The Eskimo Connection Study Guide

The Eskimo Connection by Hisaye Yamamoto

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Introduction

Hisaye Yamamoto' s short story "The Eskimo Connection," published in 1983 in the Japanese-American magazine *Rafu Shimpo,* tells of the curious relationship between Emiko, a widowed Nisei poet living in Los Angeles and now primarily taking care of her grandchildren, and Alden, a young Eskimo in a federal penitentiary. Alden initiates a correspondence with Emiko, saying that he saw a poem of hers in a magazine and would like a critique of an essay he wrote for the prison newsletter. Emiko is, at first, very hesitant to respond to Alden, fearing that her negative impression of his writing would hurt him; and besides, she cannot imagine what they have in common. But she does answer his letter, and a two-year relationship between the two unlikely correspondents is initiated.

Yamamoto wrote this story late in her career, a good thirty years after she had received the first applause for her short stories but before she received the Before Columbus Foundations American Book Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1986. "The Eskimo Connection" is a story of empathy between a woman, who spent time in the Japanese-American internment camps of World War II as Yamamoto did, and a "fellow Asian American" as Alden refers to himself, who is living under similar restrictive circumstances. In fact, Valerie Miner in the *Nation* lauds Yamamoto's "multicultural casting" in many of her stories, including "The Eskimo Connection," and credits Yamamoto's "rich variety of experiences growing up in California" and other incidents, including living in an internment camp and working for the *Catholic Worker,* for giving her an unusually broad but sympathetic view of the world. King-Kok Cheung, in her introduction to *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories,* which includes "The Eskimo Connection," also notes that Yamamoto's themes include the relationship between Japanese immigrants and their children, the adjustments made by the first-generation Japanese— especially the women—to living in America, and "the interaction among various ethnic groups in the American West."

Author Biography

Many critics and readers consider Hisaye Yamamoto, an essayist, poet, and short story writer, one of the most gifted of the post-World War II female Nisei writers. (The term *Nisei* refers to the generation of Japanese born in the United States to parents who emigrated from Japan.) Yamamoto was born to immigrant Japanese farmers in Redondo Beach, California, in 1921. She began writing at the age of fourteen and was a voracious reader in both Anglo-American and Japanese subjects. She published her first literary piece at the age of twenty-seven.

After the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, Yamamoto, along with more than one hundred thousand other Japanese Americans, was interned to an inland camp. The federal government considered the Japanese-American population, as well as a smaller number of German Americans and Italian Americans, a security threat during World War II. Yamamoto spent the years between 1942 and 1945 in a Poston, Arizona, camp, where she wrote for the camp newsletter and other camp journals.

After the war, Yamamoto wrote for the *Los Angeles Tribune,* an African-American weekly newspaper. In 1949, she published her most widely anthologized short story, "Seventeen Syllables." She then received a John Hay Whitney Foundation Fellowship (1950-1951), which allowed Yamamoto to write fulltime for a while. In 1952 her story "Yoneko's Earthquake" was selected for publication in that year's *Best American Short Stories.*

Attracted by its pacifist ideals, Yamamoto wrote for the *Catholic Worker* and lived with her adopted son, from 1953 to 1955, on a Catholic Worker farm in Staten Island, New York. In 1955, she married Anthony DeSoto, and she eventually had four children with him. Since the 1950s she has regularly published in various Japanese-American newspapers, including *Rafu Shimpo* and *Hokubei Mainichi,* as well as in literary publications such as *The Kenyon Review* and *The Partisan Review.*

In 1986, Yamamoto was awarded the Before Columbus Foundations American Book Award for Lifetime Achievement, and her work has been praised for its humanity and compassion and its ability to go beyond political rhetoric.

Plot Summary

1975

"The Eskimo Connection" begins in the late winter of 1975, when Emiko Toyama, a Nisei poet and widow living in Los Angeles, receives a letter from a young Eskimo prisoner-patient at a federal penitentiary in the Midwest. Alden Ryan Walunga has read one of Emiko's poems in an old Asian-American magazine and wants her to critique an essay he has written for a prison publication.

Emiko is very hesitant to continue the correspondence and to give Alden her impression of his essay for two reasons: she does not see what they could have in common, and his essay is a "brief but remarkably confused" piece on the ruination of his native land that turns into a "sermon" on biblical prophecy. Emiko remembers an experience she had in the internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II, which taught her what sensitive egos artists often have. As well, two other experiences she remembers remind her that "most egos are covered with the thinnest of eggshells."

But Emiko eventually decides to respond to Alden's letter and provides him with some carefully worded suggestions about his writing. This begins a correspondence between the two, with Emiko learning numerous things about the prisoner: he spent two semesters at the University of Alaska and has read quite extensively; he is the third of seven children; he is being treated for depression with massive doses of Thorazine and attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings at the prison; and he has "come to Christ" and considers the study of "His Word" the primary concern in his life. Emiko sends him Asian-American magazines and other material but is dismayed at the limits the prison puts on how many publications he may receive.

Emiko learns how restricted Alden's life is in prison and wonders if prison is "the relinquishment of every liberty that those on the outside took for granted." But she also notes that Alden is "an exuberant spirit even under these stifling conditions." He writes that he has received fifty dollars for a poem to be published in a New York magazine, and she congratulates him.

Suddenly, Emiko stops hearing from Alden. She focuses on her life in Los Angeles as a grandmother and mother struggling to pay the bills and to take care of her family after the death of her husband, Mits. She feels that there is something "insidious" in the air, as most of her friends, neighbors, and relatives all seem to be getting divorces, even after many years of marriage. She wonders if she and Mits would have fallen to such a fate if he had lived longer.

