Brighton Beach Memoirs Study Guide

Brighton Beach Memoirs by Neil Simon

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Introduction

Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* is one of his most widely respected plays. Simon earned kudos for what many critics consider the best example of his efforts to combine his trademark humor with a level of drama and character introspection. *Brighton Beach Memoirs* was first produced at the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles on December 10, 1982. It debuted on Broadway on March 27, 1983, at the Alvin Theatre. Like many of Simon's successes, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* enjoyed a lengthy run and financial success. The play won Simon the New York Drama Critics Circle Prize for Best Play.

Critics attributed much of the success of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* to Simon's newfound sophistication. Before this play, Simon had a long career of successful plays that were either comic or serious. His previous attempts to combine the two rarely impressed critics or audiences. Critics praised *Brighton Beach* for its deft characterizations and meaningful humor. Some attribute this to the fact that Simon knew his material well. Though not strictly autobiographical, Simon based the play on his memories of growing up in New York City in the years just before World War II. Despite the play's success, some critics found *Brighton Beach Memoirs* superficial, comparing it to a soap opera, albeit one with good jokes.

The success of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* led to two more plays featuring protagonist Eugene Jerome and his family, 1985's *Biloxi Blues,* which dealt with Eugene's armed service years, and 1986's *Broadway Bound*. Each of these plays received more positive reviews and contained more extensive autobiographical material than *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. With the success of this trilogy, Simon's reputation as a premiere American playwright was cemented.

Author Biography

Simon was born on July 4, 1927, in the Bronx, New York. His father, Irving, worked as a garment salesman. Irving Simon's job forced him to leave his family periodically during Simon's childhood. Simon's mother, Mamie, was forced to work during these periods in such places as Gimbel's department store to support Simon and his elder brother Danny. After his parents divorced, Simon lived for a time in Forest Hills, New York, with relatives. From an early age, Simon displayed comic and writing talents, and his elder brother encouraged his efforts.

After graduating from high school in 1944, Simon attended several colleges, served in the Army, and taught himself to write comedy from books and imitating successful comics. After being discharged from the military in 1946, Simon was hired to work in the mailroom at Warner Brothers studios. Danny Simon already worked in the publicity department there. The brothers Simon were given an opportunity to audition as comedy writers, and they were immediately hired by Goodman Ace on the basis of their sample. The brothers worked as a comedy writing team for the next decade in radio and television.

Danny Simon decided to pursue a career in television directing in 1956, while Simon continued to write television comedy for several shows. He won two Emmy Awards for his television writing. But Simon felt restricted by television and began working on a play around 1959. Titled *Come Blow Your Horn,* Simon rewrote the play for several years. It was finally produced on Broadway in 1961 and was a minor success. Simon immediately began work on his next play, a comedy called *Barefoot in the Park*. The play opened in 1962 and was an immediate smash hit.

The success of *Barefoot in the Park* established Simon's reputation as a playwright, and he began turning numerous plays. Almost all of them were moneymakers on Broadway. Many of his plays in the 1960s were straight comedies, including 1965's *The Odd Couple*. By the late-1960s, Simon attempted to combine comedy with serious issues. These efforts were not always successful or critically well-received, especially 1970's *The Gingerbread Lady*. After Simon's wife Joan died in 1973, leaving him with two young daughters, Ellen and Nancy, Simon's career temporarily floundered.

Simon remarried soon after his wife's death, to actress Marsha Mason, and moved to California in 1975. He wrote both successful comedies, such as *California Suite* in 1976, and more serious plays that dealt with his personal turmoils, such as 1978's *Chapter Two* (based on Joan's death and his subsequent remarriage). His comedies were usually bigger successes, both critically and at the box office. By 1983, however, Simon was able to combine the comic with the serious in his semi-autobiographical *Brighton Beach Memoirs,* the first play of a trilogy. The result was acclaim from the audience and critics alike.

Simon continued to use *Brighton Beach Memoirs*'s main character in two more plays, each more successful than the last. Though plays written after the trilogy were not

always as successful, Simon's reputation as a gifted playwright was firmly solidified, and Simon continued to write Broadway plays well into the 1990s.

Plot Summary

Act I

Brighton Beach Memoirs opens in September, 1937, in the Jerome household. The Jeromes live in a lower middle class neighborhood in Brighton Beach, New York. It is about 6:30 in the evening and fourteen-year-old Eugene Morris Jerome is playing a semi-imaginary game of baseball outside. As his ball hits the house, Eugene's aunt, Blanche Morton, gets a headache. Eugene's mother Kate yells at her son to stop the game and come inside. Eugene reluctantly comes inside. He tells the audience that he wants to play professional baseball or be a writer. He is sent upstairs, and he begins writing in his journal.

Eugene tells the audience that his Aunt Blanche and his two cousins, Nora and Laurie, live with his family because Blanche's husband died of cancer six years ago. Eugene's father, Jack, has worked two jobs to support everyone for three and a half years. Eugene's writing is interrupted when Kate demands that he come down and set the table instead of Laurie. Laurie has a heart flutter, and Eugene complains that he has to do everything because of his cousin's illness.

As Eugene sets the table, sixteen-year-old Nora comes in and is very excited. She has been offered a chance to audition for a dancing role in a Broadway show. Nora says that the producer assured her that she would get the part if her mother gave her permission. Blanche hesitates because it would mean Nora would have to drop out of school, but Nora argues that she could support Blanche and Laurie if she took the job. Blanche can't make the decision, leaving it up to Jack when he returns.

