# Indians Study Guide

## Indians by Arthur L. Kopit

BOOKRAGS

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# Introduction

*Indians*, by Arthur Kopit, was first staged at the Aldwych Theatre in London on July 4, 1968. It is a long one-act play that is about the genocide of the American Indians and the legendary figure of Buffalo Bill who is both sacrificial hero and sly showman. *Indians* is an experimental, absurdist piece that eschews conventional plotting and characterization. These qualities brought *Indians* a fair amount of criticism of the play's structure. Nevertheless, the power of this play's message and the new presentation that it attempts garnered Kopit admiration, launching his career as a playwright from collegiate productions to the professional realm.

The late 1960s, when *Indians* was first produced, was a tumultuous time in the history of the United States. Minority groups, including the American Indians, were fighting for equal civil rights, which were legally granted by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Abroad, the U.S. government had involved itself in the Vietnam War against which many U.S. citizens protested. Kopit was inspired to write *Indians* after reading that the deaths of innocent people killed in the Vietnam War were viewed as the □inevitable consequences of war,□ reports Lewis Funke in the *New York Times*. *Indians* is a critical look at a brutal period in U.S. history□the consequences of which Americans were still trying to face and acknowledge in the early 2000s.

# Author Biography

**Nationality 1:** American

**Birthdate:** 1937

Arthur Lee Koenig was born May 10, 1937, in New York City, but his mother, Maxine, divorced his father when he was very young, and she then married George Kopit, a jewelry salesman. Kopit grew up on Long Island in New York and graduated from high school in 1955. He attended Harvard University on an engineering scholarship but discovered theater while there and spent a lot of time writing and directing plays. Kopit had seven of his own plays produced at Harvard's Dunster House Drama Workshop, six of which he directed. He graduated from Harvard cum laude in 1959 with a bachelor's degree in engineering. While traveling Europe the following year, Kopit wrote *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad* in five days for a small contest at Harvard, which he won. The play was a wild success, eventually making its way to Broadway in 1963. Kopit also won the Outer Critics Circle Award and the Vernon Rice Award in 1962 for *Oh Dad*.

Kopit's accidental career in playwriting continued with *Indians* (1968), which was inspired by the Vietnam War. He saw what was happening in Vietnam as □a continuation of cowboys-and-Indians on another continent,□ Don Shewey wrote in the *New York Times*. *Indians* was the inspiration for the 1976 Robert Altman film, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson*, starring Paul Newman as Buffalo Bill. The play was published in 1969 by Hill and Wang. Kopit received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1969 and spent ten years experimenting with avant-garde theater before his next major play was produced. *Wings* (1978) is one of Kopit's most avant-garde plays and was inspired by his father who lost his ability to speak from a stroke in 1976.

The semi-autobiographical *End of the World* (1984) is drawn from the playwright's experience of being hired to write a play about nuclear weapons, a subject Kopit found very difficult to handle. The turn-of-the-century success, *Y2K* (2000), delves into fears about computers, security, and identity theft, themes which remained relevant even as technology continued to evolve.

Kopit married Leslie Garis in 1968. He has taught playwriting at Wesleyan University, Yale University, and the City University of New York. As of 2006, Kopit lived in Connecticut.

# Plot Summary

## Scene 1

*Indians* opens with three glass cases displaying an effigy of Buffalo Bill, an effigy of Sitting Bull, and, in the last case, a buffalo skull, a bloodstained Indian shirt, and an old rifle. Buffalo Bill himself appears on stage, riding an artificial horse and his Wild West Show coalesces around him. He starts off speaking with confidence about his Wild West Show until a Voice interrupts him, telling him that it is time to start. Buffalo Bill is distraught. Indians appear and the Voice continues to urge him to start. Buffalo Bill goes on the defensive, declaring, □My life is an open book.□ He calls himself a hero and the scene ends.

## Scene 2

Sitting Bull and his people are starving on the reservation where they have been relocated. The president (the Great Father) sends three senators out to investigate their complaints, and they bring Buffalo Bill along to help them. Buffalo Bill promised Sitting Bull that the Great Father himself would come, and Sitting Bull and his people do not understand why the Great Father did not come. They are very angry. Buffalo Bill tries to keep relations calm between the Indians and the senators. John Grass speaks first for the Indians; he tells the story of how the Great Father convinced them to take up farming but gave them poor farmland. The Great Father also sent Christian missionaries who beat the Indians. Now they are starving and the buffalo are all gone, and the Great Father has yet to fulfill his promises to give them clothing, food, and money. All they want is what they have been promised□and for the buffalo to return.

## Scene 3

In a flashback, Buffalo Bill is shooting buffalo for sport, to impress the grand duke of Russia. He is thrilled with his success and then comments to himself that the buffalo are getting harder to find. His enthusiasm turns solemn. Spotted Tail, who has been watching from afar, confronts Buffalo Bill about shooting so many buffalo. Bill invites Spotted Tail to help himself to the meat and talks about how things are changing. He seems to feel some guilt but confesses to Spotted Tail that he hopes to be famous someday. The grand duke appears with his entourage, including reporter Ned Buntline. The grand duke gives Buffalo Bill a medal and asks him to come back to Russia. Buffalo Bill declines. Encouraged by Buntline, Buffalo Bill launches into a fantastical story of how he got into a fight with fifty Comanches and killed their chief. The grand duke declares that he wants to be like Buffalo Bill and kill a Comanche also. Buffalo Bill tries to explain that the Comanches are in Texas, and he is in Missouri. The grand duke fires into the darkness and kills Spotted Tail. Buffalo Bill is stunned, saddened. Buntline and the grand duke are thrilled.

## Scene 4

This scene returns to the discussion between the senators and Sitting Bull's people. Buffalo Bill pleas with the senators to understand how important it is that Sitting Bull's Indians' lives are saved. □For it is we, alone, who have put them on this strip of arid land. And what becomes of them is . . . our responsibility.□

## Scene 5

The scene shifts to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Geronimo is announced and appears crawling through a tunnel. He is prodded by two cowboys into a cage. Geronimo shouts about his conquests over white people. Buffalo Bill enters his cage, walks up to him, turns his back, and then walks out. Geronimo is worked up to a fighting frenzy but does nothing to Buffalo Bill.