Alden begins corresponding again after a break of a few months, apologizing and saying that he has experienced a spiritual crisis. They exchange a couple of letters on how both of them are seeing changes and upheavals in their lives. Alden stresses to Emiko "the importance of holding fast to the Lord Jesus Christ." Emiko notes that Alden

never writes of why he is in prison, so she decides that he is in prison for forgery, as a favorite neighbor of hers was in prison for this crime. Emiko considers that she is not very comfortable with the idea of putting people in prisons and is against capital punishment, but she acknowledges that there should be some system for separating those who are an immediate danger to the public from society.

1976

In February of 1976, Alden sends a Valentine's Day card to Emiko, noting that he is being transferred to the McNeil Island Penitentiary, near Seattle, and he wonders if she might be in the area to see him there. He also thanks her for the pictures she has sent him of her family. She writes him that family matters prevented her from meeting him, and later she feels bad for not making the effort to visit with him.

In July, though, Emiko is scheduled to attend the wedding of her childhood friend's son in Seattle, and she believes that she is being given a second chance to see Alden. She makes the official arrangements to visit the prison, but the finished paperwork does not reach her by the time she must leave for Seattle. Emiko figures that she should not have too much trouble finishing it once she is in Seattle, especially since she is coming all the way from Los Angeles. But the prison authorities deny her permission to visit Alden, and she cannot understand why.

When she returns home, the mail includes an official letter from the prison stating that, after all, she has been put on Alden's visitor list. Yamamoto writes, "Thanks a lot, she thought, knowing that she would probably never have the occasion to go to Seattle again." She reads the information included in the letter covering the numerous rules visitors must follow when visiting a prisoner.

In his next letters, Alden does not talk much about Emiko's failure to secure a visit but writes that he will take classes at a community college in the fall and is busy working on his own translation of the Gospels from the Greek. He also sends her a story entitled "The Coffin of 1974," which Emiko finds disturbing with its dark and bloody images. It is the story of a young Eskimo man who kills his uncle and rapes and kills a female relative and dies afterward. But the story has a happy ending, as the young man does not actually die but is "reborn in Christ, a new man, washed clean of his sins." Emiko is stunned by the story and wonders if this is Alden's story of himself. She shakes off her concerns and returns the story to Alden with suggestions as to how to improve it.

Alden's final letter to Emiko is in September, from the Seattle City Jail, where he has been transferred for his own protection after telling the McNeil Island authorities about a homosexual rape he witnessed. He also reports that he has been recommended for a transfer to Alaska, where he can be closer to his family. Because she is involved in "the mire of modern family life," Emiko does not answer his letter until almost Christmas, but it is returned by the jail, stamped "Unclaimed." She never hears from him again and simply decides that he must be too busy with his many projects and interests to continue being the pen pal of "some old woman" in California.

Characters

Emiko Toyama

In the story "The Eskimo Connection," Emiko is a Nisei poet and a widow living in Los Angeles in the 1970s. Emiko remembers living in one of the internment/relocation camps for Japanese Americans during World War II.

Emiko receives a letter from a young Eskimo prisoner, Alden, asking her to critique his essay. Emiko is self-deprecating and wonders what Alden and she could have in common. She is hesitant about making a connection with Alden but eventually decides to make a few suggestions and return the essay to him. This begins their two-year correspondence.

The entire story, while not written in a first-person point of view, is told through Emiko. She has a sense of humor but can sometimes appear to be a bit naïve. She does not want to know why Alden is in jail, preferring instead to create an image of his crime based solely on a neighbor of hers who was twice sent to prison for forgery. When Alden mails her a short story he has written about a young man who murders his uncle and rapes and murders a female relative, she is shocked and horrified and wonders if this is Alden's life.

Emiko has a number of children, three of whom are still living at home, and grandchildren as well. She is the head of her household and is trying to make ends meet after the death of her husband, Mits. Mits left her some money but not a huge amount, and Emiko works hard at managing both the money and the minor family disasters that erupt from time to time.

Alden Ryan Walunga

Alden is a prisoner at a federal penitentiary in the Midwest. He initiates correspondence with Emiko after reading one of her poems in an Asian-American publication. He is a Yupik Eskimo in his early twenties and is interested in writing. In his first letter to Emiko, he encloses his essay on how his native land has been "despoiled" and asks Emiko for a critique. She is hesitant for a number of reasons, including the fact that the essay eventually degenerates into a "sermon" on the biblical prophecy that the ruination of his land was part of what was supposed to happen before Christ's return. "The article was brief but remarkably confused," notes Emiko. But this eventually does begin their correspondence.

Alden never reveals to Emiko why he is in prison, and Emiko never asks. But Alden does tell her about his family, his Thorazine treatment for depression, and his membership in Alcoholics Anonymous. He is also a voracious reader and spends a lot of time studying the Bible. Many of his letters to Emiko include religious sayings. Emiko sends him Asian-American literary magazines, but he is allowed only a limited number

of pieces of mail and borrowed library books, frustrating his desire for more material to read and study.

Eventually, he is transferred to a jail near Seattle, where he is able to attend community college classes. Finally, he is transferred to Alaska, where he will be closer to his family. Before his transfer, he sends Emiko a short story he has written about a young man who kills his uncle and rapes and kills a female relative.

Themes

Loneliness

In "The Eskimo Connection" both Alden and Emiko are victims of loneliness, although in different ways. Emiko's husband is dead, and she describes herself in terms of what she has lost: her husband and her poetry. As "an aging Nisei widow in Los Angeles with several children, three still at home, whose main avocation was not writing poetry but babysitting grandchildren," Emiko cannot imagine what she would have in common with a young Eskimo prisoner; but her isolation encourages her to accept Alden's offer to exchange letters anyway. Besides her family, Emiko appears to have connections with very few people. She mentions a friend from childhood and a neighbor who was once sent to prison, but that is all, until she begins her correspondence with Alden. The conversations in the story are primarily the written ones with Alden, and her relationships with others are only briefly paraphrased.