Eugene's mother sends him to the store. Nora and Laurie talk in their room. They discuss their dead father and they resolve to spend no more money on anything so they can buy a house for their mother. When Eugene returns, his elder brother Stanley is waiting for him. Stanley tells Eugene that he was fired from his job for standing up for a coworker. To regain his position, he must apologize to his boss. Stanley wants to stand up for his principles, but the family desperately needs the money. Stanley decides to talk it over with his father.

A tired-looking Jack Jerome arrives home carrying several large boxes. They contain noise makers and party favors. Jack's second job was selling these items to hotels and nightclubs, but the business closed that day and he was left without employment. Jack worries about being able to support the large family. At the dinner table, everyone is tense. Jack suggests to Stan that he ask his boss for a raise. Laurie brings up Nora's offer, much to her chagrin. After dinner, Nora insists on talking about the audition with Jack, though her mother tries to prevent her. Jack offers his advice as they walk down to the beach.

Meanwhile, Stanley and Eugene talk in their room. Eugene describes an erotic dream he has had, and Stanley tells him it was a wet dream. Eugene presses him for information on puberty and girls, especially their cousin Nora, but Stanley's focus is on his employment problem. Kate and Blanche have a conversation downstairs. Kate tries to convince Blanche to come to a party that Jack's company is giving next week, but Blanche reveals that she has a date with Frank Murphy, a man who lives across the street with his mother. Nora and Jack return, and Nora presses her mother to make a decision. Blanche, like Jack, thinks Nora should finish high school. This angers Nora, and she storms upstairs.

Jack is growing more tired, and Kate wants him to come to bed. Stanley appears and asks to talk to his father. Stanley tells Jack what happened, and his father understands his dilemma. Stanley decides to write the letter and apologize. Stanley hires Eugene to write the letter in exchange for a detailed description of the time Stanley saw Nora naked in the shower.

Act II

This act takes place one week later. The household is in disarray because Jack has had a heart attack in the past week and is resting at home. Also, Blanche is getting ready for her date with Frank Murphy. Stanley sneaks into the house and talks to Eugene in their room. Stanley has lost his entire week's salary playing poker and is desperate about what to do.

Jack decides to get up and go downstairs to meet Blanche's date. Kate is appalled at her husband' s disregard for his health, and they argue. Nora comes downstairs and leaves for her date, not wanting to see her mother. Blanche makes an appearance, and everyone present thinks she looks like a movie star. Jack sends Eugene and Laurie to get ice cream. Kate goes upstairs to ask Stanley for his pay so she can give emergency money to Blanche. Stanley tells her that he lost it in a poker game. Kate tries to remain calm and decides not to tell anyone about the matter until later.

Kate comes back into the kitchen in a very agitated state. Blanche is still worrying about Nora. Kate gets angry at Blanche for only focusing on her own problems. The sisters get into a fight which is interrupted by Laurie's return. On her way to get ice cream, Frank Murphy's mother gave the girl a note. Frank had a car accident and will not be able to keep their date because he is in the hospital. This leads to another argument between Kate and Blanche. Kate expresses her resentment at Blanche for things that go back to their childhood. Blanche decides that she will move out and live with a friend while she looks for a job. When she has a job, she tells Kate, she will take her daughters and move into her own home.

Eugene is sent upstairs to get Stanley and Laurie for dinner. Stanley demands money from Eugene in case he has to sleep out that night. Stanley has decided to join the Army because he might be able to make more money that way. Eugene becomes very

upset, but Stanley still leaves. Eugene cannot tell his family about where Stanley has gone during dinner. After the meal, he tells Laurie.

Several hours later, Blanche waits outside for Nora to return. Blanche tells Nora about her decision. Nora tells her that she feels that Blanche does not care for her as much as she does Laurie. They make an awkward peace. Kate comes downstairs because of the noise, and Kate asks Blanche not to leave. Kate convinces Blanche to stay while she looks for work.

The next day, Stanley comes back just in time for dinner. Stanley says he passed the physical, but he could not join up knowing how much the family needed him at home. Stanley and Jack talk. Stanley made some money at a bowling alley, which he gives to his mother. He promises to make up the rest. Jack tells him that war is coming.

Upstairs, Stanley gives Eugene a present: a postcard with a naked woman on it. Eugene is overwhelmed. Jack gets a letter saying that his cousin and family have escaped Poland and are coming to New York City. He begins making plans for fitting the extra family members into the house.

Characters

Eugene Morris Jerome

Eugene is the fourteen-year-old narrator of *Bright Beach Memoirs*. He wants to be a baseball player, but if that does not work out, he'll settle for being a writer. He keeps a detailed journal of his family's eccentricities. Eugene is concerned for his family, especially his overworked father, but complains about their demands on him. He feels like a slave to his mother, who is constantly sending him to the store on one errand or another. He also feels that he is blamed for everything that goes wrong. Eugene has a love-hate relationship with his elder brother, Stanley. For the most part, though, Eugene worships his brother because he has integrity and tells Eugene about girls and masturbation. Eugene is at the beginning of puberty and just beginning to notice the opposite sex, especially his pretty cousin Nora. Eugene writes a letter of apology for Stanley in exchange for details about the time Stanley saw Nora naked.

Jack Jerome

Jack is the patriarch of the family. He works two jobs to support everyone in the household and looks older than his forty years. He is constantly tired, but makes time to guide both Nora and Stanley through their tough decisions. Between the action depicted in the acts, Jack has a heart attack and is confined to his bed. Though he finds someone to cover for him at work for several weeks, Jack still worries about taking care of everyone. This becomes especially important when relatives who have escaped from Poland write of their imminent arrival in America.