## Scene 6

At the Senate Committee, Senator Logan asks John Grass to be more specific about the Great Father's promises. The senators deny knowledge of any promises. They discuss a treaty in which Sitting Bull's Indians sold the Black Hills to the U.S. government. The money from the sale is supposedly held in trust at a bank, and the senators will not give it to the Indians. Frustrated, Grass keeps trying to walk away, but the senators and Buffalo Bill make him come back. Grass describes where the treaties were signed and what was promised to them. The senators point out that the Indians do not know how to read and cannot be sure of the content of the treaties. Grass is confused and appeals to Buffalo Bill, asking him why he could not get his friend, the Great Father, to come himself.

## Scene 7

*Scouts of the Plains*, a play about Buffalo Bill written by Buntline, is being performed at the White House for the Ol' Time President and the First Lady. Buffalo Bills plays himself, as does Wild Bill Hickok. They are on a mission to stop the Pawnee tribe's □dreadful□ Festival of the Moon and rescue the maiden Teskanjavila. Hickok is not really interested in acting and quickly abandons his lines. He argues with Buffalo Bill and then stabs and kills Buntline because he feels humiliated □'[b]out havin' to impersonate myself.□ Hickok then lustfully goes after Teskanjavila, hiding with her half-naked behind the curtain. Throughout the fumbled production, the Ol' Time President and the First Lady are blissfully unaware of the reality of what is happening in front of them. They think the play is fantastic. Buffalo Bill is left alone on stage, in a daze, spinning in circles.

## Scene 8

At the Senate Committee hearing, Senator Logan challenges John Grass, insisting that it was the Indians who did not fulfill their terms of the Fort Lyon Treaty. Grass insists that the Indians did not know they were giving up their land in exchange for twenty-five thousand cows; the Indians thought the cows were a gift. The Indians understood the white people wanted to take the land, but they also seemed to think they could stay there. Grass tells the senators that they were intimidated into signing the treaty. When pressed by the senators, Grass says that he and his people prefer to live like Indians, not white people□and they want their promised money. Senator Dawes refuses because Indians only spend money on alcohol. Grass retorts that the Indians are only imitating white people, making all the Indians laugh and irritating the senators.

## Scene 9

At the Wild West Show, Buffalo Bill is introducing his performers when the Voice returns, reminding him to include the Indians. Buffalo Bill is uncomfortable but complies. Indians set up for a recreation of their sacred Sun Dance while a very old Chief Joseph recites his surrender speech for the audience. Then Buffalo Bill introduces the Sun Dance. It is a gruesome and brave ritual particular to the tribes of the Plains, and Buffalo Bill's Indians are only imitating it because it has been outlawed by the government. John Grass appears, affixes the barbs to his chest, and goes through the ritual in the traditional fashion. At the end, he collapses and dies from loss of blood.

## Scene 10

Buffalo Bill goes to visit the Ol' Time President and ask him to come to Sitting Bull's reservation and speak with the Indians personally. The Ol' Time President is riding a mechanical horse. He refuses to go to the reservation, saying that the Indians are beyond his help. Buffalo Bill pleads with him, and the Ol' Time President agrees to send a committee since he is so grateful to Buffalo Bill for his Wild West Show. Buffalo Bill knows that a committee is useless but cannot change the president's mind.

## Scene 11

At the Senate Committee hearing, Sitting Bull is upset with Buffalo Bill that the Great Father (the president) did not come himself and sent stupid men instead. Buffalo Bill sees a fundamental, cultural misunderstanding between Sitting Bull's Indians and the senators. He tries to explain the Indian point of view to the senators: that plowing land to farm is harmful to their sacred earth and land ownership is a concept that does not exist in Indian culture. Senator Logan invites Sitting Bull to speak, and Sitting Bull tells them of the depravation his people are experiencing. He says he wants to live as white people do since the old way of life is gone. This stuns his Indians, but he continues by asking the senators to send enough animals, tools, and other material items for them to

set up life as farmers. On the surface his demands are not unreasonable because he is only asking for what white people have, but his request is so enormous that it underlines how little the Indians have by comparison. Sitting Bull is also insulted that the senators do not recognize his authority as chief. Senator Logan belittles Sitting Bull, denies him any further speech before the committee, and closes the hearing for the day. Sitting Bull gets in the last word: □If a man is the chief of a great people, and has lived only for those people, and has done many great things for them, *of course he should be proud*!□

## Scene 12

In a saloon full of cowboys, Jesse James is singing a song about a dead man. Buffalo Bill enters, asking for Wild Bill Hickok. Suddenly Buffalo Bill is involved in a stand-off against Billy the Kid and Jesse James. Hickok enters and he and Buffalo Bill go off to a corner to talk in private. Buffalo Bill is consumed with guilt for killing the buffalo and driving the Indians to starvation. But he does not believe he is responsible because he was only doing his job, while working for the government. He tells Hickok that Sitting Bull's Senate Committee hearing went poorly, and the government had Sitting Bull murdered. Buffalo Bill wants Hickok's help to know who he is so that he does not die wrong, in the middle of his show. Hickok calls forth a group of Buffalo Bill look-a-likes. Buffalo Bill tries to shoot them down and begs for the show to close, but the Voice says, □Not *yet* □ and reports that the rest of Sitting Bull's tribe were also murdered.