Alden does not profess any loneliness, but his initial reaching out to Emiko through a letter indicates his desire to connect with someone in a way that might not be possible in prison. His loneliness is seen through his letters, as he reports that he works fervently on his Bible studies and his writing, filling the long days that face him as a prisoner in the Midwest. Although a short story that Alden has written and sent to Emiko indicates that he is probably not in good stead with his family, he is nonetheless separated from them by thousands of miles and prison walls. Alden's letters finally stop when he is transferred to Alaska, where he is closer to his family and is given the opportunity to attend community college classes, possibly mitigating the original sense of isolation that spurred his first letter to Emiko. Unfortunately, though, not much has changed for Emiko when the letters stop, and she ends the story on the same lonely note with which she began it.

Family and Family Life

The images of family and family life in the story are varied, but all are affected by the stresses of modern life. Emiko is the head of a family that includes three generations: herself, her children, and her grandchildren. There do not appear to be any men around the family, and the only time she mentions her dead husband is when she wonders if they would have divorced, like so many people she knows, had he lived longer. Her children who are mentioned are daughters and seem to behave like young children, even though they are most likely adults or close to adulthood. She carries the main responsibility for the finances and struggles to "cope with the needs of her brood."

Alden is part of a large family with seven children, which he attributes to "the Eskimo need for survival." But a short story he writes and sends to Emiko makes her believe that he has killed his mother's brother and raped and killed a female relative—hardly the

image of a happy and close family. He is delighted, though, when he discovers that he will be transferred to a prison in Alaska.

Images of Men

The only men mentioned at any length in the story are Alden, Emiko's neighbor, and her husband. None of the three is portrayed as particularly strong or successful: Alden is in prison, possibly for murder, and is taking "massive doses" of Thorazine for depression; Mits, Emiko's husband, is dead and has left her with the job of heading a multi-generational family without much support (and she wonders about their prospects for divorce had he lived longer); her neighbor has been to prison twice for forgery and is so fragile that he cries when Emiko removes a splinter from his hand.

Violence

There is an undercurrent of violence in the story, beginning with the fact that Alden is in a federal penitentiary. Emiko does not know why he is there, but a particularly dark and bloody short story he has written gives her the idea that he has murdered two relatives. As well, Emiko reports being "pummeled by a dear friend" who did not appreciate Emiko's response to her poem; and Emiko's daughters are seen in a brief scene in which one drags the other around the house by her hair, "rebelling at last against her sister's authoritarianism."

Emiko also remembers seeing a television news report about five young people, who had kidnapped an heiress to express their "disillusionment with the establishment," being burned alive in their house after the police tried to take them into custody. She is horrified by the actions of the police and sympathetic to the young people, whom she sees as outcasts and desperate martyrs.

The story ends on a violent note, as well, when Alden is moved to the Seattle City Jail for his own protection after he reports witnessing a rape in the federal prison.

Cultural Differences

Yamamoto presents a wide array of cultures and shows how they relate and sometimes clash. This includes the relationship between Alden, who is Eskimo, and Emiko, who is Japanese American. They are different ages and come from different cultural backgrounds. Alden must deal with prison culture everyday, while Emiko struggles with the modern world of twentieth-century Los Angeles. In addition, Emiko, despite living in a Japanese-American internment camp during World War II, cannot quite comprehend the limitations placed on Alden as a prisoner in the federal penitentiary.

Indeed, the modern world is a cause of stress in the story, as it pushes against more traditional cultures. Alden's short story presents visions of a traditional walrus hunt alongside the image of a murder committed with a Remington magnum rifle. Alden's

newly found Christianity is used to decry the destruction of his ancestors' land and, as well, his academic and intellectual excursions into his religion are in stark contrast to the rapes and other degradations of his prison environment.

Style

Narrative Form

Given that the bulk of Yamamoto's story is about the letters written between Alden and Emiko, "The Eskimo Connection" is written almost as an epistle—a writing form that presents letters written to someone or written between two or more people. (According to one of the letters, Alden has paraphrased the biblical epistles of Paul). But the critical difference between a true epistle and "The Eskimo Connection" is the point of view. A true epistle allows for multiple points of view; that is, the letters of all of the characters are presented without the intrusion or interpretation of a narrator.

In contrast, in Yamamoto's story, nearly all of Alden's thoughts and words in his letters are told through Emiko's eyes. Only twice are Alden's own words actually presented somewhat in full: when Emiko includes a section of a letter Alden writes after he is transferred to McNeil Island Penitentiary, remarking how beautiful the place is; and when Emiko shares a small portion of Alden's short story. In addition, Emiko allows a few single words of Alden's to pepper her story about their relationship; and at the end of the story, she includes two phrases Alden uses to describe homosexual activity at the prisons. Essentially, this is Emiko's story, and she is the narrator, even though it is not written in a first-person point of view. The question arises, then, as to how reliable a narrator Emiko is. Because all of the information transmitted through the story comes from Emiko, it is colored by her opinions and experiences.

Use of Humor and Self-Deprecation

Yamamoto allows Emiko to be a character who can make fun of herself and uses humor to lighten an otherwise harsh situation. This is apparent immediately in the story when Emiko, a published poet, describes herself as "an aging Nisei widow" who is now involved with caring for her grandchildren rather than with writing poetry. The story closes on a similar note, although by this time there is a tinge of sadness to the self-deprecation.

While she is not always light-hearted throughout the story, Emiko's sense of humor is apparent in the present and in her memories: she refers to the artists she knew in the World War II Japanese-American internment camp as being vulnerable "creative critters," and she remembers being "pum-meled by a dear friend whose poem she had made light of." As well, the strict rules that govern visits to Alden's prison are mocked when she reads that visitors must be careful of their attire and that such clothes as miniskirts and low-cut shirts are considered improper. The author writes, "Well, she would have to bear that in mind. No bikinis, either, she supposed."