Jacob Jerome

See Jack Jerome

Kate Jerome

Kate is Eugene's mother and nearly forty-years-old. She is also Blanche's elder sister. Kate takes most of the responsibility in keeping the household running smoothly, acting as mother to everyone. She ensures everyone eats and is properly taken care of according to their needs. She also manages the money, scrimping to feed everyone. While Kate might inject her opinion on situations, she refuses to make decisions for other people. Eugene believes that she is illogical about some of the things she yells at him about, and that she has some sort of second sight. Kate feels especially protective of her sister, Blanche. She does not like the Murphy family living across the street, especially when Frank Murphy shows an interest in her sister. In the second act, Kate reveals that she has also resented Blanche at times.

Stanley Jerome

Stanley is Eugene's elder brother, nearly nine-teen-years-old. He works in a hat store to help support his family. Stanley has a moral dilemma in the first act of the play. At work, his boss treated a black employee unfairly and Stanley stood up to him. Stanley must apologize for his actions or he will lose his job. After discussing the matter with his father, Stanley decides to apologize, but only because his family needs the money. In the second act, Stanley gambles away his weekly paycheck that the family desperately needs. Stanley leaves to join the army, but he does not enlist. He ultimately returns to the family and his job. Stanley is usually kind to his brother, Eugene, teaching him about the opposite sex and other worldly lessons, such as masturbation.

Blanche Morton

Blanche is Kate's younger sister. She has been a widow for six years because her husband David died of cancer. Since then, she and her daughters have lived with the Jeromes because her husband left her penniless. Blanche has asthma. Blanche takes in some sewing to contribute to the household, but it does not amount to much money. Blanche feels guilty about her lack of earnings. She lets her sister dominate her. Though Blanche has not shown much interest in getting remarried, much to her sister's chagrin, she agrees to go on a date with a neighbor, Frank Murphy. He is in a car accident and it does not happen. After she and Kate fight following the aborted date, Blanche decides that she will move out and get a job. Kate convinces her to stay until she finds employment.

Laurie Morton

Laurie is Blanche's younger daughter. She has a heart flutter and is rarely required to do any household labor. Laurie spends much of her time studying and reading.

Nora Morton

Nora is Blanche's elder daughter. She is six-teen-years-old and very pretty. Nora takes dancing lessons and has a chance to audition for a Broadway producer. She is very angry throughout the play because she is not allowed to audition. Everyone insists that she graduate from high school instead. In the second act, Nora reveals that she is angry with her mother for favoring her younger sister because of her illness. She and Blanche reconcile after this revelation.

Themes

Coming of Age

Eugene Jerome, the main character of *Brighton Beach Memoirs,* is nearly fifteen-years-old and in the grip of adolescence. He is both a child and an adult. Eugene feels that he is a slave to his mother because he has to go to the store for her several times a day. Yet he does not have to work to support his family, and he still attends school. Eugene still has choices to make in his life: He wants to be a baseball player or a writer. His family wants him to attend college. Eugene is noticing girls for the first time and constantly asks his older brother for information about the opposite sex. Stanley tells his brother about masturbation and buys him a postcard with a naked woman on it. Eugene lusts after his beautiful sixteen-year-old cousin Nora. Eugene's adolescent concerns sometimes seem petty when compared to the rest of the family's problems. But Eugene realizes this by the end of the play, and this realization marks the beginning of his maturity.

Family

Everyone in *Brighton Beach Memoirs* is related and the importance of family is emphasized throughout the text. After Blanche's husband Dave died six years ago, the Jeromes took her and her daughters in. Jack and Stanley work to support Blanche's family as well as their own. Blanche tries to contribute to the household by taking in sewing. At the end of the play, it is revealed that a number of Jack's relatives have escaped the invading German Nazis in Poland and are making their way to New York City. The family decides how to make room for the new arrivals.

Despite the cramped quarters and occasional lack of privacy, everyone takes care of everyone else in the Jerome/Morton family. Jack does not complain about having to work two jobs to support seven people. Stanley feels guilty about losing his paycheck in a poker game because he knows how much the family needs the money. Though Eugene sometimes resents his mother's constant nagging and his frequent trips to the grocery store, he does his part to keep things running smoothly. There are numerous arguments between family members, especially between Blanche and her daughter Nora as well as Blanche and Kate, but their familial bonds endure.

Duty and Responsibility

Most every member of the Jerome household accepts their duties and responsibilities in life. Jack Jerome works two jobs to support his family and suffers a heart attack in the process. He does everything he can to make sure the bills are paid and everyone has food and clothing. Stanley Jerome also works to support the family. His sense of duty goes beyond money, though. Stanley stands up to his boss when he thinks the man has wronged another employee over an accident. No one else stood up for the man, and

Stanley's sense of responsibility for his fellow man nearly costs him his job. Stanley is still young (eighteen), however, and still makes mistakes. He irresponsibly loses a whole week's pay in a poker game the same week his father is out of work because of his heart attack. Stanley decides to join the Army, ostensibly to make more money for the family and avoid their wrath over the lost wages. His sense of duty kicks in, however, and he realizes that his family needs him nearby.

The younger kids also feel a sense of duty and responsibility, though they sometimes manipulate it for their own benefit. When Nora is offered a chance to dance on Broadway, she tries to convince her mother to let her go by arguing that she will be able to support their family. Blanche wants Nora to finish high school instead and argues that is will be better for the girl in the long term. Nora resents the decision, but her desire to help out her family is sincere. Similarly, Eugene is often forced to run errands and perform household chores that he resents. But his sense of duty to his mother and his family forces him to set the table and go to the store, even if the request made of him seems stupid or unreasonable. This sense of duty and responsibility to each other keeps the family together.