## Scene 13

The bodies of Indians lay in heaps in the center of the stage. Colonel Forsyth tells two reporters that he and his men wiped out all the Indians in this tribe, making up for Custer's slaughter. He describes it as □an overwhelming victory□ and an end to the □Indian Wars,□ although some call it a massacre. The colonel, his lieutenant, and the two reporters leave for the barracks, and Buffalo Bill stays behind to honor Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull's ghost appears, and Buffalo Bill yells at him for not listening. Sitting Bull points out that although Buffalo Bill was trying to help the Indians with his Wild West Show, he was also exploiting and humiliating them. Buffalo Bill reiterates his fear of dying in the middle of his show. Sitting Bull, just before he leaves, tells Buffalo Bill □how terrible it would be if we finally owe to the white man not only our destruction, but also our glory.□ Alone with the Voice, Buffalo Bill is excited to almost be done. He delivers a prepared speech about how Indian tribes across the United States were decimated by the government in various ways, but his speech is sympathetic to the government's position. While he is speaking, the dead Indians rise and surround him. Other Indians appear onstage as well. Individual Indians announce their names and that they are dying while Buffalo Bill is speaking. Buffalo Bill denounces any responsibility on his part or the government's for the termination of the Indian way of life. He cuts himself short and pulls Indian artifacts out of his bag and shows them to the audience. Buffalo Bill sits by his display of trinkets and falls silent. Chief Joseph repeats his surrender speech. The stage gradually fades to dark and then comes back to full light with the Roughriders

circling. Buffalo Bill enters on a white stallion. Indians lurk in the shadows and move toward him as the lights fade again. When lights are restored, the stage is set with three glass boxes as seen at the beginning of the play.

# Characters

## Grand Duke Alexis

Grand Duke Alexis of Russia visits the United States, and Buffalo Bill escorts him on a tour of the wild west. The grand duke is excited by Buffalo Bill's cowboy lifestyle and kills Spotted Tail in an effort to be more like Buffalo Bill. The grand duke's simple-minded view of the Indians is similar to that of the Ol' Time President.

## Billy the Kid

Billy the Kid is a famous outlaw who appears near the end of the play at the Dodge City saloon.

## Buffalo Bill

Buffalo Bill is the central character of *Indians*. He is a cowboy, a scout, a showman, and a humanitarian. Wild Bill Hickok is Buffalo Bill's foil: whereas Hickok is hard-edged, dangerous, and interested in immediate satisfaction, Buffalo Bill is easy-going and hopes to be famous. Buffalo Bill's name, like his Wild West Show, is a mockery of American Indian naming conventions. The irony of his name is that it does not refer to a reverence for the natural world but instead Buffalo Bill's slaughter of enormous numbers of buffalo. Buffalo Bill, as a young man, tells Spotted Tail that his people must assimilate to survive. He also declares that he wants to help people and become famous. This sentiment sets the tone for the play. Buffalo Bill believes that in helping people, he is a good person and deserves accolades and fame. So when the American Indians continue to die despite Buffalo Bill's efforts to help them, he is demoralized and wracked with guilt. He believes the Indians are going about things all wrong and perhaps deserve what is coming to them. But he also has compassion for them as suffering humans and wants to help. Guilt and compassion do not seem to be enough to absolve Buffalo Bill of his mixed involvement in the decimation of the American Indians. Buffalo Bill wants to absolve himself of responsibility, but his monologue at the end of the play underlines his basic hypocrisy, which has been apparent since the beginning but clouded by Buffalo Bill's good intentions and clumsy follow-through. After the death of Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill's monologue of self-absolution, Bill is reduced to pathetic peddling of American Indian trinkets—all *he* has left of his Indian friends.

## Ned Buntline

Ned Buntline is a writer who chooses Buffalo Bill as the subject of his work. He wants to make Buffalo Bill famous, which the cowboy finds intoxicating. Buntline urges Buffalo Bill toward tall tales and unnatural behavior to improve his stories. Buntline's play *Scouts of the Plains* is performed at the White House, starring Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill

Hickok as themselves. Like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Buntline's play is a sad caricature of the real experience. Buntline is stabbed and killed when Hickok realizes the humiliation Buntline's play is attempting to put him through. Like the American Indians, Buntline dies with Buffalo Bill standing there, doing nothing, unsure of whom to please next.

## William Frederick Cody

*See* Buffalo Bill

## Senator Dawes

Senator Dawes is one of three senators sent by the Ol' Time President to host a Senate Congressional hearing with Sitting Bull's tribe.

## First Lady

The First Lady is married to the Ol' Time President. She is as delighted as her husband is with Buntline's play, which is performed by Buffalo Bill, Buntline, and Wild Bill Hickok. In true absurdist fashion, the First Lady does not seem to realize that Buntline's death and Tenskajavila's rape are real and not part of the script of Buntline's play.

## First Reporter

First Reporter gathers information from Colonel Forsyth about the death of Sitting Bull.

## Colonel Forsyth

Colonel Forsyth is responsible for the slaughter of Sitting Bull and his tribe. He does not see what he has done is a massacre even though many of the people killed were women and children. Instead, the colonel sees the attack as a victory that wins the U.S. government the war against the American Indians. He has not bothered to count the dead Indians, and they are left on the ground, being covered by snow, while the colonel goes inside the barracks for warmth and conversation.

## Geronimo

Geronimo, an Apache leader, was renowned for his fierceness in fighting back against white aggressors. He appears in the play as a caged animal in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. It is unclear whether Geronimo is acting for benefit of the show or is actually imprisoned.

## John Grass

Grass is an articulate Indian belonging to Sitting Bull's tribe. Grass is supposed to understand white people better than many in his tribe because he attended a white school. Grass even has a name that sounds more white than American Indian. Sitting Bull asks Grass to be the first to speak for the tribe at the Senate Congressional hearing, but Grass is unable to successfully negotiate an agreement. He states his tribe's grievances over promises made to them and signed in treaties, but the senators refute these claims, saying that these things they were promised were not actually detailed in the treaties and that the American Indians have not behaved in good faith toward their agreement. Frustrated, Grass makes fun of the senators which angers them and effectively ends the day's hearing. Grass next appears at the Sun Dance imitation going on at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. He interrupts the performance and does the Sun Dance the traditional way with barbs through his chest, which is illegal according to the U.S. government. Although the Sun Dance does not have to be lethal, Grass pushes himself until he tears free of the barbs and falls to the ground, bleeding to death. Traditionally the Sun Dance is for penitence so this is probably not intended as suicide.