Historical Context

Japanese Internment Camps During World War II

After the Japanese attack on American ships at Pearl Harbor in 1941, sentiment grew in support of relocating all Japanese Americans living along the West Coast to the interior of the country. Many in the western states, as well as those holding high positions in the United States government, feared a Japanese invasion and felt that the presence of those with Japanese ancestry living along the West Coast posed a national security threat. In March of 1942, President Roosevelt issued an executive order defining an area of the West Coast from which all persons of Japanese ancestry were to be excluded. The army forcibly relocated approximately 110,000 evacuees (most of whom were American citizens) to ten relocation centers in western states. Smaller numbers of Germans, Italians, and people of other nationalities were also interned or forcibly relocated.

Yamamoto lived in one of these camps during World War II. Barbed-wire fences surrounded the camps, and soldiers carrying guns patrolled the camp perimeters. Barracks hurriedly constructed of wood and tarpaper served as shelters with cots, blankets, and a light bulb; bathing, toilet, laundry, and dining facilities were communal. Some internees had access to small jobs, and a few even had gardens to grow food to supplement what was doled out, but there was very little to do on a daily basis at the camps. The internees had left their homes and businesses, and estimates of these losses amounted to approximately $350 million. The relocation disrupted family life and undermined the traditional authority of the father in these households.

Those concerned with civil liberties were stunned to see that the United States Supreme Court failed to rule that the forced relocations violated the civil rights of the internees and were therefore unconstitutional. The last of the centers closed in 1946. In 1988, President Reagan signed a bill granting each surviving Japanese-American internee a tax-free payment of $20,000 and an apology from the U.S. government.

Japanese-American Writing

Three distinct groups of Japanese dominate the economic, political, and cultural history of the Japanese-American population: the Issei, those who immigrated to the United States; the Nisei, the second-generation, American-born children; and the Sansei, the children of the Nisei. An extensive but little-known body of Issei writing exists, but most of it is confined to Japanese libraries. The literature available to American audiences primarily includes several oral histories and biographies, such as anthropologist Akemi Kikumura's *Through Harsh Winters,* the story of her mother, and journalist Kazuo Ito's thousand-page tome on the Pacific Northwest entitled *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America.*

Nisei literature, mainly through short stories and autobiography, exhibits a dichotomy of sorts, between writers who see the tension between Japanese ethnicity and white society and those who do not. An author from the first category is painter Mine Okubo, who wrote *Citizen 13660,* an illustrated diary of her life at an internment camp. Hisaye Yamamoto is one of the most widely read members of the Nisei group, as is fellow writer Wakako Yamauchi. Some critics think that Monica Stone's *Nisei Daughter* failed to challenge white mainstream culture, but the autobiography was written before the term "Asian American" became a positive, widely used expression, and the concept of being "Japanese American" was not prevalent.

The work of Sansei writers appeared in the period between the 1970s and the 1990s through poetry, drama, and prose. Work from the 1970s addressed larger societal issues such as the Vietnam War, feminism, and civil rights. Prominent works of poetry include Patricia Ikeda's *House of Wood, House of Salt* and Geraldine Kudaka' s *Numerous Avalanches at the Point of Intersection.*

Critical Overview

While Yamamoto's reputation as a writer primarily rests upon the stories published in the collection *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories,* many critics believe her to be one of the most gifted Japanese-American short story writers of the twentieth century. Ruth Y. Hsu, writing in *The Reference Guide to American Literature,* notes that Yamamoto is "widely considered to be one of the most accomplished Japanese-American writers." And in her piece introducing *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories,* King-Kok Cheung asserts that many of Yamamoto's stories are on equal footing with the writing of such short story masters as Katherine Mansfield, Flannery O'Connor, and Grace Paley.

Critics reading Yamamoto's short stories are struck by her compassion and empathy toward characters who are marginalized and ignored by society, such as Alden, the young Eskimo prisoner in "The Eskimo Connection." Cheung notes that Yamamoto's "sympathy is invariably with those who are on the fringes of American society." Hsu has noticed this as well, commenting that Yamamoto's interests lie "in the tales of the disenfranchised, tales largely left untold but for authors like her." This also includes characters such as Emiko, the widowed poet in "The Eskimo Connection," a woman who works hard to support her family amid the chaos that is Los Angeles. Yamamoto's voice, according to Cheung, is "at once compassionate and ironic, gentle and probing."

As well, critics have noted Yamamoto's interest in other ethnic groups and in how they and the Japanese relate. Valerie Miner, writing in *The Nation,* alerts readers that "a distinguishing characteristic of Yamamoto's work is her multicultural casting" in many of her stories, including "The Eskimo Connection." The collection of stories in *Seventeen Syllables* is not just about Japanese Americans but also about African Americans, Chicanos, other Asians, and whites of differing classes—this multicultural focal point many attribute to the fact that Yamamoto has lived among a wide variety of people.

Another focus of Yamamoto's is the family and the stress it undergoes every day in contemporary society. In her stories, parents and children have trouble understanding each other, families struggle to make ends meet, and women are in unhappy marriages. "Yamamoto writes with distilled realism about ordinary people experiencing romance, racism, and family responsibilities," writes Miner. Her plots are firmly rooted in families and the troubles and joys they bring. Mothers are critical characters to Yamamoto, as seen through Emiko and her role as a matriarch to a variety of people in "The Eskimo Connection." Gayle K. Fujita Sato recognizes this in *The Oxford Guide to Women's Writing in the United States,* where she notes that one of the primary themes exhibited in Japanese-American literature since the 1920s is that of "a definition of home, through actual and symbolic mothering."

In 1986, Yamamoto received the Before Columbus Foundations American Book Award for Life-time Achievement, and she continues to be published in both Japanese-American publications and mainstream journals such as *The Kenyon Review.*

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson examines how the character Emiko Toyama in Yamamoto's short story, despite her denial of her role, serves as a sort of mother figure to people beyond her immediate family.

Hisaye Yamamoto's "The Eskimo Connection" is told through the eyes of Emiko Toyama, a poet who self-deprecatingly refers to herself simply as "an aging Nisei widow" with very little to offer a young prison pen pal. She never directly calls herself a poet in the story, although art and writing have certainly played an important part in her life, at least in the past: she is a published poet; in the internment camp she "hung out sometimes with people who wrote and painted"; she has discussed poetry with fellow writers; and she sends literature magazines to Alden in prison. Her response to Alden' s requests to critique his writing has the tone of a woman experienced in thinking deeply about writing.

