Babette's Feast Study Guide

Babette's Feast by Karen Blixen

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Perhaps best known for *Out of Africa* (1937), Isak Dinesen is the pseudonym of Karen Blixen. Having established her reputation as an author in the 1930s and 1940s, she sought to increase her income in the 1950s by having stories published in American magazines. A number of her stories were featured in *Ladies' Home Journal*, including "Babette's Feast," which was first published in 1950. A friend had advised her to write about food because Americans love food, so she crafted a story about the transformative powers of a very special feast. In 1958, "Babette's Feast," along with other stories published in magazines, was compiled into *Anecdotes of Destiny*, which was available as of 2004.

As a child, Dinesen suffered the loss of her father by suicide. In the wake of this tragedy, her grandmother and a nearby aunt helped care for the family. Through this experience, Dinesen came to understand and appreciate the ways women take care of loved ones and of each other. As an adult, Dinesen found herself operating a coffee farm in East Africa, an experience that taught her a great deal about contrasting people and cultures. Dinesen's admirers and scholars often seek parallels between her life and her writing, and in "Babette's Feast" Dinesen seems to draw on her childhood and adult experiences to give the story depth and authenticity.

Author Biography

Karen Blixen (also known as Isak Dinesen) was born Karen Christentze Dinesen on April 17, 1885, near Copenhagen, Denmark. Her father was loosely related to royalty, and her mother was the daughter of a successful shipowner. When Dinesen was ten, her father committed suicide. This was devastating to Dinesen, who had shared a close relationship with her father.

Literature played a prominent role in Dinesen's family; her grandfather had been friends with the fairy tale author Hans Christian Andersen, and her father, brother, a sister, and an aunt were all writers. When Dinesen was twenty-two, several of her short stories were published in literary journals.

On January 14, 1914, Dinesen married her second cousin, Bror von Blixen-Finecke, a baron's son. With the emotional and financial support of their family, the couple bought 700 acres of land in East Africa and began cultivating it for coffee beans. Within the year, however, Dinesen discovered that she had contracted syphilis from her unfaithful husband. Afraid and angry, she returned to Denmark for treatment. She stayed there for most of 1915 and 1916 before reconciling with Bror. With big dreams, they purchased two more coffee farms, but a series of droughts left them profitless.

Dinesen and Bror separated and then divorced in 1925, leaving Dinesen in charge of the failing coffee farms. Her personal life was further complicated by her romance with a longtime friend, an Englishman named Denys Finch Hatton. She had two miscarriages over the course of their relationship, and he had no intention of marrying her. Dinesen's coffee career ended because of a failed loan, fallen coffee and land prices, locusts, and droughts. In 1931, she sold everything to a local developer. A few weeks later, Hatton died when his small airplane crashed.

Prior to leaving Africa and again after returning to Denmark, Dinesen submitted stories to an American publisher (under the name Isak Dinesen). In 1934, her first book of short stories, *Seven Gothic Tales* was published in America. Critical reception was overwhelmingly positive, although the book failed to make waves in Denmark. When *Out of Africa* was published in 1937, American readers and critics alike applauded the author's work. This time, her Danish readership was equally impressed.

In 1959, Dinesen's health was on the decline. Still, she visited America on a four-month tour, where she was toasted by the elite of New York City, including Pearl S. Buck, e. e. cummings, and Marilyn Monroe. After her return to Denmark, her health continued to deteriorate. On September 7, 1962, she died of malnutrition near Copenhagen.

Plot Summary

Part 1: Two Ladies of Berlevaag

In the town of Berlevaag lived an old man and his two daughters, Martine and Philippa. Martine had been named for Martin Luther, and Philippa (one year younger) had been named for Luther's friend Philip Melanchton. The man, called the Dean, was the leader of a small Lutheran religious sect with a faithful following in the small town. He and his daughters led a puritanical life, and the daughters were expected to forgo marriage for the sake of leading the sect after the Dean's death.

After the Dean died, the sisters continued his legacy, keeping the church going and ministering to the poor. Now, many years later, the aging churchgoers are bickering and bringing up past wrongs.

Part 2: Martine's Lover

As young women, Martine and Philippa had been strikingly beautiful. At the age of eighteen, Martine caught the eye of a young lieutenant, Lorens Loewenhielm, who then began visiting the Dean in order to see Martine. Despite his frequent visits, he could never manage to tell her of his feelings for her. Being around her made him feel small and worthless, so on his last visit he boldly kissed her hand and declared that he would never see her again. After this he resolved to forget about her and focus on becoming a great military leader so he would never feel small again.

Part 3: Philippa's Lover

A year later, when Philippa was eighteen, a visiting opera singer from France heard her sing at church. The singer, Achille Papin, was renowned in Paris and was convinced that young Philippa could be the toast of Paris with her exquisite soprano voice. The Dean agreed to allow Papin to give the girl lessons, but when Papin rehearsed a romantic duet with her, he kissed her. She returned home and asked her father to write a letter telling Papin she would no longer accept instruction from him. Papin felt a deep loss for the world of music, and he barely remembered the kiss.

Part 4: A Letter from Paris

Fifteen years later, a ragged-looking woman appears on the sisters' doorstep with a letter from Papin. He explains that this woman, Babette Hersant, has fled Paris for her life. He hopes that Martine and Philippa will be kind enough to take her in as a maid, as she has nowhere else to go, having lost her husband and son in an uprising. Babette assures the sisters that she will work as their maid and cook for nothing, and the sisters agree to the arrangement.

