Great Day Study Guide

Great Day by David Malouf

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

□Great Day,□ which appeared in David Malouf's 2000 collection, *Dream Stuff*, has been singled out as one of his best stories. This well-crafted tale explores the tensions that can arise in a close-knit family; it traces each family member's need to find a harmonious balance between personal desires and external connection to the group. The story centers on one day in the life of the Tyler family as its members celebrate the seventy-second birthday of the family patriarch, Audley Tyler. The story begins on the morning of the day, which is also a national holiday, as some members of the family wait for the arrival of the entire clan. Tensions immediately arise as individuals begin to express their separate longings and the obstacles to those longings as they gather together for the celebration. The tensions are eventually resolved as all are able to renew or reestablish connections and come to an acceptance of their collective and personal experience. As the story ends, the family comes together to celebrate their sense of community at the close of their □great day.□

Author Biography

Nationality 1: Australian

Birthdate: 1934

David Malouf was born in Brisbane, Australia, on March 20, 1934, to George and Welcome (Mendoza) Malouf. After he was awarded a degree with honors from the University of Queensland, he relocated to England, where he was employed as a teacher from 1959 to 1968. That year he returned to Australia where he served as a lecturer at the University of Sydney until 1977. Malouf gained recognition and several awards for his poetry written during his teaching years. In 1975, he turned to fiction with his well-received first novel, *Johnno*. In 1978, he retired from teaching and devoted himself full-time to writing.

Malouf has gained international acclaim for his work, which includes several volumes of poetry, six novels and two novellas; three short-story collections, including *Dream Stuff*, in which □Great Day,□ appeared; several nonfiction works; a series of libretti for opera, and a play.

Malouf has received many awards. Among these are the following: the 1974 Australian Literature Society Gold Medal and the 1974 Grace Leven Poetry Prize for *Neighbours in a Thicket: Poems*; the New South Wales Premier's Fiction Award in 1979 for *An Imaginary Life: A Novel* and the New South Wales Premier's Drama Award in 1987 for *Blood Relations*; the 1983 Book of the Year and the 1983 Australian Literature Society Gold Medal for *Fly Away Peter*; the Best Book of the Region Award, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Southeast Asia and South Pacific Region), the Miles Franklin Award, and the Prix Femina Prize (France) for *The Great World* in 1991; and the 1994 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction, the 1994 Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Southeast Asia and South Pacific Region), the 1995 Prix Baudelaire (France), and the 1996 IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for *Remembering Babylon*. In 1994, his *Remembering Babylon* was short listed for the prestigious Booker Prize. In 2000, the *New York Times* named *Dream Stuff* one of its Notable Books of that year, and the same year, Malouf received the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

David Malouf lived in Tuscany, Italy, from 1978 to 1985, after which he returned to Australia.

Plot Summary

□Great Day□ opens early on the morning of Audley Tyler's seventy-second birthday, which is the same day as a national Australian holiday. Angie, Audley's daughter-in-law, sits gazing out to sea while, nearby, Audley is fishing. When Angie walks back to the house, she is greeted by her son, Ned, who informs her that Fran is coming with Audley's son, Clem, her ex-husband.

Angie is always □ill at ease□ in the kitchen of her mother-in-law, Madge, where Angie sits drinking tea. Her daughter, Jenny, asks Angie whether Audley has caught any fish, and Ned asks why Fran and Clem are still friends after their divorce, but no one answers them. Ned agrees to go out and pick wild spinach with his sister for Madge's soup. The narrator notes that the daughters-in-law never really feel a part of the tightly knit Tyler clan.

Today, the entire family along with some neighbors will gather to celebrate Audley's birthday. Later, Audley comes back to the house with two freshly caught blackfish, and he eats breakfast. The narrator explains that Audley was an important official in the Australian government for thirty-seven years. Madge puts the fish in the sink and turns to one of the children's books she is writing, which she bases on her family's experiences.