The ironic tone that accompanies Emiko's description of herself mimics, in fact, the words Yamamoto used to describe herself in the *Amerasia Journal* (as quoted in Cheung's Introduction to *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories),* saying that she must "in all honesty list [her] occupation as housewife." Cheung adds that Yamamoto's own words are often like her stories, "told by unreliable narrators and laden with irony," and cannot be taken literally.

It is through this sense of irony that Emiko's full character is revealed. She pretends to be one thing—"just" a mother—but her actions reveal the complexity of her identity. In the same way that she dismisses her artistic side, Emiko dismisses her maternal side. But through careful examination of Emiko's actions, and less attention to whom she *says* she is, Emiko is revealed as a sort of mother, a matriarch to those outside her family as well as to her own family. Gale K. Fujita Sato, in *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States,* notes that most Japanese-American writing since the 1920s includes the theme of "a definition of *home,* through actual and symbolic mothering," and "The Eskimo Connection" is no exception.

Emiko's mothering in the story takes on a variety of forms. Immediately she is seen as the mother and grandmother to her own family, "her brood," as she later refers to them. Yamamoto gives Emiko children, but only the number of children still at home is disclosed—three—while the total number of her children is unspecified. Emiko also has grandchildren small enough to need babysitting, which she claims to spend much of her time doing instead of writing poetry. She is alone, handling this "brood" without her husband, who is now dead.

Emiko's family appears to be a handful. In various places in the story she portrays the management of her family as a huge j ob, one that sounds as if it almost drowns her. "It was always something— dentist, doctor, marijuana, living together without marriage, distressing report cards, flu." Somehow, even on the small amount of money her

husband has left her, she copes with the disastrous and the routine. Later in the story she blames a late response to one of Alden's letters on "wallowing in the mire of modern life." And when she is in Seattle for a wedding and calls her family, she reports that "she got the impression that the kids didn't care if she ever got back," again diminishing her role. But years later, she discovers that in her absence her daughters fought bitterly, one dragging the other around the house by her hair. Obviously, Emiko provides the stability this family needs in the face of modern pressures.

But Emiko does not serve as a mother only to her immediate family. The story's main plot revolves around how she mothers the young Eskimo prisoner Alden in a long-distance fashion. He is far away from his native land, in a midwestern federal penitentiary, without a real home. Emiko's treatment of Alden, through her letters, gives him a home, a place he can come to, to brag, to share, to express fear and anger. True, she never actually meets him, but her mothering instinct clicks on almost instantly after she receives Alden's first letter, noting that he is "young enough to be one of her children." At first she shies away from answering the letter, finding all sorts of reasons why continuing the correspondence would be a bad idea. But suddenly, "against her own better judgment," she sends him a letter with a gentle critique of the essay he has asked her to look over. With every letter, Emiko learns something new about him, and he responds to her attentions with the exuberance of a proud child showing off his accomplishments from school.

Alden thrives under Emiko's nurturing, at least as reported by Emiko in the story. When he first writes her, he is described as a "prisoner-patient," receiving "massive doses of Thorazine" for depression. After a time, Emiko is happy to report that he "seemed to be an exuberant spirit," even under the oppressive conditions in prison. She is able to congratulate him on receiving payment for a published poem, and by the end of the story he has received a grant to attend community college. In his final letter to her, he rejoices with the news that he will be transferred to a jail in Alaska, near his family. After Emiko does not hear from him for a long while, she feels what any mother would feel after doing all that she could for her child: she assumes that he is very busy and happy doing the things he enjoys.

Emiko tells the story of her relationship with Alden in an almost off-handed way; as she detracts from her experience as a poet, she also diminishes her role in Alden's life. For example, she never directly talks about mailing him photographs of her family, but lets the information about this tender gesture slip when she mentions that Alden thanks her for the pictures in a letter. Although he requests the pictures, Emiko's sending them opens her up as never before. It is after this that Alden asks if she is available to meet him en route during his transfer from the Midwest penitentiary to one near Seattle. But Emiko declines his first offer to meet, possibly because she knows that the reality of Alden might ruin the image she has of him. Her second attempt to see him fails, thanks to some official mix-ups, but her response is to make fun of the regulations, giving the impression that she is not terribly upset and maybe even a bit relieved.

Emiko's family lacks men, with her husband dead and, apparently, with only daughters as children. Alden serves as the perfect son for Emiko. He shares her interest in

literature and, from her retelling of his letter, works hard and stays out of trouble while he is in prison. True, it is ironic that "the good son" should be in prison, but Emiko studiously avoids thinking too much about why Alden might be serving time. When she does consider this fact, she decides to envision him as a forger, because a favorite neighbor was a forger, and then she launches into a small soliloquy outlining her discomfort with the idea of imprisonment. Her ambivalence comes, in part, from her own experiences at a World War II internment camp for Japanese Americans, but there is a naïve quality to her eventual admission that "there must be some system to temporarily segregate those who persisted in preying on others." It is almost as though she wishes to protect Alden, as she would a son, from the harshness of real punishment.

Emiko also mothers another minor but critical character in the story, her neighbor who, years ago, was imprisoned for forgery, and of whom Alden reminds her. The way she ministered to her neighbor was very tender and maternal. Twice he asked her to remove splinters from his hand, and both times "he had begun whimpering and cringing" when she approached with the sterilized needle. At first, she thought he was joking but then saw that his tears were real. "He was one of the innocents of the world," remembers Emiko, "living about a foot off the ground." Part of Emiko's persona for Alden is derived from this sensitive neighbor who, like Alden, was both an artist and a felon.