Part 5: Still Life

At first, the sisters are wary of their new maid. She speaks only French, looks like a beggar, and is Catholic. As they get accustomed to her, however, they realize that she is strong and kind and has their best interests at heart. Although Papin's letter informed the sisters that Babette could cook, they show her how to prepare the plain dishes to which they are accustomed. Gradually, the sisters' affection for her grows, as does the affection of the members of the church. Martine and Philippa realize, however, that there is much about Babette that they do not know and that she holds painful secrets from her past.

Part 6: Babette's Good Luck

For years, Babette had continued to play the French lottery by mail. As luck would have it, she won the ten-thousand-franc prize just as the sisters were trying to plan a celebration of what would have been their father's hundredth birthday. Babette asked that they allow her to pay for and prepare an authentic French meal for the sisters and their guests. They are nervous about the dishes that will be served, and they are hesitant to accept Babette's generous offer to pay. The sisters reluctantly agree.

Part 7: The Turtle

Babette leaves for ten days to make arrangements for the ingredients for the dinner. Upon her return, Martine and Philippa notice that Babette is particularly bright and enthusiastic in anticipation of the meal. A few weeks later, strange bottles, ingredients (including a large turtle), and other items begin arriving at the house. The sisters become anxious about their guests' response to the foreign dishes, and they appeal to their guests to be as gracious as possible because they are only allowing this meal out of kindness to their servant. The church members, who love Martine and Philippa, gladly agree.

Part 8: The Hymn

The morning of the celebration, Martine and Philippa receive a note that Mrs. Loewenhielm will be bringing her nephew, General Loewenhielm, with her that evening. The General recalls his awkward appearances there as a young lieutenant and looks forward to the chance to show more poise and confidence this time. Martine and Philippa inform Babette that there will be one more for dinner and that it is a man who spent several years in Paris. Babette is delighted.

When the guests arrive, they join hands and begin singing the Dean's favorite hymns. It is a time of sharing and community, and when they sit down to the meal, they are beginning to feel more unified than they have in years.

Part 9: General Loewenhielm

On the drive to the dinner, Loewenhielm had been reflecting on his life and the fact that, despite his military glory, earthly success, and beautiful wife, he is basically unhappy. He had begun to worry about the state of his soul but lacked direction on how to resolve his angst. He remembered the brash young officer he had been years before and how he had dreamed of having everything he now has.

Part 10: Babette's Dinner

A member of the congregation says the blessing over the meal, and Babette's hired assistant begins serving the food and wine. With each course, Loewenhielm is more amazed at how fine the food is and how it reminds him of his days at Paris's finest restaurants. Meanwhile, the conversation at the table revolves around miracles they had all seen during the Dean's years of ministry.

Part 11: General Loewenhielm's Speech

Overcome by the experience of the meal and the feeling of hospitality, Loewenhielm stands up to deliver a speech about righteousness and bliss. He is so eloquent that even though his fellow guests do not understand everything he says, they are moved. Around the table, the men and women of the congregation make amends for their recent bickering and grudges.

As the guests prepare to return home, the sisters walk them to the door. Before leaving, Loewenhielm confesses to Martine that he has never forgotten her and that he never will. They part amicably.

Part 12: The Great Artist

With the meal concluded, Martine and Philippa go to the kitchen to find Babette. She is surrounded by piles of dirty dishes and pots. They thank her for such a fine meal and for all of her work. She admits that she was once the chef at one of Paris's finest restaurants, but when the sisters ask about her return to Paris now that she has money, she answers that she will never go back to Paris. The sisters are relieved but surprised. Babette explains that she prepared the meal that night for herself because she is a great artist and needed to express her artistry. Back in Paris, the life she knew and the people who appreciated her work are all gone. She also tells them that she cannot return to Paris because she has spent her entire lottery winnings on this one meal.

With the understanding of who Babette truly is and how she sees herself, the sisters are moved to compassion. Philippa embraces her and assures her that her art is not lost, because in paradise she will be all God meant her to be.

Characters

Babette Hersant

Babette is welcomed into the home of Martine and Philippa because she is in dire need of a place to stay. She has fled Paris after she and her husband and son participated in an uprising and her two men were killed. Under accusations of arson, she left the country to save her life, taking with her a letter from Achille Papin asking the sisters to take Babette into their home.

Babette is confident, frugal, intelligent, congenial, loyal, and hardworking. She treats the sisters with respect and devotion, despite the many differences between them and herself. Although the sisters do not know it until the end, Babette had been a renowned Parisian chef. This is part of her identity, as she considers herself a great artist who must express her art in order to feel fulfilled. She waits patiently for twelve years before being given the opportunity to prepare a lavish meal for the sisters, an experience that means more to her than it does to them.

Lorens Loewenhielm

When the reader first meets Loewenhielm, he is a young lieutenant in the military, who is smitten with Martine. Never able to bring himself to reveal his feelings for her, he determines to continue his military career and be great so that he will not feel the awkwardness and unworthiness he felt around Martine. Many years later at the dinner, he is a guest. Having become a general with numerous achievements and medals, he feels self-confident entering the house that had intimidated him as a young man. At the same time, he has become introspective in his older age, and he realizes that all the "trappings" of the good life he pursued have failed to make him truly happy.

Martine

Martine is the slightly older sister in the story. As a young woman, her beauty had caught the attention of many men (including Lieutenant Loewenhielm), but she remained loyal to her father's church and his expectation that she and Philippa would oversee it after his death. As a result, she never marries, and she and her sister live together throughout their lives.