## James Butler Hickok

*See* Wild Bill Hickok

## Interpreter

The interpreter works for Grand Duke Alexis of Russia. He translates Russian and English between his duke and the American hosts.

## Jesse James

Jesse James is a famous western outlaw whom Buffalo Bill meets briefly at the Dodge City saloon near the end of the play.

## Chief Joseph

Chief Joseph appears in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, a shadow of the powerful man he once was. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce is famous for helping his tribe escape and evade U.S. soldiers for years in the Pacific Northwest. His eventual surrender, when his people were starving and greatly diminished in number, was considered a significant victory by the government. Chief Joseph, weak and defeated, recites his surrender speech at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as a way to earn some money. He now lives a half-life.

## Lieutenant

The lieutenant serves Colonel Forsyth.

## Senator Logan

Senator Logan is one of the three senators sent by the Ol' Time President to host a Senate Congressional hearing with Sitting Bull's tribe.

## Senator Morgan

Senator Morgan is the lead senator sent by the Ol' Time President to host a Senate Congressional hearing with Sitting Bull's tribe.

## Ol' Time President

The Ol' Time President is a foolish man, caught up in the romantic view of the wild west as full of adventure, romance, and cowboys fighting Indians. He has no compassion for the American Indians and refuses to personally meet with Sitting Bull in case it would send the wrong message to other American Indian tribes.

## Poncho

Poncho is at the Dodge City saloon near the end of the play.

## Second Reporter

Second Reporter is gathering information from Colonel Forsyth about the death of Sitting Bull. Second Reporter is more outraged than the first over the slaughter of Sitting Bull's tribe.

## Sitting Bull

Sitting Bull is the leader of a Sioux tribe of displaced American Indians. Originally living in the Black Hills, Sitting Bull's tribe was displaced by the U.S. government when gold was discovered there. Sitting Bull spent some time working for Buffalo Bill in his Wild West Show. He appears to foresee his tribe's fate and tries to make the senators see the errors in their understanding of native ways, particularly in relation to ownership. The senators are rude to him, perhaps because they feel threatened. Sitting Bull and his people are killed in a raid commanded by Colonel Forsyth. His ghost visits Buffalo Bill soon thereafter and will not absolve the cowboy of his guilt. Sitting Bull's greatest sorrow

is the thought of □how terrible it would be if we finally owe to the white man not only our destruction, but also our glory.□

## Spotted Tail

Spotted Tail is a Sioux Indian who is shot and killed by the Grand Duke Alexis for sport. Buffalo Bill pretends, for the sake of the grand duke and Buntline, that Spotted Tail was actually a dangerous Comanche warrior□from Texas.

## Teskanjavila

Teskanjavila is the so-called Indian princess created by Buntline for his play *Scouts of the Plains*, which is performed at the White House. She is played by an Italian actress.

## Uncas

Uncas is the evil Indian chief created by Buntline for his play, which is performed at the White House for the Ol' Time President and the First Lady.

## Wild Bill Hickok

Wild Bill Hickok is an unapologetic, classic cowboy and scofflaw. Hickok, because of his straightforward nature, is uncomfortable with Buntline's play in which he is supposed to perform as himself. He finds this to be shameful□just like the Indians in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show□and refuses to go on. Hickok kills the writer and makes off with the buxom actress. Buffalo Bill seeks Hickok out at the end of *Indians* to ask him for help in identifying Bill's true self.

# Themes

## Genocide

Kopit's primary theme in *Indians* is genocide (mass murder). Genocide is usually motivated by racial, ethnic, or nationalistic prejudices. Kopit was motivated to write about the U.S. government's genocide of American Indians because of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, in which he saw a similar arrogance. In this play, Kopit unabashedly points out the unethical treatment, dispossession, suffering, and death brought upon the American Indians by the U.S. government. Bolstered by greed, nationalism, and presumed ethnic superiority, white Americans of European descent in the U.S. government of the nineteenth century repeatedly lied, cheated, coerced, and murdered the native inhabitants of North America. They perpetrated these crimes in an effort to gain fertile or otherwise rich land and to eliminate a culture that they saw as obstructing this appropriation. *Indians* represents some of the ways in which the U.S. government brought harm to native tribes people: the futile Senate Committee hearing, the wasteful hunting of buffalo, the surprise-attack slaughter of entire tribes, and even Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Buffalo Bill tries to bridge the gap between his government and the American Indians, but although he understands the Indians more than many white people, he does not understand them well enough to find a solution amenable to both sides. Genocide has occurred throughout human history and includes events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as those in World War II Europe, in Rwanda, and in Darfur.

## Guilt and Responsibility

Buffalo Bill feels guilty about his role in harming the native way of life. As a young man in the employ of the U.S. Army, Buffalo Bill slaughtered thousands of buffalo, driving the species to near extinction. He is undeniably responsible, in part, for the destruction of the Indians although he did not directly lay his hand against them and even actively tried to help them. Buffalo Bill's guilt drives him to find ways to help the American Indians adapt to their new neighbors. He also wants to be famous. Joining these disparate ambitions, he starts up a traveling Wild West Show, which is hugely popular and even exhibits some famous American Indians such as Geronimo, Sitting Bull, and Chief Joseph. Buffalo Bill's efforts to help and support the American Indians are finally ineffective in holding off the grim determination of the U.S. government to clear American Indians from the land they occupy. His solution, assimilation, is a different, slower death which also causes the American Indian culture to break down.

The Ol' Time President and Colonel Forsyth, in contrast to Buffalo Bill, actively and consciously participate in the destruction of the American Indians and feel no remorse because they have objectified the Indians as the so-called bad guys while they identify themselves as the good guys. This binary, us/them approach dehumanizes the opponent as the other. The only responsibility the president and the colonel feel is

toward their own government, which, they believe, is threatened by the native way of life.