Yamamoto has created a character who, "against her own better judgment," makes a connection with someone very different from herself, thanks to the power of her maternal instincts. Her strength and power come from her role as a mother in her family, and this is extended beyond the bounds of her own home and into the lives of others. Emiko tries to downplay her matriarchal position and importance, just as she attempts to reduce her role as a poet, but the lesson of her experience with Alden shows that this is impossible; she can say all she wants about merely being "an aging Nisei widow" but the proof is in her actions.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on "The Eskimo Connection," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Carroll has a bachelor of arts degree in English from Oakland University. In this essay, Carroll explores the ways in which Yamamoto uses subtlety in her story to give power to repressed individuals.

Sometimes, the words an author leaves unsaid are as important to the story as the written words on the page. In "The Eskimo Connection," Hisaye Yamamoto builds a story from broken glimpses into the lives of the two main characters, Emiko Toyama and Alden Ryan Walunga. The written correspondence that they share with each other is not constant, and what they write is not always definite or necessarily reliable. Yamamoto provides the reader with clues to the dialogue between the two but rarely uses the original text from the letters Emiko and Alden write. By giving fragments of a story, she emphasizes to the reader what may not be obvious about the characters to themselves and about the world in which they live. The story of Asian-American history, from the Eskimos to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, has been greatly ignored in most surveys of American history. Emiko and Alden, to a great extent, are unable to realize their own identities as prisoners, and Yamamoto uses this ignorance to give a voice to the hidden story of life for Asian Americans, on both an internal and external level.

While Emiko is shocked at the conditions under which Alden lives, she never connects them to her own experience in the internment camp. Yamamoto makes one mention to Emiko's experience there, writing, "As a young woman in camp, she had hung out sometimes with people who wrote and painted and she knew what vulnerable psyches resided in creative critters." Using terms like "hung out" suggests choice, and if a reader knew little about American history, it might be difficult to understand that she was referring to something other than some sort of enjoyable day camp for young women. Emiko seems to ignore the fact that she was a prisoner in the camp. When she received word from Alden's prison office that she must get permission before sending a literary magazine, Yamamoto describes her reaction, "That was what being in prison was, was it, the relinquishment of every liberty that those on the outside took for granted?" Emiko is forthcoming in her beliefs that prisons are not the answer for crime. Yamamoto makes a point against internment through the subtleties of Emiko's argument against prisons. She also questions the morality of government by having Emiko remember the story in which a government official thought it moral to financially reimburse people for property damage, while ignoring the true moral problem with the situation.

In *A People's History of the United States,* Howard Zinn tells how in 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave the army power to "arrest every Japanese-American on the West coast ... to take them from their homes, transport them to camps far into the interior, and keep them there under prison conditions." Emiko should be able to understand the circumstances under which Alden lives in prison because she shared a similar experience of not being free. That Emiko is seemingly unaware of the seriousness and unjustness of her past makes it all the more sad that she cannot relate it to her own experience. Yamamoto shows that not only is imprisonment of Japanese

Americans by the United States government absent in the minds of the average Americans, it is also taken as a normal experience of life for those who were the victims of it. Yamamoto provides a voice for the words that Emiko cannot herself express.

While Alden's imprisonment is more defined than Emiko's, he accepts his situation with little outward discontent. Yamamoto writes, "Alden Ryan Walunga seemed to be an exuberant spirit even under these stifling conditions." While Emiko feels guilty and sad for not being able to visit him, she notices that he is seemingly unaffected. Alden lives happily despite the restrictions on his life. In one letter to Emiko, he writes, "There is lots of beauty in McNeil." After Emiko's failed attempt to visit him, instead of expressing disappointment, he finds happiness in her being on the visitor list, even though there is little chance of her ever visiting. In his first letter to Emiko, the article Alden includes begins by him expressing the unjustness of the Eskimo land being taken over and destroyed. He attempts to write a serious article outlining the ways in which his people and their land and culture have been taken over and, in many ways, taken away. For some reason, his devotion to Christianity prohibits him from making a clear argument, and Emiko finds his article clouded with confusion. That Yamamoto has Alden's article end in a Christian sermon is important because it shows what a powerful influence Western culture has had over him, even to the point that it damages his ability to fully realize the negative effects it has had on his own culture. The story that Alden later sends to Emiko, which she surmises as his story, is dark and bloody but has another happy and religious ending, mirroring his first article. The reader cannot truly know whether it is Alden's story or not. He is a medicated prisoner who is so devoted to Christianity that it has led to what Emiko feels is "self-delusion."

Both characters' minds are barred from seeing themselves and their situations clearly. In addition to leaving the story of her physical imprisonment in an internment camp untold, Emiko also lacks a voice to express the unhappiness of the imprisonment in which she resides at home. Although Alden is in a physical prison, he still finds the inspiration to write. The reason why Emiko doesn't write anymore is unclear, although it appears she has simply gotten too caught up in the day-to-day tasks of life to find the inspiration or the time to devote to her creative side. Yamamoto provides little detail of the life of Emiko, naming her a widow but not giving a personality to her husband or to her kids. Emiko doesn't seem happy, but she does seem somewhat content with her situation. Yamamoto shows little closeness in the relationships that Emiko maintains, and Emiko seems to be lost in a world of taking care of daily business but not really living freely. She is so accustomed to living this way that, similar to her references to her internment, she is mute in voicing concern about her limited freedoms.

Throughout the story, Emiko seems surprised by the vulnerability of humans. In reference to her former neighbor, she remembers him crying at the sight of a needle. Initially, she laughed at his reaction before realizing he truly was frightened. In addition, Emiko notices the fragility of marriage when she discovers many people in her life are seeking divorce after many years together. She is surprised to learn that something as sacred and seemingly eternal as marriage is vulnerable to destruction. Emiko never seems able to confront her own vulnerabilities, as if she is unwillingly restricted from doing so. In the introduction to Yamamoto's *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories,*

King-Kok Cheung writes, "We must be attentive to all the words on the page to unbury covert plots, fathom the characters' repressed emotions, and detect the author's silent indictment and implicit sympathy." Yamamoto's subtle tendencies to leave things unsaid help the reader discover what the characters cannot alone express.