Style

Setting

Brighton Beach Memoirs is set in Brighton Beach, New York, in September, 1937, near the end of the Great Depression and just before the start of World War II. The Jerome household is located in a lower middle class section of the area near the beach, where most of the inhabitants are Jewish, German, and Irish. All of the action takes place in and around the Jerome house, a frame house with a small porch. Inside the house, the audience can see the dining room and living room on the first floor as well as the steps leading to the second floor. On the second floor the audience can see a hallway and three small bedrooms: Nora and Laurie's; Stanley and Eugene's; and Kate and Jack's. This setting emphasizes the familial themes of the play and the close-knit nature of their relationships.

Narrator

Eugene Jerome is the narrator of *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. He directly addresses the audience, commenting on the action and relaying information. Much of what Eugene says is humorous in nature and acts as a release for the play's dramatic tensions. By talking directly to the audience, Eugene establishes a link between them and the heart of the play. The device also allows the audience to better understand Eugene and his feelings. For example, from these musings the audience knows that he hates his name and how he really feels about his family. Sometimes his actions contradict his words, but his true feelings come through.

In his narration, Eugene also reveals information about his family that the audience might not otherwise receive. One example is the details surrounding Aunt Blanche and why she and her daughters live with the Jeromes.

Metaphor

One way to interpret the Jerome and Morton family household is as a metaphor or microcosm of America in the late-1930s. *Brighton Beach Memoirs* takes place in 1937 during the Depression and the beginning of the Nazi horrors in Europe. Many members of the household remember a better life, before the economic and political turmoil. Nora, for example, remembers life before her father's death. The tensions in the household increase with each new problem, mirroring the increasing tensions in Europe as the Nazi aggressions increase. Because the Jerome and Morton families are Jewish, this metaphor works on another level as well. The family's endeavor to survive and maintain their dignity under extreme circumstances echoes the problems Jewish people faced with the onslaught of the virulently anti-Semitic Nazis.

Historical Context

In 1983, the United States was a country that looked to its past for inspiration. Nostalgia was a strong cultural force. Older ideas were reworked and recombined into new philosophies and styles. Little was truly original. This was evident in several ways. For example, 1930s-style Art Deco was influential in fashion. Rap music, a burgeoning music form in the 1980s, was often built on samples (recorded snippets) of other artists' music. Some of the decades most popular films, *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark,* for example, were essentially reworked B-movie serials straight out of the 1930s. Adding to the country's fascination with the entertainment of the past, America's president was a former film star, Ronald Reagan. His populist rhetoric and simplistic, common sense approach to the office hearkened back to the heroic film cowboy attitudes that germinated in the films of the 1930s.

Reagan was also the oldest man ever to be elected president, and by 1983, he was seventy-two-years-old. The American population was "graying, " with the percentage of senior citizens quickly growing; improved health care was extending the average life span. This senior segment of the population joined together to assert its power. The AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) grew significantly in membership and became a powerful lobbying force in Congress. There was talk of a generation gap, as the demands of senior citizens often collided with those of younger generations. This came to a head in the controversy over funding for Social Security.

Reagan was a Republican who operated from a conservative platform. The country as a whole seemed to embrace such right-leaning philosophies as an antidote to the liberal 1970s. Many voted Reagan into office hoping he would solve the country's economic problems, but in 1983, unemployment was still at record levels. Inflation had fallen to 3.2 percent, however. While conservatives touted the family-oriented, traditional life as the "new" ideal, these concepts did not mesh with the reality of rising divorces, single-parent homes, and the threat of the AIDS virus. Such contradictions showed the shallow nature of the time period, where superficial concerns held sway over substantive issues. In reality, the minority rich increased their wealth as the middle class shrunk and more and more people faced economic hardship.

To pump up the economy (and divert attention from their meager domestic policies), Reagan and the Republicans spent a record amount of money on defense, justifying their expenditures with anti-Communist rhetoric (the United States was still in the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union). In 1983, an incident occurred which allegedly proved the "evil" intent of the Soviet Union. A Korean airliner accidentally strayed into Soviet airspace and was shot down. Everyone aboard the aircraft was killed.

The Reagan administration seized the incident as proof that the Soviet threat was real, as was the threat of nuclear war. There was a controversy over whether a nuclear war could be won. One of the most highly watched television movies of 1983 was ABC's *The Day After,* which speculated what might happen in the aftermath of a nuclear war. Despite such precarious events, the United States and the Soviet Union were in

negotiation for arms reduction treaties for much of the decade. But the American policy of massive spending on defense significantly increased the federal budget deficit, leading to an uncertain economic future.

Critical Overview

While Simon has enjoyed a great deal of financial success on Broadway for many years, critics have generally been disdainful of his work. *Brighton Beach Memoirs* is regarded as the play which changed that. Many critics believed the play was the first time Simon successfully combined comedy with serious themes, and many expressed hope that Simon would finally be taken seriously by scholars. Not all critics agreed on the work's merit, but Simon did receive some of the best reviews of his career for *Brighton Beach Memoirs*.

