The Long-Distance Runner Study Guide

The Long-Distance Runner by Grace Paley

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

"The Long-Distance Runner" by Grace Paley is the last story in the collection *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, which appeared in 1974. The story is also available in *The Collected Stories* (1994). The story features Paley's lead protagonist, Faith Darwin Asbury, who at forty-two has taken up long-distance running. This semi-autobiographical character shares Paley's concern for social justice and her awareness of the cultural and economic divisions between the races, recurrent themes in Paley's fiction. The short story foregrounds Paley's skillful use of dialogue as a way of dramatizing differences between individuals in a given neighborhood. In this story, Faith travels back to her childhood neighborhood in Brooklyn and witnesses from the inside the deterioration of the now all African American tenement where her family once lived.

Author Biography

The Long Distance Runner: Grace Paley [graphic graphicname="TIF00001916" orient="portrait" size="A"]

Grace Paley was born on December 11, 1922, in the Bronx, New York. Her parents, Manya Ridnyik Goodside and Dr. Isaac Goodside, were Russian Jews who immigrated to the United States in 1906. Paley's parents were socialists who had engaged in political resistance efforts against the Russian czar and had been exiled (her father to Siberia; her mother to Germany) as a result. They settled originally in lower Manhattan where they were joined by his mother and two sisters, who, along with his wife, supported Isaac Goodside while he studied medicine.

By the time Paley was born, the family was living a middle-class existence in the Bronx. Theirs was a multilingual world: Russian was spoken in the home; Yiddish was used in the neighborhood; her father's first employment-based language was Italian; and English was spoken at school and in the city beyond. A childhood colored by such distinct sounds and colloquial expressions early sensitized Paley to how speech patterns convey character. Moreover, her family's concern for the under classes and for social justice, along with their family stories of oppression, predisposed Paley to see the political component as fundamental to individual circumstance. Indeed, when she came, in the 1950s, to write fiction, she focused on urban neighborhoods full of individuals whose ways of speaking both revealed their backgrounds and connected them to different ethnic communities.

Having survived political oppression, Isaac and Manya Goodside recognized how vulnerable people are to social upheaval and economic change. They urged Paley to learn secretarial skills so she would always be able to support herself. After attending Hunter College her freshman year, Paley went to Merchants and Bankers Business and Secretarial School, and thereafter she worked as a secretary for a reinsurance company, for some social agencies, and for Columbia University. Later she attended New York University. At home, she typed her poetry and later her stories. She married Jess Paley in 1941 and had two children (Nora in 1949 and Danny in 1951). The couple separated in 1967 and divorced in 1971, and in 1972 Grace Paley married Robert Nichols.

During the 1950s and 1960s, while becoming increasingly active in Leftist protest activities, Grace Paley continued writing and caring for her children at home. In 1959, Doubleday published her first collection of stories, *The Little Disturbances of Man*. Among her political activities, she was involved in the 1961 establishment of the Greenwich Village Peace Center, and her 1966 participation in an antimilitary protest at an Armed Forces Day parade led to her serving a brief sentence in jail. She protested for the legalization of abortion and supported the Civil Rights movement. Professionally, in 1966 she began her twenty-two-year connection with Sarah Lawrence College where she taught writing. During these years she continued to publish. *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* was published in 1974 ("Long-Distance Runner" is the last story in this

collection), and in 1985 *Later the Same Day* appeared. Also in 1985, she published her first book of poetry, *Leaning Forward*, followed by *Long Walks and Intimate Talks* in 1991 and *New and Collected Poems* in 1992.

Grace Paley's work gradually garnered widespread critical attention, and Paley began to win awards for her writing. For example, she received the 1970 National Institute of Arts and Letters award for short fiction. She won the PEN/Faulkner Prize for fiction in 1986 and the Senior Fellowship of the Literature Program of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1987. In 1987, Grace Paley became the first New York State Author, and she also won the fiction writers' Edith Wharton Citation for Merit. She won the Lannan Literary Award in 1997. In 2001, Grace Paley and Robert Nichols began a small literary press, Glad Day Books, which they operated from their Thetford, Vermont, home. Their intention, according to a *Publishers Weekly* article, was to publish works, both political and literary, which other presses could not or would not publish.

Plot Summary

When "The Long-Distance Runner" begins, Faith Asbury is preparing to leave home for a long-distance run. She leaves her two sons and a neighbor friend, Mrs. Raftery, watching television. Faith takes the train to Brighton Beach, changes her clothes in a locker, and runs along the boardwalk for a mile or more. Then she cuts away from the beach and heads into her old neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Almost immediately, Faith is surrounded by a crowd of African Americans who comment on her presence and appearance. She is undaunted by them, engaging them in conversation and commenting back in their language. She points out to the crowd her old apartment, and the Girl Scout Cynthia suggests that Faith go inside the building and meet the current tenants in Faith's childhood apartment.