Angie goes outside again, and Ralph, her husband, joins her. An hour later, Fran arrives followed in a separate car by Clem. The children are confused when Clem asks them whether he and Fran look like newlyweds. They know that since his car accident, □Clem *said things*, just whatever came into his head.□ Three years before, he swerved his car to avoid hitting a boy and crashed; the accident put him in a coma for fourteen months.

Fran used to be the girlfriend of Jonathon, Clem's brother, but she had gotten tired of his marked self-confidence. Determined that she would □save□ Clem from his family, she married him, but then she left after only two years. They remained friends after the divorce, □locked in an odd dependency.□ She and Angie, who both feel like outsiders in the family, have become friends. Audley is the only member of the family with whom Angie feels a connection.

Clem sits in the kitchen with Madge, asking her to talk about him when he was a child since many of his memories were erased by the accident. She tells him some stories, and he admits that he does not remember them. When he asks her if she and his father loved him, Madge answers, □Of course we did,□ and insists that he was Audley's favorite. After Clem claims that he thought he was a disappointment to his father, Madge replies, □Maybe. Maybe that too.□ When he hears his father approach, he runs out the door and gives him a bear hug, telling Audley how glad he is to see him.

Later, Ned sees a group of people heading to the beach. A child from the group introduces himself to Ned, but Ned is furious that the boy has taken him unawares and

rebuffs him. When he gets back to the house, Ned asks his father whether the group is allowed to make a bonfire on the beach, and Ralph tells him that they are, which angers Ned who stalks off to tell his grandfather. Ned admires Audley for his formality, which his own father lacks. After he gets no response from his grandfather, Ned goes back to the beach and spies on the group. As he leaves, he stumbles on the boy who had introduced himself and says, □Hi,□ to him by way of reconciliation.

Audley walks to town and heads toward the Waruna Folk and History Museum, which he often visits. The museum holds a collection of Tyler family artifacts and offers Audley a chance to reminisce about the past.

At seven-thirty, the guests begin to arrive. Jonathon, who brings a new girlfriend, is followed by □an old flame of Audley's,□ according to Madge. An hour later, groups of men □vigorously□ argue while the women sit □on the sidelines.□ As Fran wanders from group to group, Clem watches her from the background. Cedric Pohl, a guest whom she has never met before, introduces himself to Fran. As they chat, she notices that he is interested in her.

Feeling that □too much might be happening too fast,□ Fran escapes outside where Ned, Jen, and some of their cousins are dancing to music from a stereo. Fran thinks about how during visits there she used to fill notebooks with angry epithets about the Tyler family, who she felt never fully accepted her. When Audley approaches and tells her he will get her something to drink, she feels the same desire to be a part of the family, but then, just as suddenly, she feels the same anger over her exclusion. She grabs Angie and the two escape to the beach.

As they walk along the beach, Fran admits that Cedric has asked to drive her home. Angie insists that he is □a bit of a s□□,□ explaining that he has cheated on his wife. After they come across the group that Ned had seen on the beach, they stop and watch for a while. Fran imagines herself joining the group.

As they walk back to the house, they see a strange glow in the sky, which turns out to be the museum that has been set on fire by arsonists. When all in the house race to town, they discover that the museum cannot be saved. Audley feels oddly relieved as he stands next to his old friends and watches the museum burn, knowing that many objects connected to his past are being destroyed.

After some of them return to the house, Clem feels that something needs to be said on the occasion. He gives a disjointed speech about how everyone in the universe is connected and that □nothing ever gets *lost*.□ Even though Fran had already left with a group that included Cedric, Clem feels satisfied with his speech and himself. After everyone leaves, Angie and Ralph take a walk while Audley plays the piano. Later, she goes into the kitchen to clean up where she is soon joined by Audley. They talk about Clem's speech, which Audley admits moved him deeply. The story closes with a description of the glowing ashes of the museum, the bonfire on the beach, and the promise of □a new day coming.□

Characters

Cedric Pohl

The night of the celebration, Fran leaves with Cedric Pohl, an attractive thirty-three-year-old. His expensive haircut, along with his propensity for travel, suggests he is wealthy. He is □a bit too sure of himself,□ but she responds to his need to relieve her of her obvious desperation. Little information is provided about him since he serves more as a illustration of Fran's constant need to develop new relationships.

