, because he is scared to do so in real life.

His simple life leaves him feeling sad, unfulfilled, and isolated, with his only comfort being the other lives he can live in his head. His tendency to be pushed around makes him displaced and unable to get out of his life, other than through imagining characters he can be who are powerful and authoritative. Imagination is the key to freedom for Walter, as he can imagine himself anywhere he wants, specifically places where his problems and responsibilities are nonexistent. Walter Mitty uses his powerful mind to escape the humdrum life he is trapped in, and go somewhere where he can be special and exceptional for once.

#### Works Cited:

Thurber, James. *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty*. Harcourt, brace and company, March 18, 1939.