Wild Bill Hickok is portrayed as the stereotypical cowboy□brash and fiercely independent. He is so straight-forward that he never behaves contrary to his nature. He suffers no guilt because he does not second-guess himself and is not introspective. Near the end of the play, Buffalo Bill feels he has lost himself and asks Hickok for help, but Hickok's twisted solution of multiple Buffalo Bills only exacerbates Bill's guilty conscience. Consumed by remorse and yet confused because he believes he is a good man, Buffalo Bill is the one left suffering at the end of *Indians*; he is the most human and humane of the white people in the play.

## Ownership versus Stewardship

The difference between the concepts of ownership and stewardship define the difference between white people and American Indians in Kopit's play. Western white people believe in individuality and property. One's success is intrinsically tied to one's wealth, which may be measured in possessions, property, and land. American Indians, by contrast, have a communal lifestyle in which property is shared collectively but not owned personally. American Indians see themselves as stewards of the land, responsible for its care. The land is a gift to them from the Great Spirit, and they see the land as a living entity which cannot be bought, sold, or traded but instead belongs to everyone. As Kopit expresses in his play, the Indians are baffled by the white men's request to buy their land, such as in the Laramie Treaty. The Indians accept the offer, seeing it as a type of gift since of course the land cannot actually be transferred from one person to other; however, the white men are offended that the American Indians are not upholding their side of the agreement, uneven as it was, because they understand the treaties to be legally binding documents. This misunderstanding fuels the arguments that American Indians are not as smart as white people and not as honorable.

# Style

## Plot

Kopit uses a non-linear plot structure to build dramatic tension in this play which is largely based on historical events and is thus a story with which audience members are already familiar. At the center of action is Buffalo Bill and throughout the play, viewers see events from his youth, from the recent past, and the present time of the telling of his story which takes place toward the end of his life. Throughout the play, Buffalo Bill feels varying levels of guilt over his involvement in the genocide of the Indians, and this guilt seems to increase as he grows older. The non-linear plot may also be an acknowledgement of an American Indian world view, where history is perceived as cyclical. Kopit combines several threads of Buffalo Bill's life, but the image finally depicted is not of a humanitarian. Buffalo Bill has tried to connect with the American Indians but failed to be a hero or their friend.

## Absurdism

Absurdism is a literary style that emphasizes the disconnection and meaninglessness in human experience. When the style is used in drama, the plays do not provide rational sequences or realistic portrayals of action, and these plays may collectively be referred to as theater of the absurd. Characters in absurdist plays are often disorientated and feel threatened, like Buffalo Bill. In *Indians*, Kopit shows how Buffalo Bill is overcome by guilt and cannot come to terms with what has happened to the American Indians. He is jumpy and rubs his head and squints often as if he has a headache. The other white men in the play are absurdist in their unreal, over-the-top behavior.

Theater of the absurd is highly unconventional and purposefully strives to keep the audience off balance. Kopit achieves this effect with his grotesque presentation of the Wild West Show and direct look at the brutality perpetrated against Indians. Theater of the absurd rejects language as a reliable means of communication and seeks to evoke myth and allegory to find alternative meaning. Buffalo Bill's attempts to serve as an interpreter between the senators and the Indians, between Hickok and Buntline, between the grand duke of Russia and the Indians, all underline a breakdown in language as an effective means of communication. The allegory of *Indians* is in its similarity in theme and outcome to the Vietnam War, which was contemporary with the first production of the play.

## Tone

Tone is the writer or narrator's attitude toward the story, which helps to set the mood. Tone influences how readers feel about the characters and what happens to them. The tone of *Indians* is one of anxiety, outrage, and futility. Kopit knows there is nothing that can be done to change what has already come to pass, but if his message can be

communicated to audiences, then perhaps genocide may be averted in the future. Kopit communicates his frustration and anger through Buffalo Bill's quiet desperation, the irresponsible behavior of the other white men in the story, and the edgy resignation of the American Indians. *Indians* is a play of difficult emotions, but Kopit avoids heavy-handed badgering by making Buffalo Bill a flawed yet somewhat sympathetic character.

# Historical Context

## Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was a protracted military conflict between North and South Vietnam, lasting from 1957 until 1975. Vietnam was a proxy war for the cold war going on between communist and democratic nations. The United States was involved in Vietnam on the side of the South Vietnamese starting in 1955, but it was not until the appointment of General William Westmoreland in 1964 that the numbers of U.S. troops engaged there rose significantly. It quickly became apparent that the U.S. military was unprepared for the guerilla style of fighting used by the North Vietnamese. Guerilla warfare is a decentralized approach that works well for defending against foreign invaders. U.S. soldiers, never knowing who was friend or foe, were demoralized. Their fear contributed to their perpetrating crimes against civilians. Many Vietnam War veterans suffered from psychological trauma as a result. In the United States, many people were outraged by what they learned from daily news reports. Large numbers of citizens, especially young people immediately affected by the involuntary draft, began to protest publicly against the war. These protests polarized public opinion, causing sharp division between those who disapproved of U.S. involvement in Vietnam and those who accepted the government's argument that the United States was defending democracy against communism. By the end of the Vietnam War, two to four million people□military and civilian and of all nationalities□were dead and South Vietnam, along with her allies including the United States, had lost the war.

## American Indian Rights

American Indians, along with other minorities, gained civil rights protection with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. But the Bureau of Indian Affairs was still trying to bring American Indians into mainstream U.S. culture in order to do away with reservations. In the 1970s, a group called the American Indian Movement (AIM) staged several highly publicized protests to bring further awareness to the rights of native peoples. Their goals included improving living conditions, protecting Indians from police brutality, and working to remove Indian caricatures from sports. Their methods were sometimes dramatic, but AIM overall made progress in raising awareness and respect for the cultures of American Indians. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, American Indian tribes have federal rights of self-government, much like states have. Almost three million American Indians live in the United States, divided into 563 tribal governments. Efforts to disenfranchise some tribal governments continued in the early 2000s as their land was sought for the valuable resources it contains. Other areas of the country resist permitting the formation of tribal governments because of concerns over gambling and casinos, which are often built and run by tribes to generate revenue.