Martine is devout, kind, and non-judgmental. She honors her father's memory and loves her sister. Martine and her sister have led sheltered lives, and they both resist change. Martine's anxiety regarding the unknown is evident in the episode in which she sees the large turtle brought in for Babette's meal and is so terrified she has nightmares. Still, she decides that Babette's feelings are more important than her own anxiety. She visits the men and women of the congregation who will be guests at the dinner, asking them to

pretend to enjoy the meal, even if the dishes served are very strange. This gesture demonstrates her sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Achille Papin

A great French opera singer, Achille Papin takes a leisure trip to Norway, where he meets eighteen-year-old Philippa. Her voice astounds him, and he arranges to give her private voice lessons. During a duet, however, he kisses her, and she ends the lessons. Though he is disappointed not to see Philippa again, he is more distraught over what the world of art has lost in Philippa's decision not to pursue singing.

Papin is basically a kindhearted man who enjoys his fame and the benefits it brings him. The reader sees how his compassion has grown over the years when he comes to Babette's aid in Paris. With her life at risk, he remembers the two gentle Norwegian sisters and sends Babette to them with a personal letter asking them to care for her.

Philippa

One year younger than Martine, Philippa is the other daughter of the Dean. Together, she and her sister oversee their father's Lutheran sect in their small hometown. Like her sister, she honors her father's desire that they focus on the congregation rather than marry and have their own families. Also like her sister, she seems to bear no resentment for this course in life, and she and Martine live happily together for their entire lives.

Philippa has a beautiful voice, and in her youth it captured the attention of the French opera singer, Achille Papin. She turns from pursuing developing this talent, however, and devotes her life to her father's congregation. Philippa is a kind and religious woman who leads a plain but satisfying life. Her sensitivity is demonstrated in the last scene when, after Babette has revealed her identity as a chef and an artist, Philippa embraces her and encourages her in her art. She assures Babette that her days as an artist are not over because in heaven she will enjoy the fullness of her art as it was meant to be.

Themes

Food

The predominant theme of "Babette's Feast" is how food can transform the hearts of people and the atmosphere of a gathering. Prior to Babette's appearance on their doorstep, Martine and Philippa regarded food as something plain that had the sole purpose of providing their necessary sustenance. Because their lifestyle requires shunning the pleasures of the flesh, they had never considered food a luxurious experience to be enjoyed. Babette, on the other hand, has a very different perspective; she adores preparing exquisite food to delight others, and when she is finally given the chance to do this for the sisters and their congregation, the story takes on new life. The meal she prepares creates an atmosphere that fosters interaction and delight. Dinesen explains: "Usually in Berlevaag people did not speak much while they were eating. But somehow this evening tongues were loosened." She adds:

Most often the people in Berlevaag during the course of a good meal would come to feel a little heavy. Tonight it was not so. The *convives* grew lighter in weight and lighter of heart the more they ate and drank. They no longer needed to remind themselves of their vow [to pretend to enjoy the meal despite the strange dishes]. It was, they realized, when man has not only altogether forgotten but has firmly renounced all ideas of food and drink that he eats and drinks in the right spirit.

Even before the feast, Dinesen reveals that Babette has unusual powers with food. When she takes over running the house for the sisters, she respects their work feeding the needy. The sisters notice that "the soup-pails and baskets acquired a new, mysterious power to stimulate and strengthen their poor and sick." Whether she is cooking for friends, hostesses, strangers, the needy, or the wealthy, Babette has a special gift with food that fulfills her while satisfying others.

Contrast

Throughout the story, Dinesen sets up a variety of contrasts. Most of the contrast is between Babette and her hostesses, Martine and Philippa. Babette is an entirely different kind of woman than they are, and Dinesen draws these lines very clearly. Whereas Babette is dark, the sisters are fair. Whereas Babette is a French Catholic fleeing danger and unrest, the sisters are Norwegian Lutherans secure in their familiar and predictable environment. Whereas Babette embraces worldly experience and pleasure (though not to excess), the sisters consciously avoid such things. The religious contrast is an important one to the sisters, a lesson they learned from their father, who upon learning that Papin was Roman Catholic "grew a little pale," as he had never actually seen a Roman Catholic in person. Dinesen writes that the sisters and their congregation "renounced the pleasures of this world, for the earth and all that it held to them was but a kind of illusion." Shedding light on the sisters' upbringing, Dinesen offers

a contrast between them and the world beyond the environment created by their father; the sisters are described as having had an "almost supernatural fairness of flowering fruit trees or perpetual snow," and they "did not let themselves be touched by the flames of this world." On the evening of the dinner, Babette's diligent and frantic preparations in the kitchen contrast sharply with the sisters' preparation for the event. Martine and Philippa "put on their old black best frocks and their confirmation gold crosses. They sat down, folded their hands in their laps and committed themselves unto God."

What makes the idea of contrast a theme rather than a stylistic consideration is what Dinesen does with it. Rather than use it as a way to generate interest in the characters, she brings all the contrasts between Babette and the sisters to the moment of the feast, where she demonstrates how their differences ultimately bring them closer together. To everyone's surprise, their differences are not irreconcilable, as General Loewenhielm announces in his toast, "Righteousness and bliss have kissed one another!" By treating each other with kindness and understanding, the women learn that their differences in no way prevent them from achieving emotional intimacy. This closeness is hinted at earlier in the story, when the sisters have taken Babette into their home and are getting to know her better. Dinesen reveals a realization they make: "She had appeared to be a beggar; she turned out to be a conqueror." The contrast between the first impression she made and the person she actually is only important because the sisters keep their hearts open to finding out who Babette really is.