Angie Tyler

Angie Tyler, Ralph's wife, has a sense of □stillness□ and a □capacity to just sit among all that Tyler ebullience and remain self-contained.□ She also has a sense of darkness that gives her sympathetic connection to Audley, which is suggested by the framing technique Malouf uses in the story. The opening and closing scenes focus on the two together, separate from the rest of the family.

Audley Tyler

Audley Tyler, the patriarch of the family, whose ancestors were among the early European settlers, has a formal bearing and appears in a black suit on all occasions. Angie regards him as □a somber column,□ whose demeanor commands attention and respect. He is fastidious and at times gloomy with a 'tendency to withdraw.□ His dark side becomes ominous when he tries to disguise it with □bitter jokes and a form of politeness that at times had an edge of the murderous.□

Yet he is also responsible in his position as the primary caregiver for his children and as a government official. During his years with the government, he served as a model to young, ambitious men □who saw in him the proof that you could get to the top, and stay there too, yet maintain a kind of decency.□ He is the one most moved by Clem's speech, and by the end of the story, he comes to recognize more than any of them the value of family. After the museum burns to the ground, he is also able to reconcile himself to the reality of death.

Clem Tyler

Clem Tyler, one of the four Tyler brothers, never felt included in his family since he did not seem to take after any of them. He has a good nature but is □slow, tongue-tied, aimless,□ which was exacerbated by his accident. Because of her confidence in him, Fran is the only one with whom Clem □felt entirely whole.□ When he is at the party, he seeks her out in order to □centre himself. Otherwise, the occasion might have become chaotic□ due to the expectations others may have of him. When he cannot think clearly,

he experiences moments of panic and must find a familiar object to calm himself. His obvious love and affection for his family fills him with the confidence he needs to give his speech about how connected they all are to each other and to the universe.

Fran Tyler

Fran Tyler, Clem's ex-wife, is adventurous and restless and so is attracted to new places and new men. She turns to Clem for stability. While she demonstrates a good sense of humor, it can sometimes turn cruel as when she kept journals that attacked what she considered to be the family's faults. Fran is the only one who is able to find a life outside the family that she balances with her need to remain connected to it.

Jenny Tyler

Nine-year-old Jenny Tyler, Angie and Ralph's daughter, is younger than her brother but appears worldlier. She rolls her eyes when Ned does not understand why Clem and Fran got divorced if they are still friends.

Jonathon Tyler

Jonathon Tyler, one of the four Tyler brothers, introduced Fran to the family as his girlfriend, but she soon got tired of □the assurance he had of being so much cleverer than others□ and of □his sense of his own power and charm.□

Madge Tyler

Madge Tyler is a messy, disorganized housekeeper, whose bluntness and □off-hand discourtesies□ sometimes put off others, especially her daughters-in-law. She is self-deprecating and full of life. Her boys have inherited her □energy and rough good humour.□ She provides a nice counter to Audley's solemn and dignified demeanor. Madge was adopted and brought up by farmers, and she determined early on that she □belonged to no one but herself,□ which, according to Audley, □made life very interesting.□

Ned Tyler

Eleven-year-old Ned Tyler, Angie and Ralph's son, tries to gain some measure of power in the family by being □the bearer of news,□ and he is disappointed when the others already know that Fran is coming with Clem. He is also disappointed that the family will not be celebrating the country's anniversary since □he wanted time to have precise turning-points that could be marked and remembered.□ Ned becomes intensely concerned about things and is □quick to take offense□ if he feels that others are not equally concerned, as with the question of the bonfire.

Ralph Tyler

When they were young, Ralph Tyler and his brothers □had to fend for themselves, shouting one another down in the war for attention and growing up loud and confident.□ Ralph is shyer than his brothers but shared their same love and respect for their parents. He is easygoing, having been part of the liberal movement of the 1960s.