T. E. Kalem of *Time* wrote: "Without slighting his potent comic talents, Simon looks back, not in anger, remorse or undue guilt but with fondly nourished compassion at himself as an adolescent in 1937 and at the almost asphyxiatingly close-knit family around him." Frank Rich of the *New York Times* concurred, stating "Mr. Simon makes real progress towards an elusive longtime goal: he mixes comedy and drama without, for the most part, either force-feeding the jokes or milking the tears. It's happy news that one of our theater's slickest playwrights is growing beyond his well-worn formulas of the past." But Rich went on to argue that the play is not as good as it could be. He called it superficial, and criticized its skirting of deeper issues. Rich also felt that the character/narrator Eugene was too glib. Rich's colleague at the *New York Times,* Walter Kerr, disagreed, writing: "The shrewdest of Mr. Simon's ploys, and very probably the best, is not simply to have made the boy hilarious in his likes and dislikes, his comings and goings, his sexual gropings. Mr. Simon lets us watch the comic mind growing up." Kerr, though, felt the second act faltered in part because "we tend to lose Eugene" in favor of the rest of the family.

Critics who disliked the play often focused on the weakness of Eugene. Jack Kroll, writing in *Newsweek,* said that Simon's "young hero, Eugene, wants to be a writer but Simon gives him so much dialogue about masturbation and naked girls that it gets unfunny and embarrassing." But the reviewer conceded, like many other critics, that "There are moments of tenderness and insight." Catharine Hughes in *America* agreed. She wrote: "His youthful narrator almost always steps in to diffuse seriousness with a facile, albeit usually funny, remark. After a time, this becomes too predictable as a device."

Other critics found *Brighton Beach Memoirs* as a whole to be problematic. The Nation's Richard Gilman stated, "The first act contains the usual complement of more or less amusing episodes and funny lines. But the second act turns serious. That is to say, Simon wants to be a *dramatist* and so devises some hokey stuff about family life in the Depression, the growing menace of fascism, intergenerational conflict, and youth's awakening to sex. It's all obvious, derivative and flaccid."

Many critics who criticized the play often focused on Simon and his background. While Simon says that he based *Brighton Beach Memoirs* on his adolescence, he did not intend it to be wholly autobiographical. None of the play's dramatic incidents actually occurred in his own youth, though he experienced many family difficulties. Critics

suggested that Simon could have written a better play if it had been more autobiographical. Kroll wrote, "In an interview Simon talks about his 'extremely painful' childhood, how he lived with a pillow over his head to block out the bitter fights of his parents, how his father would leave for long periods, how he was abused as the only Jewish kid in school. Why isn't this in the play? He didn't go all the way with his own truth." John Simon, in *New York,* brought up a similar issue, claiming "The first problem with *Memoirs* is that it has no intention of being truthful," before relating details of Simon's childhood.

Similarly, critics were divided over Simon's use of Jewish characters. Kalem in *Time* said that "Simon is openly comfortable with his Jewish characters " Rich in the *New York Times* took a mixed point of view, writing, "Though some of the Jewish mother gags are overdone, others are dead-on." John Simon took the most negative view, stating that "as a final dishonesty, his Jewish family talks and looks as un-Jewish as possible (through the writing, casting, and directing)." The only thing that critics could agree upon was Simon's draw at the box-office and the wide appeal of his brand of humor.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso discusses how the concept of dignity drives each of the characters in Simon's play.

In Neil Simon's play *Brighton Beach Memoirs,* there is an underlying theme overlooked by many critics. Each major character in the play is driven by or looks for some measure of dignity in his or her life. This measure of self-worth is an important part of why the Jerome-Morton household survives despite the cramped quarters and the economic duress of the Great Depression. The quest for human dignity does not take the same form for each character, but the variety of experiences makes the tapestry of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* a rich composite of the problems people face to this day.

For Stanley Jerome, the eighteen-and-a-half-year-old brother of narrator Eugene Jerome, the quest takes on several forms. This is fitting for a young man on the verge of adulthood. In Act I, Stanley nearly loses his job when he stands up for a co-worker, defending the man's honor in the face of what Stanley perceives as an injustice. This dilemma makes Stanley heartsick, but because his family needs the money so desperately, he ultimately swallows his pride and writes (or has Eugene write) the letter of apology.

While Stanley's sweeping dirt on Mr. Stroheim's shoes is immature, the rest of his actions show that he is a young man willing to speak up when he perceives that an injustice has occurred. Jobs were hard to come by during the Depression, but Stanley's instincts put dignity before commerce. If it were not for the Depression and the scarcity of jobs, it is implied that Stanley would not have apologized. In Act II, Stanley's dignity-related dilemma takes on a much different form. It is a week later, and Stanley has lost his entire week's salary at a poker game. To save face with his family, Stanley decides that he will join the Army, rationalizing that he will earn more money as a soldier, especially when he makes sergeant. He promises Eugene that he will send all his salary home. Though his parents are angry when they learn about the lost salary, they are relieved when Stanley returns having not enlisted. Though Stanley thought he could find dignity in escaping, he decides that his family will benefit more from having funds now rather than later. Simon implicitly argues that to be dignified is to face up to one's responsibilities, even when mistakes are made and great shame is the result.

One of the reasons Stanley's salary is so important in Act II lies in the fact that his father, Jack Jerome, has had a heart attack and cannot work for several weeks. Like Stanley, much of Jack's quest for dignity lies in his ability to support his family. Jack must do everything he can, no matter what the cost to his health, to pay the bills for the seven members of his household and ensure some quality of life. The weight of the family's dignity lies on his shoulders. In Act I, Jack loses his night job when the owner goes bankrupt. Jack worked as a party favor salesman to nightclubs and hotels. To compensate for this loss, Jack does several things. First, he takes as many noisemakers and party favors as he can carry to try to compensate for loss of income.

Second, Jack finds another job, driving a taxi cab. This employment situation compounded by constant worry leads to his heart attack.