Style

Biblical Allusion

Biblically well-read, Dinesen applies her knowledge of Scripture in "Babette's Feast" to underscore the strong religious overtones of Martine and Philippa's home they share with Babette. Throughout the story, subtle biblical allusions are introduced without reference, giving them the natural context of everyday thought that they have in the hearts of the sisters and the congregation. In describing the sisters' beauty in their youth, Dinesen explains that they caught the eyes of the men in the congregation. She writes that the older men "had been prizing the maidens far above rubies," an allusion to Proverbs 3:15 ("She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare to her") and Proverbs 31:10 ("A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies").

Babette is also the subject of biblical allusions. At one point, she is likened to Martha and the sisters to Mary, a reference to a story in the book of Luke (Luke 10:38—42) in which Jesus visits the sisters Mary and Martha. While Martha busies herself with hostess duties and preparing food, Mary sits quietly to learn. Babette is also deemed a "good and faithful servant," an allusion to the parable of the talents. In this parable, a master puts some of his servants in charge of money to see what they do with it. The servant who doubles his sum is praised, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21).

The feast itself inspires a reference to the wedding in which Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1—11). Dinesen writes, "They were sitting down to a meal, well, so had people done at the wedding of Cana. And grace has chosen to manifest itself there, in the very wine, as fully as anywhere." This is a significant reference for the conservative Lutherans at the meal because it gives them biblical permission to enjoy the event and its wine, and it is the first step toward the eventual reconciliation of the pleasures of the world and the fullness of the spirit.

Simile

Perhaps because the Norwegian setting and characters were unfamiliar to her American readers ("Babette's Feast" was, after all, written for an American magazine), Dinesen scatters similes throughout her story to provide her readers with familiar images. This approach begins in the very first paragraph, where Dinesen writes of the small town of Berlevaag that it "looks like a child's toy-town of little wooden pieces painted gray, tallow, pink and many other colors." When Babette asks if she may use her lottery winnings to pay for and prepare a lavish French meal, Dinesen writes, "Babette's dark eyes were as eager and pleading as a dog's." General Loewenhielm dresses in his military regalia for the feast, and when he arrives, "in his bright uniform, his breast

covered with decorations, [he] strutted and shone like an ornamental bird. A golden pheasant or a peacock, in this sedate party of black crows and jackdaws."

Historical Context

Norway in the 1870s

In the 1870s, Norway was a relatively peaceful, prosperous nation. Although it was under Swedish rule, Norway had been allowed to have its own constitution. This simply meant that rather than being governed by its own monarch, it was under the authority of Sweden. In the Parliament and among the people, however, a growing nationalist movement began to pave the way for Norway's eventual independence. Economically, Norway was healthy. Increased trade and more favorable tariffs brought Norway further into the opportunities offered by the European economy. Modernity was making its way into the country's business and daily life: The first railway had been in operation since 1854, the telegraph was available, and agricultural methods had been modernized. Industry had grown substantially since the 1840s, which, combined with the increased trade, substantially grew the merchant fleet.

With the economic upturns, however, came class conflict and a call for social reforms. This eventually led to the first liberal political block that challenged the predominant conservative thinkers in government. Still, it would not be until 1884 that this block would officially become a political party.

The population in 1870s Norway was quite homogenous. There were very few non-Norwegians, so the language and customs of Norway remained well preserved. Family life was very traditional, with women expected to marry young, have children, and maintain the home, whereas men were expected to work hard to provide for their families.

The 1871 Communard Uprising in Paris

France in the mid-nineteenth century was a place of political turmoil. Between 1852 and 1871, the period called the Second Empire saw the Emperor Napoleon III pursue colonial expansion and foster a strong economy. The Franco-Prussian War, however, lasted from 1870 to 1871 and brought France and its emperor to its knees. A provisional government was put in place as a stopgap until February 1871, when elections were held for a National Assembly. A group of radicals, however, were angry at how quickly France had surrendered to Prussia and how the new government was shaping up to be conservative. In March, these radicals and the National Guard seized Paris and appointed themselves the *Communards* (supporters of *La Commune de Paris*) to take over as the governing body. Government troops were sent on May 21 to destroy the *Communards*, and the week that followed became known as "Bloody Week." After the defeat, punishments were handed down to those who participated. In all, eighteen thousand Parisians lost their lives and seven thousand were deported.

Critical Overview

Critics generally characterize "Babette's Feast" as a triumphant and sensitive story of generosity, grace, and healing. John Simon of *National Review* deems it as "one of the author's finest." The characterization of the women in the story and the relationships between them strike readers as believable and sympathetic. In the *New Republic*, Stanley Kauffmann observed, "Lightly but clearly interwoven in the story are oppositions of cultures□pleasure-loving Catholic France, dour and hell-conscious Protestant Denmark." Despite the differences between Babette and the sisters Martine and Philippa, the women find a way to live contentedly together, caring for each other and finally getting to know each other in meaningful ways. In fact, Bruce Bassoff of *Studies in Short Fiction* notes that "Babette's Feast" features new knowledge and "a desire for transcendence," which are present in other short stories by Dinesen. Her use of these ideas and plot elements in multiple stories suggests that depicting them to her readers was important to Dinesen.