Themes

Dreams

The thematic focus on dreams in the story is announced by the title of the collection, *Dream Stuff*, an allusion to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (4.1.156-58). Prospero, the central character in the play, notes the temporal nature of human life in his claim, □We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded by a sleep.□ (The passage from Shakespeare appears in Peter Pierce's article, □What Dreams May Come: David Malouf's *Dream Stuff*.) In □Great Day,□ this allusion suggests reflection, as Audley celebrates his seventy-second birthday, and hope as the characters are able to find comforting connections.

Fran's dream becomes a sign of the unification that the family feels at the end of the story after Clem has declared, □Anything is possible. . . . Nothing ever gets *lost*.□ She sees herself lying down with the others on the beach and recognizes the connection that she has with the Tyler family as she emerges □in out of the dark□ and □into the circle of light.□

Loss

Several characters in the story experience an ironic sense of loss. Paul Sharrad notes that this loss □can be both debilitating and the catalyst for creation.□ Clem and Fran, for example, lose a partner when they get a divorce, but the experience allows them to establish a new, supportive relationship with each other. Clem is also able to strengthen his relationship with his family while Fran finds a satisfying balance between her life inside and outside of it.

Ned loses his sure sense of right and wrong when his father and grandfather refuse to support his contention that no one should be setting bonfires on the beach. Paradoxically, he is also disappointed that his family is not celebrating the national holiday by waving flags or building their own bonfires. He disagrees with his father's conclusion that □If these fellers want an excuse for a good do, I'm not the one to deny them, but it's just another day like any other really.□ Ned becomes angry at the members of his family who □like things left up in the air□ and who □never want anything settled.□

This inconclusiveness, however, also suggests an openness and flexibility that Ned eventually adopts. After he watches the group on the beach, he admits □that what he really regretted was that the bonfire was not theirs,□ and, as a result, he is able to make a connection with the boy whom he had previously rebuffed.

Style

The dominant image in the story is fire, which appears in the beginning as Ned watches a group on the beach build a bonfire and, at the end, when the museum is set ablaze. The fires provide an ironic tension in the story as they suggest both destruction and positive change. Both the bonfire and the museum fire represent outside forces that have the potential to disrupt the Tyler family, but at the same time, they also provide a cathartic and unifying influence.

Initially, the bonfire presents tension through Ned's response to it as he fails to get support from his family for his contention that the group on the beach is breaking the rules. His eventual acceptance of the bonfire helps Ned become less rigid in his thinking. The bonfire also enables Fran to realize her connection to the Tyler family: she imagines herself enclosed in the circle of light it offers, the same comforting □light that fills the world.□

Malouf connects the bonfire to the museum fire as he describes the glowing embers of each at the story's close. Initially, the museum fire causes a similar tension in that it is the result of outside forces, here specifically more threatening ones. Yet as Audley watches the artifacts of his past be destroyed by the fire, he comes to recognize the importance of what is left behind. In both cases, the fire draws a circle of people around it, emphasizing connection between those who form the circle.

Historical Context

The story is set on a warm day during the Australian summer. No date is mentioned, but it is most likely in January, which is Australia's hottest month. During this month, Australians celebrate two historical events: Australia's Independence Day on January 1, which honors the day the country won its independence from Great Britain in 1901; and Australia Day on January 26, which honors the date in 1788 when the first white settlement was established. Some critics have assumed that the story takes place on Independence Day, but others have inferred that it is Australia Day. Malouf never identifies the specific holiday that becomes the backdrop for the story, perhaps to place more emphasis on the reunification of family.