# Theater of the Absurd

The term, theater of the absurd, was coined by Martin Esslin in his 1962 book of the same name. It refers to existential playwriting that asserts the meaninglessness of life. Esslin formulated his theory of the theater of the absurd after reading Albert Camus's essay, □The Myth of Sisyphus,□ in which the meaninglessness of life is a central idea. The four playwrights Esslin identified as being the forerunners of the absurdist movement are Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, and Arthur Adamov. Theater of the absurd is, in essence, a type of avant-garde presentation. It employs unconventional and unrealistic settings, characters, plot development, and dialogue. Experimental literature has been written for centuries. Avant-garde was coined in Paris in 1861 to refer to those works that test conventions and initiate change. Avant-garde works such as those produced by surrealist poets and cubist painters were especially popular in the early twentieth century, paving the way for the rise of theater of the absurd in the 1950s and 1960s.

# Critical Overview

The 1968 opening of *Indians* in London was greeted with a mixture of puzzlement and guarded praise. People wondered why a show that was so thoroughly American would first be staged in Britain. Irving Wardle, reviewing for the London *Times* proclaims: □the play is one of the few necessary works to have appeared from the America of the sixties. Whatever holes you care to pick, it is a work of high ambition.□ Stateside, drama critic Clive Barnes, also reviewing the London production, writes that Kopit's play is □only partially successful□ and that □the play is at its best at its most serious, when it is making substantial and documented charges against the Government.□ British critic Martin Esslin, writing for the *New York Times*, considers *Indians* to be both □moving□ and □amusing.□

When *Indians* was restaged in Washington, D.C., a year later, Julius Novick found it to be □more annoying than satisfying□ and □not yet a good play,□ while acknowledging that the merits of this play establish Kopit as more than a one-hit wonder. Barnes also reviewed the D.C. production and found it to be greatly improved, structurally, over the London production. While Barnes is overall positive about the show, he tempers his review by observing that □there is still an odd strain of facetiousness in the play, although not nearly so much as before.□ In October 1969, *Indians* moved to Broadway where Barnes reviewed this third production, summarizing his position: □It is not the greatest play ever written□far from it. But it does, even by the freedoms of dramatic form it grandiloquently permits itself, extend our theater.□

Lewis Funke, in the *New York Times*, takes a far more positive position, declaring that *Indians* is □one of the most theatrically spectacular productions to reach Broadway in years.□ But Walter Kerr's review of the Broadway production was more harsh: □Everywhere substance has been skimped. Sometimes the skimpiness is covered over by attitudinizing, sometimes it is covered over by moralizing (because we are guilty, must we accept weak dramaturgy?).□ *Indians* was restaged twenty-two years later and received an even more negative review from Alvin Klein, who found the play to be shapeless and polemical. He writes in the *New York Times* that *Indians* □comes off as more diatribe than drama□ and that it is □perhaps most unsettling for being so relentlessly penitential and uninvolving.□

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

# Critical Essay #1

*Ullmann is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, she discusses Kopit's characterization of Buffalo Bill and whether the character's efforts to help the American Indians are disingenuous.*

*Indians*, by Arthur Kopit, is a difficult play to absorb because the message about the genocide of American Indians at the hands of the U.S. government is frank and unavoidably accurate. Buffalo Bill was a unique figure in this conflict historically because he had a foot in both camps. Advancements in civil rights since the 1960s have reduced the shock of Kopit's message, which was also intended to comment on the U.S. role in Vietnam. Critic Lewis Funke quotes Kopit as explaining his inspiration for *Indians*: □I was reading a newspaper in which General Westmoreland expressed regret for the accidental killing and wounding of innocent people in Vietnam. These, he said, were the inevitable consequence of war.□ This sentiment is repeated in the last scene of *Indians* when Colonel Forsyth congratulates himself on his so-called victory against Sitting Bull and his tribe.

One can always find someone who'll call an overwhelming victory a massacre. . . . Of course innocent people have been killed. In war they always are. . . . In the long run I believe what happened here at this reservation yesterday will be justified.

The fact is Colonel Forsyth's hope for justification never came. Buffalo Bill pursues justification even as he tries to help the American Indians survive, but to no avail. Throughout *Indians*, Buffalo Bill wants to be understood and forgiven; therefore, he seeks justification as a means toward understanding. The horror of what has happened to the American Indians at the hands of white people is too painful for a single person to contain. Buffalo Bill seems to be the only white person at the time who is taking in the whole of this experience, and his conscience is tearing him apart as a result.

The title of Kopit's play is deceiving because the focus is actually Buffalo Bill and not the Indians. The Indians, some named and many nameless, come and go throughout Buffalo Bill's story, already ghosts of their true selves. Even John Grass and Sitting Bull, who are the most animated of the Indians, seem to have seen their fates and know that they are going through the motions in a history that has long since become inevitable. It is this inevitability that Buffalo Bill cannot face because it means he has lost control□or never had any control to begin with. It means that his good intentions were not good enough.

*Indians* is not about *what* happened in the United States in the late nineteenth century, but *why* it happened. *Indians* is based on historical figures and events, so the audience already knows the basic plot. Kopit, an avant-guard, absurdist playwright, has elected to use a non-linear structure, weaving together several episodes in time without conventional regard to chronology. The play is framed by Buffalo Bill's public face, his Wild West Show. It is grotesque and opaque, repulsive in its unreality. The Wild West Show also appears near the middle of the play, both before and after the central three

scenes which feature John Grass's testimony at the Senate congressional hearing and Buntline's play at the White House. These two Wild West Show exhibitions feature American Indians: Geronimo as a caged animal, Chief Joseph blandly reciting his surrender speech, and an imitation of the American Indians' sacred Sun Dance. In the scenes of the Wild West Show, beneath the bravado, one can see Buffalo Bill's nervousness. His nervousness stems from his guilt over the suffering of the American Indians, but Buffalo Bill also worries about his identity. He is afraid of dying onstage and being lost to history as a mockery of his true self. He is scared because he is no longer sure what his true nature is.