Dinesen's use of food in the story is a frequent topic of critical discussion. Dinesen uses food in the story in two opposing ways: first as an outward reflection of the differences between Babette and her hostesses and then as a means of bringing unity and commonality to a diverse group of people. In *Style*, critic Esther Rashkin comments on the former:

Food has tended to be viewed allegorically in the story as representing, for example, the schism between the ethical, Norwegian, puritanical sect of Protestantism, nurtured on split cod and ale-and-bread soup, and the aesthetic, sensuous inclinations of French Catholicism, nourished by haute cuisine and epitomized by the master chef Babette.

She adds:

There is no denying that Babette's sumptuous feast and its aftermath offer a reflection on religion and on the opposition between the spiritual and the carnal, while also raising questions of artistic creation and identity.

More attention, however, is given to the banquet that gives the story its title. With the feast itself, Dinesen not only introduces the sense of sharing that comes with enjoying a meal together, but she adds the elements of generosity, service, mystery, and revelation. Rashkin notes that the feast demonstrates how the differences between Babette and the sisters come together in a unique and transformative way over the course of the evening. Of particular interest to Rashkin is the way the dinner opens up the hearts and mouths of the guests to explore emotional territory previously kept private. She notes that many of the guests, along with the main characters, have suffered loss that remained unspoken until the feast. She explains that the dinner "allows for a communion in loss by enabling loss to be talked about and the process of mourning to begin." Rashkin concludes her commentary by suggesting that writing this story had a similarly cathartic purpose for Dinesen, who endured considerable loss during her years in Africa. Having lost her coffee farms, her husband, her lover, two

pregnancies, and almost two decades, she returned to Denmark alone. Rashkin offers this biographical interpretation of "Babette's Feast":

If Africa was for Dinesen a "child she had buried" and could only talk or write about from a distance, and if "Babette's Feast" is all about the creation of a work of art as the therapeutic medium for "talking" about loss, we may suggest that Dinesen too, like the sisters . . . "used" this narrative for her own therapeutic needs. . . . Created as a symptom of her need to grieve, as a vehicle for facilitating the grieving process, and as a subtle commentary on the intricate relationship between writing and bereavement, "Babette's Feast" can ultimately be read as a text that humorously and poignantly tells the tale of Dinesen's own recipe for mourning.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey examines Dinesen's depiction of the unique ways in which women take care of each other in "Babette's Feast," and she relates them to the author's life.

Isak Dinesen's "Babette's Feast" features three main characters, all women, who find themselves as unlikely housemates. Martine and Philippa are sisters who remain unmarried so they can take up the responsibilities of overseeing the congregation of their deceased father's Lutheran sect. The other woman in the story is a French woman named Babette, who fled Paris in great danger and is taken in by the two sisters. Babette and her generous hostesses have little in common, but among the strongest qualities they all share is the impulse to take care of each other. Despite their differences, they forge a familial bond through the act of mutual support, first out of a sense of duty, but ultimately out of affection.

Initially, the sisters know little of Babette, and her inability and unwillingness to communicate with them makes her difficult to understand at times. Besides the language barrier that exists between Babette and the sisters, Babette carries a great deal of pain and loss at having fled Paris for her life after the deaths of her husband and son. Dinesen writes, "When in the early days the sisters had gently condoled her upon her losses, they had been met with that majesty and stoicism of which Monsieur Papin had written [in the letter introducing her to them]." The lack of communication between the women compels them to take care of each other in practical ways. They want to help and support each other, but as virtual strangers, the only ways they can do so are by attending to each other's obvious needs. The sisters come to Babette's aid by giving her a safe place to stay; by providing food, shelter, and companionship; and by making few demands of her. In turn, Babette looks after the sisters by cooking, cleaning, shopping, and running the house so they can focus on their congregation and their charity work. Babette shows respect and appreciation for the sisters by working hard without complaining. In all of these ways, the women help lighten each other's loads, and they begin to build a relationship of trust and dependence that will later open up the possibility of emotional bonds.

As their relationships gradually develop over the next twelve years, the sisters and Babette learn to take care of each other in more personal ways. As they get to know each other better, they learn how to be kind, understanding, respectful, patient, and intuitive toward each other in ways that are personally meaningful to each woman. The reader also notices that the three women do not pressure each other, but instead are sensitive enough not to pry into the pain or emotional discomfort of one another. Because Babette is so different from the sisters, they all make special efforts to accommodate each other. Babette wants to cook in her familiar, grand way, but she realizes that the sisters expect to eat exactly as they always have, so she sacrifices her art for their comfort and makes the plain dishes they request. Later, the sisters agree to allow Babette to prepare a large French meal, even though they are very apprehensive

about the dishes that will be served. For Babette's sake, however, they determine to pretend to enjoy the food, and Martine asks the guests to do likewise. In this way, the sisters unselfishly accommodate Babette's wishes, as she has done for them for so many years. Gestures such as these reflect emotional growth between the women. By the end of the story, the women have such love for each other that they feel deep sympathy and compassion for each other's pain. Martine and Philippa listen as Babette explains what she lost when she left Paris, and they are moved by her pain. Dinesen explains:

The strange names and titles of people lost to Babette faintly confused the two ladies, but there was such an infinite perspective of tragedy in her announcement that in their responsive state of mind they felt her losses as their own, and their eyes filled with tears.

The development of the emotional bond is important to Babette because she has been emotionally alone for many years, whereas the sisters have been close all their lives. But the emotional bond with Babette is not meaningless to the sisters. Having led very sheltered lives, they grow in unique ways from knowing her. Their experiences are broadened and their ability to be open emotionally is stretched as a result of this stranger entering their lives.