Though almost all of Jack's time and energy is sapped by his constant work, he does not neglect his duties as father and head of the household. He works hard to maintain the dignity of his family economically, but he does not forget their personal quests for dignity. Everyone looks to Jack for guidance. Stanley consults him on his work dilemma mentioned earlier. He also gives Nora counsel on her hard decision, and shows his support for both Kate and Blanche during their times of trouble. Because Nora's father is dead, and her mother will not make a decision about her audition, Jack steps in, though physically exhausted, and takes a walk with Nora to offer his advice. Though Jack is supposed to be restricted to bed rest because of his heart attack, he insists on getting up to be there for Blanche when she goes on her first date in many years.

When Frank Murphy does not come, and Kate and Blanche get into an argument, Jack does his best to be intercede and get them both to understand each other. He tells them to "get it out of their systems" and then make up. Individual dignity must be maintained in such a small space or the household would be an intolerable place to live.

The dignity-related dilemmas on the homefront are economically related on the surface. Nora is sixteen-years-old and has been taking dancing lessons, with considerable promise, for many years. In her class, she is offered an audition for a Broadway musical called *Abracadabra* along with a few other girls. The producer pulled her aside and said she basically had the job if she wanted it. Though she would have to drop out of school to take the role, Nora argues that she could help support her family and begin to pay back the Jeromes. Implicit in Nora's desire for the job, though, is a need for freedom, to be an adult.

When she and Jack return from their walk, Nora tells her mother, "I don't want this just for myself, Momma, but for you and for Laurie. In a few years we could have a house of our own, instead of all being cooped up here like animals. I'm asking for a way out, Momma. Don't shut me in. Don't shut me in for the rest of my life." Nora wants dignity in two ways, but the adults decide that she should stay in school until she gets her diploma. Nora resents the decision, but eventually she and Blanche reach a mutual understanding.

Blanche's quest for dignity is not unlike Nora's by the end of *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. Blanche is thirty-eight-years-old and has been a widow for six years. Because her husband left her nothing, she has had to rely on the kindness of her sister's family to survive. She does not work outside the home but takes in sewing work to contribute something to the household finances. During Act I, Blanche is content to let everyone around her make the decisions. When Nora presses her to decide if she can audition for the musical, Blanche defers to Jack's judgment. When Blanche feels tired from sewing, she lets Kate tell her when to stop. She does stand up for herself, though, when she decides to go on a date with Frank Murphy, an Irishman who lives across the street. Kate disapproves, but Blanche wins her over. After Murphy gets in an accident and the date is canceled, Blanche and Kate get into an argument. This argument leads to

Blanche's realization that she has been too dependent on everyone for everything. She decides that she will get a job and move out of the house. She tells Jack, "I love you both very much. No matter what Kate says to me, I will never stop loving her. But I have to get out. If I don't do it now, I will lose whatever self-respect I have left. For people like us, sometimes the only thing we really own is our dignity." Though Kate convinces her to stay with them while she looks for work, Blanche is changed by the realization that dignity is a key to life.

Kate and Eugene have very slightly different concepts of dignity than the rest of the characters in *Brighton Beach*. Because they are the only two characters not concerned with supporting themselves directly, they are focused more on the home and family. Kate works to ensure a dignified household is maintained despite the limited space. She makes sure everyone eats and rests, according to their needs, and she manages the money. Though she can be insensitive, Kate wants her family to hold its collective head up. During her argument with Blanche, it is revealed that Kate sometimes resents having to be the "workhorse," but she does what she can to keep her family together.

Though fourteen-year-old Eugene is the narrator and main character of *Brighton Beach Memoirs,* his pursuit of dignity is the simplest and one common to every teenager. He wants a little respect from his family. He does not want to be blamed for everything that goes wrong. He does not want to be the center of attention when something bad happens. He does not want to feel like the family slave, though he has to go to the store constantly for his mother. He wants to survive puberty in the Depression with his dignity intact, despite circumstances which seem to work against him. Because his concerns are universal, he is an ideal portal into the family depicted in *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. Though Eugene's quest for dignity might seem to be the least desperate and the most superficial of all the characters in the play, it emphasizes that dignity is irrevocably linked to family. Whether wanting to earn an income or simply to define one's self and one's place in the world, in *Brighton Beach Memoirs* the quest for dignity begins and ends at home.

Source: A. Petrusso, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Simon is one of the best-known theatre critics in America. In this review of Brighton Beach Memoirs, *he praises Simon's facility with humorous dialogue, though he has reservations about the playwright's status as a master dramatist*.

Brighton Beach Memoirs is Neil Simon's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Simon is the world's richest playwright and he even owns the Eugene O'Neill Theater, but though you can buy the name, you cannot buy the genius. Actually, rather than into one night, the play takes us into two consecutive Wednesday evenings in 1937 (when Simon was ten rather than, as in the play, fifteen), but the pseudo-autobiographical hero is actually called Eugene, and there is an ostensible scraping off of layers of patina to get at the alleged truth; if no one takes dope, there are plenty of dopes around, not least the author, who, like all those comedians wanting to play Hamlet, imagines that he can write a serious play.