Buffalo Bill has only wanted to help others. The main, repeating episode in *Indians* is the Senate congressional hearing which makes up five out of thirteen scenes. In these scenes, no agreement or solution is achieved, no resolution even attempted between the government and Sitting Bull's Sioux. The senators, John Grass, and Sitting Bull, all speak their parts and seem incapable of understanding one another's point of view. They do not even try. Buffalo Bill intervenes, first begging the Indians for cooperation and later trying to explain each side's position to the other. But his pleas for middle ground are ignored. The Indians are stubborn, sad, and resigned. The senators are stubborn and ruthless. Buffalo Bill is thus defeated in his not-quite selfless quest to help. He can give jobs, money, and supplies to the American Indians, but he is incapable of changing history. Buffalo Bill is, by increasing degrees, hypocritical because although he wants to help American Indians, he believes more strongly in assimilation than in finding a way to live as neighbors. He does not understand the gravity of what he asks when he presses the American Indians to assimilate. Hickok senses it when he refuses to perform in Buntline's play. The American Indians performing in the Wild West Show also understand the humiliation of assimilation.

In scene 3, Buffalo Bill is seen at his youngest, shooting buffalo for sport and to entertain the grand duke of Russia. His infectious enthusiasm engages the duke, who takes up a gun and shoots the nearest Indian□Buffalo Bill's friend Spotted Tail. To bolster his career and reputation, Buffalo Bill barely reacts to Spotted Tail's death, staying in showman form. It is his first step down a long path of self-aggrandizement at the expense of his Indian friends. When Buffalo Bill employs American Indians to perform in his Wild West Show, so that they might have jobs and more easily assimilate to white culture, he fails to recognize the humiliation his show costs them.

Ned Buntline's *Scouts of the Plains* extends this humiliation to Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Hickok. Hickok recognizes the exploitation right away and refuses to perform. Although he is a scofflaw who kills Buntline and rapes the Indian princess Teskanjavila, Hickok never pretends to be anything different. He knows himself and is content with his life. Buffalo Bill, as he grows older and more confused about his role in history, yearns for Hickok's surety and goes to the saloon in Dodge City to find himself, with Hickok's aid. Hickok shows him a group of Buffalo Bills, declaring that now he can help more people because he can be in more than one place at once. This idea horrifies Buffalo Bill because he has grown to hate himself. He does not want to discover his true identity; he wants to become something else.

Buffalo Bill is a proud man with a troubled conscience. Through the various scenes, we see increasingly into his heart. He is disturbed by the harsh treatment of American Indians, which the audience sees when Buffalo Bill argues with the senators about their responsibility for the livelihood of Indians they have displaced. He even appears to understand something of the Indian worldview when he tries to convince the senators that the American Indians do not understand ownership the way white people do. But Buffalo Bill is haunted by the faces of dead Indians.

Buffalo Bill's sincerity is ultimately undermined in the final scene when, in a passionate, almost angry monologue, he argues the government's view that the American Indians were difficult to deal with and fought unfairly: □I am sick and tired of these sentimental humanitarians,□ he says in ironic reference to himself. All around Buffalo Bill American Indians are dying, and he, having failed at being greater than the sum of his parts, is reduced to selling Indian trinkets. He is a shadow of the great man he envisioned himself as being, reduced to arguing his own innocence with himself.

Buffalo Bill, as characterized by Kopit, is earnest but hypocritical. While he proclaims concern for American Indians, he believes that their only salvation lay in cooperation and assimilation, which assumes the supremacy of white culture over Indian culture. Early in Kopit's play, Buffalo Bill says to Spotted Tail, □things're changin' out here. . . . So if you wanna be *part* o' these things, an' not left behind somewhere, you jus' plain hafta get *used* to 'em. . . . you've got to *adjust*.□ His viewpoint of assimilation was one held by many Americans and was actively practiced by the U.S. government through the 1970s.

*No one who is a white man can be a fool,* Spotted Tail says to Buffalo Bill after Buffalo Bill has slaughtered a hundred buffalo for sport. Spotted Tail's statement, as understood in the context of Kopit's play, is ironic: Buffalo Bill, at the center of this tale, is king of all fools.

**Source:** Carol Ullmann, Critical Essay on *Indians*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

# Adaptations

*Indians* was loosely adapted into the major motion picture, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson*, directed by Robert Altman and starring Paul Newman. It was released in 1976 by MGM Studios and as of 2006 was available on VHS tape and DVD.

# Topics for Further Study

In his play, Kopit explores the genocide of the American Indians at the hands of the U.S. government. Research another instance of genocide from world history and prepare a fifteen-minute presentation. Tell your classmates what the background of the genocide is, how and why it was carried out, and what, if anything, was done to stop it. When the presentations are complete, hold a roundtable discussion about what can be done to prevent future genocides from happening, using your collective knowledge to inform your ideas.

Buffalo Bill was a man of conflicting interests. He worked for the U.S. government but was also sympathetic to American Indians. Research the life of Buffalo Bill (whose real name was William Frederick Cody) and write an essay that compares his life to Kopit's presentation of him. Is Kopit's version accurate in fact and emotion? Explain.

Write a fifteen-minute monologue from the point of view of an American Indian, a settler, or a U.S. soldier. What problems does your character face and how is he or she dealing with them? Be as specific and detailed as possible. Perform your monologue for your class. Discuss as a class how the characters you have each created would interact with one another.

There are hundreds of different American Indian tribes across North America, from the Abenaki of the northeastern United States to the Hopi of Arizona. Although all of these tribes are recognized as native people and as such called American Indians or Native Americans, their customs vary dramatically. Choose two geographically separate tribes and research their customs and history. Create a visual aid such as a poster or diorama that exhibits these differences and put it up in your classroom or school hallway to share what you have learned with others.

There are food traditions particular to American Indians, although they can vary widely among tribes and across geography. Research dishes of an American Indian tribe. What unique ingredients do they use? How are they similar or different from foods eaten in the United States today? Select a dish to prepare and make it for your class. Have a potluck party and taste the different foods of native tribes of North America. Let everyone choose a favorite and explain why this choice appeals.