Dinesen contrasts the sisterly interactions of the women with the ways in which the men in the story try to take care of women. Martine's and Philippa's father, the Dean, took care of them in practical ways: He provided their food, shelter, clothing, education, and religious upbringing. The women's recollections, however, do not include any warm memories of loving talks, fatherly advice, or emotional connection at all. The reader has the impression that the Dean never asked his daughters what they wanted to do in life but rather communicated to them (and to the congregation) his expectation that they would take over for him after his death. Although Dinesen tells little about what kind of man the Dean was, his parenting style seems consistent with his strict demeanor.

Two mini-chapters tell of each of the sisters' "lovers," which is hardly the correct term for two men who barely knew or interacted with the women. First, Martine is silently admired by Lieutenant Loewenhielm. He is struck by her physical beauty and is so intimidated by her that he cannot speak to her until his final departure. His feelings for her have little to do with wanting to know her, love her, and take care of her. Instead, his feelings are more akin to infatuation, and he is drawn to her by his own longings. He imagines life with her as being "with no creditors, dunning letters or parental lectures, with no secret, unpleasant pangs of conscience and with a gentle, golden-haired angel to guide and reward him."

Philippa's physical beauty, along with her extraordinary soprano voice, catches the attention of a French opera singer named Achille Papin. His desire to be with her is driven by his love for the art of music and the desire to see her rise to fame in Paris. In fact, he gives little indication that he has personal affection for the young woman, even after he boldly kisses her during a duet. He has no interest in knowing her and taking

care of her particular needs but rather in seeing her achieve the success *he* values. He tells her that she will

rise like a star above any diva of the past or present. The Emperor and Empress, the Princes, great ladies and *bels esprits* of Paris would listen to her, and shed tears. The common people too would worship her, and she would bring consolation and strength to the wronged and oppressed.

Later in life, when Babette is in need, Papin seems to understand at some level that women are best in taking care of other women; he sends Babette to Martine and Philippa, confident they will care for Babette. None of these men□the Dean, Loewenhielm, or Papin□displays any interest in attending to the emotional needs of the women in the story. At best, they have practical notions of what the women need, but in no way do they take care of the women the way the women take care of each other. To further emphasize this point, Dinesen tells nothing of the way men take care of each other. Combined, these images of men place the focus squarely on how women take care of each other.

A great deal of literary attention has been given to Dinesen's personal life and its influences on her writing. Her best-known work is easily *Out of Africa*, which relies very heavily on her own experiences in Africa. But her other works also draw from her personal experiences, and "Babette's Feast" is no exception. When Dinesen was a child, her father committed suicide, leaving her mother alone to run the house and rear the children. Luckily, a grandmother and an aunt who both lived nearby took on the responsibility of helping Dinesen's mother and the children manage without a man in the house. Biographers note that the help they lent was material, emotional, and spiritual. This tells the reader of "Babette's Feast" that Dinesen knew a great deal about how and why women take care of each other and that she was deeply affected by this kind of care. It is no wonder, then, that her portrayal of Babette, Martine, and Philippa is so warm and believable.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on "Babette's Feast," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Petruso earned a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in screenwriting from the University of Texas. In the following essay, Petruso explores how the idea of art saturates aspects of Dinesen's short story.

According to *The Random House Dictionary*, a definition of art is "the quality, production, expression, according to aesthetic principles, of what is beautiful." This concepts of art and artistry and how they can affect life is a central theme of Isak Dinesen's short story, "Babette's Feast," primarily expressed through characters and their actions. Though Babette Hersant is most obviously an artist with food as the title implies□the story's title claims that she creates a "feast" not a "nice meal"□several primary characters have an artistic element that helps answer questions such as "what is art?" and "how does it affect every day life?" Some believe that life itself is art, and this story explores that concept to the fullest.

The title character, Babette, has the most obvious and the most complicated relationship to art of any character in "Babette's Feast." Dinesen clearly labels Babette an artist. At the end of the story, the author entitles the last section "The Great Artist," and Babette herself declares to the sisters that "I am a great artist, Mesdames." In that section, Babette reveals to the sisters that she was a chef at a famous restaurant in Paris, Café Anglais, before she was forced to leave Paris and came to Norway to become their servant. Babette also tells them that she spent the whole of her winnings in the French lottery on the meal□10,000 francs. Babette sacrifices what could have given her a different, if not better, richer, and fuller life in Paris or elsewhere, to be able to create what she has not been able to do for the past 12 years while she has been in the sisters' employ: an extravagant culinary work of art. Dinesen gives Babette the chance to define what an artist is. She declares, "A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing." Much of the story is the embodiment of this idea.

It is not until that moment that at least one of the sisters fully appreciates Babette's sacrifice for her art. Philippa is moved by Babette's words in the last pages of "Babette's Feast." Though Babette was against the rich in the French civil war from which she escaped, her style of cooking was meant to be appreciated by such people before the uprising changed life in the city. It is only then that Philippa, and the reader, really understands that while Babette has not been able to be the artist she was meant to be for many years while in the sisters' employ, she has made her life a reflection of her artistry. That is, Babette found means of expressing her art in smaller ways□on smaller, odder canvases□than in the one meal she made in honor of the Dean's one hundredth birthday. Achille Papin, the singer/teacher who was connected with Philippa in her youth and who sent Babette to the sisters' door, was able to relate this idea best for Babette. While describing the longing to do one's best as an artist, Babette quotes Papin as saying, "Through all the world there goes one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost!"