Historical details do play an important part, however, at the end of the story when the museum that contains many of the family's artifacts burns down. Peter Pierce, in his article on *Dream Stuff*, notes regional elements in □Great Day,□ arguing that while there are no aborigines in the story, and □no bonfires of theirs will ring the long continental coast in celebration,□ on this national holiday, Malouf asks us □to reflect on where and how far Australia has traveled since the McGiverns . . . came to the blacksoil country and other regions of Australia that they pioneered.□

Aborigines, the name given to the original inhabitants of Australia, may have emigrated from Asia approximately 20,000 years ago. Though various groups of aborigines moved there, the country remained isolated from the outside world until Europeans began to explore and settle it. Portuguese Manuel Godhino de Eredia is considered to be the first European to sight the continent in 1601, followed by Spaniard Luis Vaez de Torres in 1605. Dutch explorers later named it New Holland.

In 1770, Captain James Cook landed on the east coast and claimed the land for Great Britain. The first British settlement, soon established in 1788, was a penal colony in Port Jackson, which is now Sydney. The continent became a British dependency by 1829. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Australia became a dumping ground for anyone deemed undesirable by the British government.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a gold strike brought an influx of people from around the world to the continent. By the mid-1800s, permanent colonization had erased the old penal settlements, and by 1901, a self-governing confederacy with its own constitution was established.

Critical Overview

Dream Stuff earned Malouf overwhelming critical praise, and □Great Day□ is often singled out as the finest story in the collection. Paul Sharrad, in his article on Malouf's short prose, insists that Malouf is □Australia's leading producer of 'poetic prose.'□ He finds that □the shorter work . . . relies for its impact on musical qualities such as rhythm and cadence and the modulation of evocative motifs□ and allows Malouf □more consistently to tap into his creative strengths and to provide new insights into old experiences.□

Rebecca Miller in her review of *Dream Stuff* for *Library Journal*, praises □these nine beautiful and often brutal stories□ that □[describe] a precarious world in which the imagination, through dreams, is the only thing that can face down the losses of life.□ She adds, □Almost all of the stories here are superb, evocative creations.□ She finds, □As a whole, the collection is like a tumultuous life: it reels through surprising turns of plot, alternating between moments on the brink of death in one story and loss of innocence in another, then presses on, redeemed only by the warmth of human feeling and a glimpse of the possible.□

A review in the *Economist* applauds the tone of the collection, arguing that □there is nothing conventionally 'dreamy' about the stories themselves. Not so much as a trace of sentimentality. Not the least haziness or insubstantiality.□ The reviewer also admires the solid construction, the □uncompromisingly gritty and emotionally charged□ subject matter, the □extent of psychological territory covered,□ and □physical landscape□ of the stories, which is □carefully charted.□ The review concludes by insisting, □Such, in the hands of a latter-day Prospero like Mr. Malouf, is the stuff that dreams are made on.□

Peter Pierce, in his article on *Dream Stuff*, finds □an artful casualness□ in the stories and praises their focus on □the variegated stuff of dreams□longed for and summoned up. Or come unbidden, bringing peace, or disquiet,□ which, he claims is their □unifying metaphorical thread.□

A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* notes the regionalism of the stories, arguing that □Malouf . . . has a peculiarly Australian sensitivity to the mechanics of large families□ and that his □stories show his feeling for the intense grip of the continent's space upon its people.□ Yet, the reviewer also insists that Malouf □[transcends] regionalism by his instinct for that odd, modulated empathy victims and outsiders can feel for their assailants□ and so □shows a rare, exploratory intelligence coupled with a compassionate view of human conduct.□ Singling out □Great Day,□ this reviewer states, □of the nine stories gathered in Malouf's latest collection, most are excellent, and one□□Great Day,□ the final entry□is outstanding,□ finding it □elegantly structured and perfectly pitched.□ Miller also singles out the story, which she claims is □the collection's final and most deeply crafted work□ as does a review in *New Statesman* that claims, □□Great Day□ [is] a charming, life-affirming account of a family gathering on the bicentenary Australia Day in 1988.□ While, like the other stories, it □also turns

opaque, with characters making gnomic utterances,□ the reviewer concludes that □here and elsewhere, Malouf's fine writing does live up to its pretensions as often as not.□

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Perkins is a professor of American and English literature and film. In this essay, Perkins traces the characters' achievement of a harmonious balance.