Which U.S. presidents held office during the nineteenth century? What were their policies toward American Indians? Who was the most sympathetic and who was the harshest? Write a report that examines the influence of the U.S. president on the treatment of American Indians. What responsibility do the presidents bear for the genocide of the American Indians? Can you imagine other ways in which this cultural clash between American Indians and European settlers could have been resolved? Explain.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was very popular. It traveled around the country claiming to educate and entertain audiences about the wild west. It toured for more than twenty

years and at its peak employed over twelve hundred performers. In small groups, investigate the details of the Wild West Show and select a portion of it to recreate for your class. Use costumes, music, props, and sets as needed to establish the tone□but remember that the Wild West Show was a traveling production.

Research two incidents of genocide and write an essay that compares them. Explain why these genocides happened, who were the parties involved, and what (if anything) was done to curtail them. How did they end? Was anyone held responsible? What are the similarities and the differences between these two instances of genocide?

Write a play or story about a frontier. A frontier is a border land between what is familiar and what is not. Your frontier can be the Wild West, outer space, or uncharted island□use your imagination. For extra credit, incorporate some of the themes or stylistic devices used by Kopit in *Indians*.

# Compare and Contrast

**1860s:** Buffalo Bill is a famous showman and western hero in his own time, having created the widely popular Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

**1960s:** John Wayne and Clint Eastwood are actors known for their performances as cowboys in western movies.

**Today:** Clint Eastwood is still a figure readily identified with westerns, although his career is diverse. Genre blending of science fiction, anime, and westerns is popular.

**1860s:** Approximately fifty million buffalo (American bison) roam the plains of North America but are being killed in large numbers for their hides and to protect farms and settlements and to remove a source of food from nomadic tribes of Native Americans.

**1960s:** Buffalo slowly recover from their near extinction in the late 1800s when only twenty-three wild buffalo remained.

**Today:** The National Bison Association estimates that there are four hundred thousand buffalo in North America.

**1860s:** American Indians have no civil rights and are not considered citizens according to the U.S. government. Treaties between the Indians and the government are often misunderstood and betrayed.

**1960s:** A movement grows to improve the civil rights of American Indians, who have been struggling against assimilation since they were made U.S. citizens in 1924. The American Indian Movement (AIM) organization is formed.

**Today:** Tribes are autonomous entities within the federal government, much like states. Many tribes run casinos to generate revenue, but some feel that casinos contribute to the further destruction of their culture. American Indians are protected by the same anti-discrimination laws that shield other minority groups, but fights over land, resources, and sovereignty continue.

# What Do I Read Next?

*The End of the World* (1984), by Arthur Kopit, is a semi-fictional dramatization of the author's struggle to write about nuclear bombs.

*Waiting for Godot* (1954) is a two-act absurdist play by Samuel Beckett. Two characters, outside a specific definition of time and space, await the arrival of a third person, named Godot, who never arrives, which illustrates the difficulty and esential meaninglessness of life, a tenet important in existentialist philosophy.

*The Bald Soprano* (1950) is Eugène Ionesco's first play, written when he was in his forties. It is loosely based on Ionesco's experience learning English by using an unusual method of memorizing whole sentences. Ionesco was one of the earliest of the theater of the absurd playwrights, and *The Bald Soprano* shows the breakdown of language to the point of dysfunctionality and the inability of people to relate to each other.

*Waterlily* (1988), by Ella Cara Deloria, is a novel that follows the life of a Sioux woman during the nineteenth century. Deloria, born at the end of the nineteenth century, was of mixed blood but was born and lived her life on Indian reservations in North and South Dakota. She was intimately aware of traditional Sioux life and filled her book with astonishing detail.

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? (1962), by Edward Albee, is a Tony Award-winning play about an unhappy couple, George and Martha, who invite another couple, Nick and Honey, over to dinner. George and Martha attack each other verbally, flirt with and insult their guests, and argue about a son who does not exist.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), by Tom Stoppard, is an absurdist play reminiscent of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In this play, two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are seen drifting through the events of Shakespeare's plot, unable to change their situation.

*Theater of the Absurd* (1962), by Martin Esslin, is the defining text for absurdist, experimental theater in the 1960s. Esslin identifies four playwrights as being at the vanguard of the absurdist theater movement: Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Adamov.

In the title essay collected in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (1955), Albert Camus examines the importance of life and the possibility of suicide. It is from this essay that Esslin adapted the phrase □theater of the absurd.□

*Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad* (1963) is Kopit's first professionally produced play. It is a wacky, farcical one-act play that he wrote in a just a few days. This play initially caused Kopit to be labeled as an absurdist playwright, though his later work showed that he was capable of presenting a wide range of theatrical models.

*Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views* (2004), edited by Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny, is a collection of essays that examine the history of genocide in the twentieth century as well as how and why these genocides occurred. The purpose of the contributors is to bring awareness to a topic often marginalized by those who choose to remake history.

# Further Study

Adams, Alexander B., *Sitting Bull: An Epic of the Plains*, Putnam's Sons, 1973.

Adams's popular biography of the Sioux chief explores the complex relationships of Sitting Bull and his contemporaries, such as Crazy Horse, Buffalo Bill, Spotted Tail, and General Custer.

Brown, Dee Alexander, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970.

Brown's book was a breakthrough in historical interpretation at the time that it was published. Using primary sources, the author showed white Americans the Indian side of what happened in the late 1800s.

Cody, William Frederick, *An Autobiography of Buffalo Bill (Colonel W. F. Cody)*, Cosmopolitan Book, 1920.

Buffalo Bill revised his autobiography until his death in 1917. The story of his life reads like a novel in some parts, with dialogue and action. Buffalo Bill's romanticized interpretation of the events of his life are reminiscent of Kopit's characterization.

Young Joseph, Chief of the Nez Perce, □An Indian's Views of Indian Affairs,□ in *North American Review*, Vol. 128, No. 269, April 1879: 412-33, http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABQ7578-0128-41 (accessed September 21, 2006).

Chief Joseph's essay explains the culture and laws of American Indians to white people who have been taught that North America's native inhabitants are savage and barely human.

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

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