Though Babette is grateful to the sisters for providing her a home and a position after she came to their door penniless and alone, the limitations of the sisters' severe and quiet lifestyle affects Babette's ability to express her art the way she had in Paris before the uprising. But for the 12 years in the sister' employ until Babette wins the French lottery, Dinesen describes several ways in which Babette expresses herself culinary artist. When the sisters demonstrate to her what their preferred meal is□split cod and an ale-and-bread soup□Dinesen writes that she masters it like a native of the city. Babette acquiesces in their demand for plain and simple food for themselves, but when told that the food she creates for the poor□"soup-pails and baskets"□is important, she puts much effort into doing the best she could. Her food for unfortunates "acquired a new, mysterious power to stimulate and strengthen the poor and the sick." Babette also is able to be cost efficient. The costs of running the household go down and she is described as winning many battles while haggling over the price of food with local tradesman. Though these small works are not as extravagant as the meals she cooked in Paris, they allow Babette a limited outlet for her artistry. They give her leave to do her utmost and be an artist every day of her life.

Another way that the idea of art works in "Babette's Feast" is in how Babette's art is appreciated and used by those who partake in it. The main place where this occurs is during the meal, primarily described in "Babette's Dinner" and "General Lowenhielm's Speech." Only General Loewenhielm directly verbalizes the extraordinary nature of the dinner that Babette has cooked. He has eaten her culinary art before. In the text, he recounts an original dish he ate in Paris and that a woman, implied to be Babette, was considered "the greatest culinary genius of the age." Loewenhielm is constantly amazed by the courses that she cooks for them, and knows the name of each dish and every beverage. He is a connoisseur of Babette's art.

Though the other attendees at the dinner are not as sophisticated about such culinary matters as the general, Babette's art moves them as well. To compare this appreciation to how an audience views a painting in a museum, the general is an educated viewer who understands the background of the painter and can explain why the piece is beautiful, while the other attendees of the dinner are more casual viewers of the work. Such patrons walk by, perhaps consciously appreciating the color scheme and the subject of the painting, but something about the work jars a memory, creates an emotion, and perhaps starts an unexpected conversation. It affects them deeply. Babette's feast has such an effect on the other guests. Because the sisters, primarily Martine, were concerned that the meal might be bad somehow, all the attendees, members of the Dean's congregation, decide not to comment at all on the food that Babette serves them at the dinner for the sake of the sisters. The attendees□save the general, an outsider added to the guest list at the last minute□stick to this pledge, but the meal greatly affects them. Though it is not local custom to talk during the meal, the guests speak freely of the Dean, his life, and their memories of him. Later, Dinesen writes that the divisions between certain people are overcome and old grudges are forgiven. Babette's culinary art works emotional magic.

Dinesen's definition of the artist also applies to the sisters, whose story makes up the majority of the text, but each in a slightly different way. Like Babette, both sisters choose

to live to the utmost, using self-discipline, sacrifice, and faith as their colors. After the meal, however, it is Philippa, the younger sister, who understands better than her elder sister Martine that Babette is an artist. Philippa makes an emotional connection to Babette at the end of "Babette's Feast." Martine compliments Babette as well, saying "They all thought it was a nice dinner," but has a different relationship to art in her life than Philippa. Philippa is more obviously connected because of her singing, but it is Dinesen's description of their lives that makes them artists in their own way.

In her youth, Philippa was recognized for having a lovely singing voice and potential for greatness in that art form. She is discovered by a well-known Paris-based opera singer, Papin, who immediately offers to give her singing lessons. Philippa so inspires him that he makes great plans for her operatic singing career, which she seems to share because Dinesen says that she keeps them a secret from her sister and father. However, after Papin goes too far one day and kisses her while they are working on a scene from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* together, she immediately ends her singing education. Dinesen implies it is because of what the kiss stirs inside of her. Thus Philippa had the chance and the skills to be an artist in song, but she took her gift elsewhere.

Though Philippa turns her back on her singing career, she and her sister live the austere life of artists of their faith. Their father was the leader of a church and had many followers. Though Dinesen does not directly address the issue of whether or not marriage was permitted for the women of this faith, his daughters did not marry, but made their lives a living work of art defined in the image of morality, ethics, and frugality set forth by their father. In the second paragraph of the story, Dinesen describes how they have the figures for fashionable clothes, but they choose to dress only in black or gray. While both sisters have a moment in which they connect with a man and a brief kiss of some sort, their lives are focused on what the Dean preached as important. Dinesen writes of the Dean's church, "Its members renounced the pleasures of this world. . . ." The author also says that the sisters never use foul language, as the Dean taught, and devote all their time and money to charitable works. Everything the pair does in their entire lives was to live to this ideal, a devotion mirrored by Babette's dedication to her culinary artistry in whatever form that was able to take in her circumstances. The sisters' lives are works of art in that they appreciated what was set for them and followed it to the letter. Their lives are beautiful in their purity, their piety, and single-minded focus.

In Bruce Bassoff's essay, "Babette Can Cook: Life and Art in Three Stories by Isak Dinesen," he argues that Martine and Philippa are "shallow" while Babette is "deep." In this argument, Bassoff oversimplifies Dinesen's conclusion in "Babette's Feast." It is Babette's artistic abilities, and the way she has incorporated them in her everyday life for the past 12 years, that has helped refine the artistry of the life of the sisters. When they learn that Babette was once a cook to an elderly priest, Dinesen writes, "the sisters resolved to surpass the French priest in asceticism." Outsiders like Babette are challenged by the sisters' life artistry and forced to find new outlets for their talents. In the end, though it takes Babette's obvious culinary artistry to make the sisters, and their

readers, more fully appreciate their lives, Martine and Philippa have already lived the full life of spiritual artists.