Yamamoto explores many ways in which people are imprisoned, and the story fits into a broad prospective on American literature. When Emiko reads the regulations for visitations at McNeil Island, she notes that women are expected to dress a certain way, not wearing anything too revealing or close-fitting. While Emiko makes a joke about this, she does not present her opinions on the matter. There is no dress code for male visitors. Yamamoto, with subtlety, makes a commentary on the ways in which women must limit their freedoms to be respected and accepted in certain situations. She makes the point that people share a lack of freedom and also a collective lack of ability to express concerns about their own limitations. Two seemingly different individuals make a connection based on the past, the present, and the future.

Yamamoto quietly and subtly gives a voice to Asian Americans in a place where it is often lacking. She encourages people to seek connections to one another and to open up discussion so that important events in history and in individuals' lives do not go on ignored. Emiko makes a connection with a prisoner, whom she appears to have little in common with, through written communication. The Asian-American literary magazine is important to her and to Alden because it provides a voice that they themselves have trouble finding, and it gives them hope that one day they will speak and be heard. "The Eskimo Connection" is not simply a story about Asian Americans but one that forces all readers to look within themselves to identify the prisons in which each person resides and the ways in which the past has influenced everyone. Yamamoto ends her sad story not unlike the way Alden ended his, by providing a glimmer of hope for the future, that one day through literature and through open discussion, no one will be condemned to live without a voice for their experiences.

Source: Marcey Carroll, Critical Essay on "The Eskimo Connection," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses the theme of family in Yamamoto's story.

In Yamamoto's "The Eskimo Connection," the narrator, Emiko Toyama, does her best to piece together enough information about Alden Ryan Walunga, her incarcerated pen pal, to create some picture of who he is and what his life is like. Throughout the narrative, the reader is also invited to create a picture of Emiko's life, which seems to revolve around her family. Accordingly, Emiko's interest in Alden is partly focused on what she imagines his relationship is to his family. However, Emiko's interpretation of the information she gathers from Alden's letters is much more optimistic than what the discerning reader may gather about the young man's family relations.

Emiko describes herself as "an aging Nisei widow in Los Angeles with several children, three still at home, whose main avocation was not writing poetry but babysitting the grandchildren." Emiko is a published poet who nonetheless spends the majority of her time tending to her family. That this is no easy task is indicated by her description of her time spent "trying as usual to cope with the needs of her brood." Among other family concerns, Emiko faces ongoing financial struggles. A widow supporting her own children, as well as grandchildren, Emiko notes that her deceased husband's life insurance "was adequate if she managed shrewdly"; but adds, there "was always something" that required money to meet the needs of her family. These problems include: the usual health concerns of any family, such as "dentist, doctor ... flu"; the challenge of seeing to her children's education, such as "distressing report cards" and "filling out unwieldy applications for college grants"; and maintaining a home, such as "keeping up with the seasonal needs of the yard, a new roof or water heater."

Included in this list of "routine cares" Emiko mentions, without further explanation, "marijuana" and "living together without marriage." This story, which takes place in the mid-1970s, refers to specific challenges to traditional family life that became prominent during the 1960s and 1970s. Apparently, Emiko must face the discovery that one or more of her children or grandchildren have been caught using illegal drugs. In addition, she is challenged with the nontraditional situation of one of her "brood" choosing to live with a romantic partner out of wedlock. However, most distressing of all to Emiko is the fact that many of her "friends, neighbors, and relatives" are getting divorced, "after twenty-five years of marriage or more!"—another break with traditional family life. Although she herself is widowed, the possibility that she and her husband, had he lived, may have faced the prospect of divorce themselves is extremely disturbing to her; she asks herself, "If Mits had not died, would they too be undergoing such trauma?"

Although she clearly manages to cope with each of these challenges, clearly, she is not entirely comfortable with the challenges "modern family life" poses to traditional expectations about family. In addition, Emiko sometimes feels that, despite all her efforts, her children do not necessarily value her role in their lives. When she goes out

of town for a wedding, she calls home just once, "to make sure all was peaceful there," and "got the impression that the kids didn't care if she ever got back." Only years later is she given reason to believe that her presence in their lives is crucial to the peace of the household, when she learns that "her younger daughter, rebelling at last against her sister's authoritarianism, had dragged her all the way around the house by her long hair."

At the beginning of "The Eskimo Connection," the narrator poses the question: "What commonality was there between a probably embittered young man and an aging Nisei widow in Los Angeles?" In addition to both being Asian American, and both being writers, Emiko imagines a commonality between herself and Alden Ryan Walunga in terms of their relationship to their families. She figures out that he is "the third of seven children with two older sisters and four younger brothers." She notes that he attributes his large family to "the Eskimo need for survival," meaning that a large family is considered important to both the survival of the family itself and to the survival of the Eskimo as a people.

However, there is evidence within the story that Alden's relationship to his family is of a more sinister nature than Emiko would like to imagine. The last correspondence she receives from him contains a story he has written that hints at why he was imprisoned. The story tells of the funeral of a young man who, using a twenty-two Remington magnum rifle, killed his uncle (his mother's youngest brother) and a female relative, after he raped her. The story focuses on the mother, who is grieving the death of her eldest son. But, Alden gives his story a happy ending, rendering the murderous son "reborn in Christ, a new man, washed clean of his sins!"

Emiko asks herself, "Was this, then, Alden's story?" but insists on maintaining a more optimistic picture of her imprisoned pen pal and his relationship to his family. By the end of the "The Eskimo Connection," when Emiko no longer hears from Alden, she consoles herself by imagining that he has either served his sentence and is on parole, or that, at least, he has been transferred to a prison in Alaska, where his mother, brothers, and sisters can visit him regularly.