In his article on David Malouf's shorter fiction, Paul Sharrad argues that Malouf's stories explore the mystery inherent in □the moment of contact between different orders of experience,□ specifically □the mystery of what makes people tick□ and □of how some of us find intuitive balance in a world that others force into solid blocks of unfeeling certitude.□ These mysteries are the main focal points of □Great Day□ in its chronicle of one day in the life of the Tyler clan. During the course of this day, readers get glimpses of what makes each member tick as well as their struggles with the inevitable tensions that arise in a tightly knit family structure. The day, however, becomes □great□ by its close, when the characters are able to strike a balance between connection and disconnection and between the past and the future.

Ned, Angie and Ralph's son, is one of the first to feel the tensions on the morning of Audley Tyler's seventy-second birthday, which falls on a national Australian holiday. At eleven, Ned, □whose idea of the world was very different□ from that of his relatives, has □a hunger for order that the circumstances of his life frustrated.□ At breakfast, he wonders why Clem and Fran are still friends after getting a divorce. When he does not get a satisfactory answer to this mystery, he explodes, □People never tell me anything. . . . How am I ever going to know how to act or anything if I can't find out the simplest thing?□

Later in the day, when he sees a group of people begin to set up a bonfire on the beach, he is certain that they are breaking rules and so tells one of the boys who has come up suddenly behind him to □piss off.□ Nat gets no satisfaction from his father who tells him, □it's a free country.□ Preferring the more formal attitude of his grandfather, Ned turns to Audley but gets no response. Yet, Audley's formality tempers Ned's indignation. When he returns to the beach and watches the group set up the bonfire, Ned is able to find a balance between his need for rules, his patriotism as he watches the celebratory fire, and his introduction to a new way of thinking. His experiences this day cause him to widen his view of the world, and as a result, he is able then to greet the boy he had rebuked earlier and so establish □a kind of reconcilement.□

Fran and Angie have always felt a sense of disconnection between themselves and the rest of the Tyler family, □a close-knit tribe□ that □hedged against intruders.□ Angie was □always ill at ease in Madge's kitchen, fearful she might register visible disapproval of the mess□ she finds there. Angie □always felt, down here, like a child who had been dumped on them for a wet weekend and could find nothing to do.□ As a result, she hangs back during family gatherings, staying on the edges of the celebrations and often leaving for a time to walk along the beach.

Fran was □never quite sure that Madge approved of her□ and had married Clem because she regarded him □as a fellow sufferer among them and decided it was her

role to save him.□ Initially, she and Angie □had been wary of one another□ because □they were so unalike,□ but they eventually came together, feeling □so out of it at times that they would huddle in subversive pockets, finding relief in hilarity or in whispered resentment.□ During Audley's party, feeling overwhelmed by the crowd, the two go off together for a walk on the beach during which they criticize some of the guests.

Tension between Fran and the family has increased after the divorce, which becomes evident when the family ignores Clem's question, □Do we look like newlyweds?□ Yet, Fran is able to find a tentative balance in her relationship with the family by the end of the day. Malouf solves the mystery of Fran and Clem's friendship when he notes that the two □had begun to see one another again, locked in an odd dependency. She was adventurous, what she wanted was experience, 'affairs.' Clem was the element in her life that was stable.□

Fran also feels compelled to maintain her relationship with the family. She is one of those people □who'd got hooked on the Tylers,□ to □the illusion of belonging, however briefly, to the world of rare affinities and stern, unfettered views they represented.□ Her need for acceptance is illustrated in the vision she has while she and Angie watch the group on the beach drawing together by the bonfire. Fran admits, □I could sit here till I understood at last what it all means: why the sea, why the stars, why this lump in my throat.□ When she imagines herself lying down on the sand with the others in □a circle of light,□ Fran has an epiphany of sorts, suggesting that she can be content inside the circle of the family as well as outside it, by striking a balance between the two. This knowledge allows her to acknowledge her ties to Clem as well as to leave later with Cedric.