Source: A. Petruso, Critical Essay on "Babette's Feast," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

In 1987, Danish writer and director Gabriel Axel adapted "Babette's Feast" to film for Orion Pictures. It garnered an impressive following and won the 1988 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

Topics for Further Study

After so many years of living a certain way, Babette reveals much about herself to Martine and Philippa at the feast. Given the ways the characters interacted during the feast, how do you think the women's relationships may be different afterwards? How may they remain the same? Do you think Babette continues to live with the sisters? Write an "Afterword" addressing these questions. You may write it in Dinesen's style or approach it as an objective follow-up.

Imagine that you are in a similar position as Babette after she won the money and offered to prepare an authentic French meal. Consider your own family's background, and prepare a menu for a feast featuring dishes from the native land of part or all of your family. Include at least three recipes with the menu. Be sure to consider every course of the meal and include beverages.

Research the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. If you have difficulty finding enough information, extend your research to other Scandinavian Lutheran churches. How has it changed since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Were sects like that formed by the Dean common, and what kinds of factors led groups to differentiate themselves slightly from the main church body?

Babette considers herself a great artist because she is a great chef. Do you agree that cuisine is a form of art? In the story, what does her cooking have in common with other forms of art, and how is it different? Choose one other student in the class whose opinion differs from yours and hold an informal debate with a panel of three students who will decide which of you makes the stronger arguments.

Compare and Contrast

1870s: Although Norway has its own constitution and its Parliament is growing stronger, it is under Swedish rule. This and other factors feed a rising nationalism that results in Norway's independence in 1905.

1950s: Having regained its independence, Norway returns to its government structure of a constitutional monarchy. Norway has deserted its World War I neutrality and joined NATO, making it a more active player in international affairs.

Today: In the 1990s, Norway maintains its independence from the European Union. The 1994 vote is very close, with a slight majority of 52 percent voting against joining Europe.

1870s: The state church is still the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. Put in place after the Reformation in 1500, the state church is funded by the government. Most Norwegians are members of this church. Having a state church does not, however, prohibit free practice of other faiths and denominations.

1950s: Little has changed over the years. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway is still the state church, and most Norwegians continue to be members with varying degrees of activity.

Today: Approximately 90 percent of Norwegians are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. While it is still the state church, a growing number of Norwegians favor separating the church and the government.

1870s: About thirty years after Norway began to establish industrial businesses, such as textile factories, the economy is healthy and strong. During this period, the number of merchant ships in Norway rises substantially, evidence of the growth of Norway's industries.

1950s: In the post—World War II years, Norway's economy has grown. More attention is given to building welfare programs to provide for the low-income segments of the population.

Today: As a result of the strong economy and the postwar welfare programs, Norwegian society is less characterized by class distinctions than many Western nations.

1870s: Women are second to men in Norwegian society. Although they won inheritance rights in the 1850s, women are still barred from pursuing higher education, and married women are not allowed to manage money.

1950s: Progress in women's rights has been made, but inequality still characterizes gender rights and privileges. With the rise of industrialism, more women have entered

the workforce, but at lower pay rates than men receive. Women also have the right to vote.

Today: Women hold visible positions in government and occupy numerous seats in the Parliament. Women comprise at least half of all college graduates each year, and the government has handed down "affirmative action"—type statutes to increase the number of women in the workforce.

What Do I Read Next?

All of the short stories in the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny* (1958), including "Babette's Feast," were written by Dinesen in the 1950s for American magazines and American readers.

Karen Blixen (as Isak Dinesen) is best known for *Out of Africa* (1937). Largely based on her actual experiences in Africa trying to operate successful coffee farms, this book remains popular because of its descriptions of landscape, animals, and people and its honest portrayal of a difficult lifestyle.

Like Water for Chocolate (1992) is Laura Esquivel's magical yet realistic novel about the emotional and spiritual effects food can have. The novel is set in Mexico and tells the story of a young woman forced to allow her sister to marry her lover. Her ability to cook, however, includes the ability to use her emotions and passions as ingredients.

Einar Molland's *Church Life in Norway: 1800—1950* (1978) closely examines the role of the state church in Norway and its influence on daily life. Molland also explores challenges to the church's theological views over this time span and how these challenges have affected the church's position in Norwegian society.

Further Study

Danielsen, Rolf, Stale Dyrvik, Tore Gronlie, Knut Helie, and Edgar Hovland, *Norway: A History from the Vikings to Our Own Times*, Scandinavian University Press, 1995.

Beginning with the mysterious Vikings, Danielsen et al. take the reader through Norway's intriguing history of thought and culture. These five historians account for Norway's economic, social, and political changes over the years. This volume originally appeared in Norwegian.

Hope, Nicholas, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism: 1700—1918*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Hope offers a history of the Lutheran church in Germany and Scandinavia, explaining its roots in the Reformation, its place in society, and its handling of the crisis of World War I.

Pelensky, Olga Anastasia, ed., *Isak Dinesen: Critical Views*, Ohio University Press, 1993.

With twenty-six articles, this collection of literary criticism provides an overview of the works of Dinesen.

Thurman, Judith, *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller*, St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Regarded by many as one of the best biographies of Dinesen, this book takes the reader from Dinesen's birth and childhood, through her tumultuous years in Africa, to her death in Denmark.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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