The reader of "The Eskimo Connection," on the other hand, is invited to piece together a harsher picture of Alden's relationship to his family. The literary references in his letters, for example, hint at a penchant for murderous family relations.

In his correspondence with Emiko, Alden refers to his love by the name "Ophelia"—the love-interest in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet.* The reference to *Hamlet* raises the specter of a family murder plot. In the play, Hamlet suspects his uncle, his father's brother, of killing his father in order to marry his mother and become king. Throughout the play, Hamlet intends to murder his uncle to avenge the death of his father. In the process, he accidentally kills the father of Ophelia, the young woman with whom he is in love. Out of grief and despair, Ophelia goes crazy and drowns herself. In the end, Hamlet succeeds in killing his uncle, then his mother drinks poison, and Ophelia's brother kills Hamlet to avenge the death of his father. If Alden refers to his love as Ophelia, by extension, one

can conclude that he imagines himself to be Hamlet—an association that resonates with his own story in which a young man has killed his own uncle.

Alden lists among his reading interests the Russian novel *The Brothers Karamazov,* by Fyodor Dostoyevski. This novel also centers on a family murder plot in which a young man kills his own father in a romantic rivalry. Soon afterward, the young man is imprisoned for murder. Alden's reference to *The Brothers Karamazov* invites the reader to draw a parallel with Alden's situation in that he is incarcerated, perhaps for the murder of one or more family members. In addition, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a long treatise on Christian faith and the nature of sin, an important element of the novel that is in synch with Alden's preoccupation with Christianity and apocalypse.

The theme of family is central to "The Eskimo Connection." Emiko' s life revolves around the care of her family, which poses many challenges to her traditional ideas about family life. Her optimistic perception of Alden's situation, by the end of the story, is based on the assumption that his mother, brothers, and sisters maintain close ties with him. However, evidence throughout the story suggests that Alden's relationship to family, and his preoccupations regarding family life, are fraught with violent fantasies—if not actual acts of violence—which Emiko chooses to disregard.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on "The Eskimo Connection," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

"The Eskimo Connection" features only two main characters. Adapt the story as a play with only those two characters. Remember that they never meet each other and know each other only through their letters. How does this affect the way you stage the play?

Investigate what led to President Reagan's 1988 decision to compensate each surviving Japanese-American internee with a tax-free payment of $20,000 and an apology from the U.S. government. What is your opinion of this decision? Have any other groups received similar payments? Do you think there are some who should receive such payments today?

What kinds of crimes lead to imprisonment in a federal penitentiary? How are these penitentiaries different from other prisons? How many federal prisoners are incarcerated today, and how has this number changed from the 1970s, when Alden was in prison?

Compare and Contrast

1940s: Japanese Americans on the West Coast are rounded up and sent to internment camps, as many American leaders fear that their race makes them a national security threat.

1970s: Emperor Hirohito of Japan visits Los Angeles.

Today: Los Angeles is home to the largest population of Japanese outside of Japan.

1940s: Racial tensions are increasing in Los Angeles between whites and minority populations. Mexican Americans are portrayed in the media as dangerous members of criminal gangs. Some Hispanic men wear zoot suits, loose-fitting suits viewed by some as an affront to the war effort to conserve resources such as fabric. Amid this atmosphere and prompted by a reported fight between a small group of soldiers and Mexican Americans, hundreds of military men stationed in Los Angeles enter the city's eastside neighborhoods and beat men wearing zoot suits. Police arrest some six hundred Hispanics over the course of a few days. The Zoot Suit Riots end only when military authorities declare the area off-limits to military personnel.

1970s: Attempting to capture the kidnappers of heiress Patty Hearst, police surround and storm a Los Angeles house occupied by Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) members.

Today: Thousands of basketball fans fill the streets in Los Angeles to celebrate the Los Angeles Lakers winning the National Basketball League Championship. The party quickly deteriorates, as hundreds of rioters decide to torch cars, loot businesses, and set fires in the streets. The twenty thousand who attended the game, as well as the athletes, are kept inside the Staple Center for their own protection.

1940s: In 1945 the divorce rate is 3.5 divorces for every one thousand people.

1970s: In 1975 the divorce rate is 4.8 divorces for every one thousand people.

Today: The most recent divorce statistics show that there are 4.7 divorces for every one thousand people.

What Do I Read Next?

The Big Aiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature, published in 1991, is a collection, edited by Jeffery Paul Chan and Frank Chin, of over a century of writing by Asian Americans.

May Sky: There Is Always Tomorrow: An Anthology of Japanese American Concentration Camp Kaiko Haiku, compiled by Violet Kazue De Cristoforo, is a 1997 collection of haiku poetry written by Japanese Americans in Word War II internment camps.

Snow Falling on Cedars is David Guterson's 1994 novel about the trial of a Japanese American accused of murdering a fellow fisherman in a small town in the Pacific Northwest. Complications arise because of the relationship that the journalist covering the trial had with the accused man's wife before World War II and the internment of the town's Japanese Americans. The novel received the 1995 PEN/Faulkner Award.

Monica Stone's *Nisei Daughter* is the 1953 autobiographical account of a Japanese-American woman growing up in Seattle from the 1920s through the 1940s, including her family's World War II internment in Idaho.

"Seventeen Syllables" and Other Stories, published in 1988, is a collection of fifteen of Hisaye Yamamoto's most famous short stories.

Further Study

Cheung, King-Kok, *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa,* Cornell University Press, 1993.

This book examines the way in which these Asian-American women use silence in their fiction.

Hagedorn, Jessica, ed., *Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction,* The Penguin Group, 1993.

The forty-eight stories in this collection are by writers from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities, writing in English. The stories range from those published in the 1930s to those published in the 1990s.

Okubo, Mine, *Citizen 13660,* 1946, reprint, University of Washington Press, 1983.

This book tells the autobiographical story of artist Mine Okubo, who was forced to leave college and relocate to an internment camp during World War II. The story is told through her drawings.

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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 memberseducational 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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