The first problem with *Memoirs* is that it has no intention of being truthful. In a *Times* interview with Leslie Bennetts, Simon tells of a father who would disappear for months, years, finally forever, and who'd have terrible fights with his wife. In the play, Jack Jerome is the most responsible, wise, and generous man alive, and his wife, Kate, heroically coping with the deprivations of the Depression, is not a jot behind him in magnanimity. Her one true fight is with her widowed sister, Blanche, who, with her daughters Nora and Laurie, has been living with the Jeromes for years, working herself blind to earn her keep, but a drain nevertheless. Otherwise, the fights are harmless ones between various parents and children□a sort of *Life With Father Jewish,* but not too Jewish, style□and even the children's missteps are footling if not laudable: Nora's wanting to accept a role in a Broadway musical and quit school, elder brother Stanley's near loss of his job when he sticks up for a black handyman abused by the boss. Oh, hoping to make extra money for the family, Stanley does once gamble away a week's salary and run off intending to join the army; but he soon returns, makes back most of the money, and gets closer to Dad than ever.

Then why, you ask, the comparison to O'Neill's play? Because Eugene is a budding playwright with problems (not TB, to be sure, only puberty and lust for his cousin), there is a serious money shortage, there is near tragedy in the house across the street, there is the Depression and the threat of Hitler to Jewish relatives in Europe, there is Father's losing one of his jobs and getting a minor heart attack, there is everyone's hurting everyone else's feelings and apologizing profusely and making up. What there isn't, though, is honesty. The first act is typical Simon farce cum sentimentality, and the better for it; the second, in which ostensibly grave themes and conflicts are hauled out, is fraught with earnest speechifying, ponderous and platitudinous moralizing, and heartwarming uplift oozing all over the place, with everybody's soul putting on Adler Elevator shoes and ending up closer to heaven. The dramaturgy itself becomes woefully schematic: Every character gets his tête-à-tête with every other character who has taken umbrage, and all ends in sunshine□even for the endangered relatives in Europe.

If all this were presented as farce, it might work. If it were honestly and painfully told, it might work. But Simon, who has also filled the play with those odious clean dirty jokes, wants to have his pain and let everybody eat cake, too. So everyone is funny and noble and ends happily, and Neil□ Eugene□who is also a good student and obedient son□is funniest and noblest of all, even if given to somewhat excessive masturbation. Actually, the masturbation is more joked about than real□except, of course, in the playwriting. Simon is a reverse Antaeus: The closer his feet get to touching the ground of reality, the weaker his writing becomes. And, as a final dishonesty, his Jewish family talks and looks as un-Jewish as possible (through the writing, casting, and directing), so that Wasps should not feel excluded, let alone offended. In fact, the Irish family across the way□though drowning in drink and filth□are, we are sanctimoniously informed, very nice people indeed.

Gene Saks has directed adroitly and vivaciously; Patricia Zipprodt' s costumes and Tharon Musser' s lighting can nowise be faulted, and even a second-best set from David Mitchell is quite good enough. The cast is uneven: Zeljko Ivanek (Stanley) is marvelous; Matthew Broderick (Eugene) fine, but too young to begin doing shtick; Mandy Ingber (Laurie) a perfect stage brat, which, however, is not the same as a real kid; Elizabeth Franz (Kate) commanding but out of character; Peter Michael Goetz (Jack) given to breaking up his speeches nonsensically, and dull to boot; Joyce Van Patten (Blanche) nondescript to the point of vanishing; and Jodi Thelen (Nora) simperingly tremulous to the point of being sickening. Still, the man behind me was convulsed with laughter; if you like commercial theater at its most mercenary, you should love this one.

Source: John Simon, "Journeys into Night" in *New York,* Vol. 16, no. 15, April 11, 1983 , p. 55.

Critical Essay #3

While calling the play's humor "surefire," Gill's ultimate appraisal of Brighton Beach Memoirs *finds the play stumbling into "shallowness" when Simon awkwardly strives for profound sentiments*.

Neil Simon's *"Brighton Beach Memoirs,"* at the Alvin, is a sentimental comedy decorated with surefire one-liners and inadvertently revealing its shallowness by means of an occasional awkward lunge in the direction of what the author evidently believes to be profundity. (In the midst of all his jokes about adolescent sex and domineering Jewish mothers in the nineteen-thirties, Simon manages to introduce the fate of European Jewry under Hitler, borrowing from that historic tragedy a weight of emotion that his ramshackle little comedy has done nothing to deserve.) Simon has acknowledged to the press that *"Memoirs"* has a greater autobiographical content than his other plays, and he finds, as autobiographers are wont to do, a seriousness it the heart of the play which members of the audience may perceive not as seriousness but as an exceptionally unabashed manifestation of self-approval. For the play is a posy presented to the author with love from the author, who appears unaware that he is telling the same story that hundreds upon hundreds of writers before him have written and that hundreds upon hundreds of writers after him are sure to write□the story of the gifted child who grows up to become the maker of the very work of art by which we are being entertained. Dickens, Joyce, O'Neill, Lowell, and scores of other novelists, playwrights, and poets have achieved masterpieces in this genre, but more commonly the product is narcissistic claptrap.

"Memoirs" has to do with seven members of a middle-class Jewish family in Brooklyn, whom we observe struggling to survive the dark days of the Great Depression. Remarkably, all seven of them have hearts of gold, and so do a couple of characters of some importance who remain offstage. Life is harsh, but everyone is doing his best to cope. Eugene, a.k.a. Neil, is a brilliant student and a successful wise-cracker; at fifteen, he is undergoing the despairs and delights of an inexplicably delayed sexual awakening. Eugene's curiosity about girls' bodies is feverish and unassuageable, though he learns what he can from his older brother, Stanley. The object of Eugene's unspoken passion is Nora, the elder of two cousins of his; unfortunately, Nora and Eugene share nothing but the unwelcome intimacy of the only bathroom in the house. Blanche, mother of Nora and Laurie (the snooty, pampered younger cousin), is a sister of Eugene's mother, Kate. Blanche is a widow and is well aware that, the house being too small for all of them and the burden of its upkeep too heavy for Eugene's sorely overworked father, she must find a new husband as quickly as possible; by ill luck, the likeliest candidate is an Irish Catholic alcoholic, living across the street with his aged mother. To Kate, everyone who is not a Jew is a cossack (at this point in the play we come close to echoing "Abie's Irish Rose," a hit of half a century ago); the alcoholic gets into trouble and misses his first□and only□date with Blanche, and other vexations beset the family, but their essential saintliness remains undiminished. The last words of the play are a cry of joy from Eugene on having at last outdistanced the ignominious pangs of puberty.