Clem, like his ex-wife, has always felt like an outsider to his family, especially after the accident, which caused him to lose much of his memory. Tension arises when he says □whatever [comes] into his head,□ as he does with his newlywed comment. When he sits in his mother's kitchen that morning, he tries to gain reassurance from her that she and his father loved him. Madge insists that they did and that he was Audley's favorite, but then she admits that he may also have been a disappointment to his father.

By the end of the day, though, Clem is able to accept his role in the family, which is illustrated in the speech he gives after the museum has burned down. Feeling that □something more was needed□ before everyone said goodnight, he begins to talk with growing confidence to these □friends, people he loved, who would understand if what he said went astray and did not come out the way he meant.□ Like his wife, he experiences an epiphany this evening, recognizing a connection among all of them, which proves that □anything is possible. . . . Nothing ever gets *lost*.□ This recognition makes everything □all right,□ even though Fran had not been there. □They could go to bed now. He could. They all could. The day was over.□

Audley realizes the same thing this evening after watching all his beloved family artifacts go up in smoke. Peter Pierce, in his article on the story, argues that □the destruction of the museum is cathartic□ for Audley. Pierce claims that □he welcomes

this destruction of the stuff of his past□ because it serves as □a drastic cleansing of the sort that one's own mind and actions can seldom manage.□ Audley comes to recognize that his family, which represents the true importance of the past and of the present, has not been lost.

As he sits in the kitchen with Angie, reinforcing their special bond that provides her at the end of the night with her own sense of connection, Audley revels in Clem's happiness during his speech and suggests, □I think he was trying to say something to *me* . . . about the fire□as well as all the rest.□ What Audley discovers is the importance of □attending,□ of paying attention to others, a virtue that they have all displayed at one point during the day that has enabled them to find a harmonious balance in their lives and an appreciation □of a new day coming,□ of □the light that fills the world.□

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on □Great Day,□ in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

Write an autobiographical essay exploring tensions within your family. Note whether the tensions were resolved and if so, how.

Read another story from *Dream Stuff*, and prepare a presentation for the class comparing and contrasting that story's use of the dream motif with that of □Great Day.□

Do some research on the national holidays of Australia and how aborigines may feel about them or observe them. Write a paper on your findings.

Visit a small, local museum, and learn about a local family whose artifacts may be housed there. Write a paper on this family, describing its contribution to the local area and describing some of the items belonging to the family you saw in the museum.

What Do I Read Next?

Malouf's title story in *Dream Stuff* (2000) explores the tensions between European and Australian cultures in its focus on a writer returning home to Australia.

Malouf's □At Schindlers,□ in the same 2000 collection, contrasts the social and the personal as it chronicles the life of a boy who loses his father during World War II.

Long Day's Journey into Night, first performed in 1956, is Eugene O'Neill's finest study of domestic interaction and offers insight into O'Neill's own tragic relationship with his family.

The narrator in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001) explores the lives of his offbeat family in this bittersweet bestselling novel as he tells of his struggle to make peace with them.

Further Study

Banting, Erinn, *Australia: The Culture*, Crabtree, 2002.

This work examines the diverse culture of Australia and provides a brief history of the country's development.

Day, David, *Claiming a Continent: A New History of Australia*, HarperCollins, 2001.

This comprehensive overview of Australia covers its history from settlement to the end of the twentieth century.

Dever, Maryanne, □Secret Companions: The Continuity of David Malouf's Fiction,□ in *World Literature Written in English*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1986, pp. 67-74.

In this article, Dever traces thematic patterns and motifs in Malouf's fiction.

Kavanagh, Paul, □With Breath Just Condensing on It: An Interview with David Malouf,□ in *Southerly*, Vol. 3, 1986, pp. 247-59.

Kavanagh interviews Malouf about his theories on writing as well as his works' reflection of Australian culture and landscape.

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Malouf, David, □Great Day,□ in *Dream Stuff*, Vintage, 2000, pp. 131-85.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Short Stories for Students

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

“Night.” Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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