"Memoirs" provides the occasion for a virtuoso acting performance by Matthew Broderick, as Eugene. Without him, much of the pleasing humaneness of the play would degenerate into slapstick. Elizabeth Franz is a conventional Jewish scold of a mother, Joyce Van Patten is the woebegone Blanche, and Peter Michael Goetz is often touching as the exhausted paterfamilias. Zeljko Ivanek, Jodi Thelen, and Mandy Ingber play Stanley, Nora, and Laurie, respectively. The slick direction is by Gene Saks, and the setting, costumes, and lighting□all of the highest quality□are by David Mitchells, Patricia Zipprodt, and Tharon Musser.

Source: Brendan Gill, "Portrait of the Artist As a Young Saint" in the *New Yorker,* Vol. LIX, no. 8, April 11, 1983, p. 109.

Adaptations

Brighton Beach Memoirs was adapted as a film in 1986. Simon adapted the script from his own play. Directed by Gene Saks, the movie features Jonathon Silverman as Eugene, Blythe Danner as Kate, Bob Dishy as Jack, and Judith Ivey as Blanche.

Topics for Further Study

Compare and contrast *Brighton Beach Memoirs* with Paul Osborn's 1939 play *Morning's at Seven,* a comedic play about familial relations. How do the different settings (urban versus rural, respectively) affect the manner in which the families are perceived?

Research the history of the Depression in the United States, focusing on the effect it had on families. How do the Jeromes compare with the average American family during the Depression?

Explore the psychology of puberty. Discuss how puberty affects the actions and decisions of Eugene Jerome. Is Eugene a typical pubescent male?

Research the history of Europe in 1937, focusing on the hostile actions of Nazi Germany towards other countries and Jewish populations. How do these political policies affect the relatives of the Jeromes in Europe as well as their American counterparts?

Compare and Contrast

1937: The United States is in the middle of the Great Depression. The unemployment rate is very high, with approximately one quarter of the workforce unable to find work.

1983: The United States is in a recession and the unemployment rate is at record levels.

Today: The United States' economy is relatively stable. The national unemployment rate is extremely low and the stock market is experiencing record highs. In early-1999, the market hits the 10,000 mark for the first time.

1937: War seems imminent in Europe because of German leader Adolf Hitler's aggressive foreign policy. Within two years, war will engulf all of Europe.

1983: The Cold War, a political standoff between the United States and Russia that has lasted for decades, is near its end. When Mikhail Gorbachev is elected to the Russian presidency a few years later, the Cold War will end.

Today: There are pockets of political instability in the world, especially the Middle East and the Balkan states, but almost of Europe is stable.

1937: Social Security, a New Deal policy that ensures an income for people of retirement age, was introduced in 1935 and is in full force by 1937.

1983: The graying of America (between twenty-six and thirty million people are sixty-five or older) puts unprecedented demands on the Social Security system. President Reagan signs a bill to ensure funding of Social Security for the next seventy-five years.

Today: There are lingering worries that Social Security will go bankrupt as the Baby Boom generation ages. There is debate over alternative means of supporting social security, including the U.S. government making investments in the stock market.

What Do I Read Next?

Biloxi Blues, a play by Neil Simon first produced in 1984, is the second in the trilogy begun by *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. This play focuses on Eugene Jerome's experiences as a recruit in the Army during World War II.

Broadway Bound, a play by Neil Simon first produced in 1986, is the third in the trilogy. This play focuses on Eugene Jerome's quest to become a professional writer.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, a novel published by James Joyce in 1916, concerns the coming of age of writer Stephen Dedalus.

Our Town, a play by Thorton Wilder first produced in 1938, is a nostalgic look at families living together in Grover's Corner, New Hampshire.

,em>New York Jews and the Great Depression, a nonfiction book published by Beth S. Wenger in 1996, discusses ethnic relations, economic conditions and life in the city.

Further Study

Bennetts, Leslie. "Neil Simon Delves into His Past" in the *New York Times,* March 27, 1983, Sec. 2, pp. 1, 6.

Bennetts interviews Simon, discussing, among other topics, the inspiration for *Brighton Beach Memoirs*.

Johnson, Robert K. *Neil Simon,* Twayne, 1983.

McGovern offers biography, criticism, and interpretation of Simon's works through the early-1980s.

McGovern, Edythe M. *Neil Simon: A Critical Study,* Ungar, 1978.

McGovern offers criticism and interpretation of Simon's works through the late-1970s.

McGovern, Edythe M. *Not-So-Simple Neil Simon: A Critical Study,* Perivale Press, 1978.

McGovern offers criticism and interpretation of each of Simon's plays, from *Come Blow Your Horn* to *Chapter Two.*

Simon, Neil. *Rewrites: A Memoir,* Simon & Schuster, 1997. Simon's autobiography covers both his career and his personal life through 1973.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) 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, DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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

DfS 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 Drama 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 DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS 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 Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama 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 DfS 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.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama 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 DfS, 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 Drama 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 DfS, 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 Drama 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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