On the first floor of the apartment building, Faith resists Cynthia's suggestion to visit Mrs. Luddy, the resident in Faith's old apartment. Faith excuses herself with the lie that her mother is dead, and she does not want to see the place. This comment arouses Cynthia's fears about losing her own mother, to which Faith replies that if Cynthia's mother were to die, Cynthia could come to live with Faith and her sons. Suddenly, Cynthia is afraid of Faith and lets out a yell. Afraid, in turn, of the fear she has aroused in Cynthia, Faith runs to Mrs. Luddy's door and begs to be admitted. Mrs. Luddy lets Faith in and bolts the door.

Faith remains with Mrs. Luddy for the next three weeks, sharing the work of tending to three little girls and offering to engage the second-grader, Donald, in reading lessons. As women and as mothers raising children alone, Mrs. Luddy and Faith are able to talk about mutually interesting subjects. But they are separated by racial, economic, and education differences. From Mrs. Luddy's window, they can see across the street into burned-out buildings and garbage-laden empty lots and down into the street below to people on the steps and sidewalk. They discuss men and sex and children; they express their separate conclusions on these subjects. Faith's naive and idealistic assumptions about cleaning up the neighborhood and bringing Donald's reading up to level contrast with Mrs. Luddy's matter-of-fact resignation to her bleak surroundings.

Then one morning Mrs. Luddy wakes up Faith with the announcement that it is time for Faith to leave. Mrs. Luddy says, "This ain't Free Vacation Farm. Time we was by ourself a little." Faith fails to return Mrs. Luddy's strict look. She says, "I tried to look strictly back, but I failed because I loved the sight of her." With a kiss on Donald's head, Faith leaves.

Faith runs back to her home and finds her lover, Jack, and her one son, Richard, beginning to clean up. It is Saturday, and her other son, Anthony, is just leaving to visit his friends in institutions such as Bellevue and Rockland State. That evening Faith tries to explain where she has been, but Jack, Richard, and Anthony do not understand. The story concludes with a kind of summing up: "A woman inside the steamy energy of middle age runs and runs. She finds the houses and streets where her childhood

happened. She lives in them. She learns as though she was a child what in the world is coming next."

Characters

Anthony Asbury

Anthony, also called Tonto, is Faith Asbury's second son. He is a social activist like his mother and visits friends in institutions on the weekends.

Faith Darwin Asbury

Faith Asbury is Grace Paley's lead protagonist, a woman with an absent husband, Ricardo; two sons, Richard and Anthony; and a sometimes live-in lover, Jack. Politically, Faith is a radical liberal, and as a mother raising children mostly alone, she is sensitive to women's rights and issues. She lives in New York. Her parents live in a seniors facility called Children of Judea.

Richard Asbury

Richard Asbury is Faith's older son. He and his brother Anthony are watching television when Faith leaves for her long-distance run.

Cynthia

Cynthia is a Girl Scout in Brooklyn who meets Faith in the street and ushers her into the apartment where Faith lived as a child. While Cynthia encourages Faith to meet Mrs. Luddy, the tenant of the apartment where Faith lived years before, Cynthia is frightened by the idea that Faith could serve her as an adoptive parent if Cynthia's mother were to die.

Jack

Jack is Faith's lover. When Faith returns from her three-week absence, Jack is cleaning house with Richard.

Donald Luddy

Donald Luddy is a second grader and the oldest of Mrs. Luddy's four children. He is bright and cordial. Mrs. Luddy keeps him in the apartment most of the time because there are dangerous people in the streets who could hurt him. While Faith stays in the Luddy apartment, Donald composes a poem.

Eloise Luddy

Eloise is the two-year-old sister of Donald Luddy. There are also twin baby girls in the Luddy family.

Mrs. Raftery

Mrs. Raftery is a neighbor and friend of Faith Asbury. Mrs. Raftery looks in on Faith's sons and sometimes makes them a meal. When Faith leaves for her run, Mrs. Raftery is watching television with Richard and Anthony.

Tonto

See Anthony Asbury

Themes

White Flight

"The Long-Distance Runner" suggests the effects of "white flight," a term coined in 1967 to describe the movement of white people to the suburbs as urban neighborhoods and schools became increasing African American. As cities lost population and tax base, urban neighborhoods decayed. Poor people were left to cope with deterioration and increasing crime, and urban neighborhoods were called ghettos. In this story, Grace Paley imagines a situation in which a middle-class white woman and an African American woman in the ghetto are able to bridge the gap created by white flight. Faith runs through her Brooklyn childhood neighborhood and is able to meet and live with people there. She witnesses the changes that have transpired since her family moved away. She is able to talk with Mrs. Luddy about the problems that confront poor people and middle-class people alike. Faith's idealistic responses to the tenement culture and problems are countered by Mrs. Luddy's discouraged resignation. Mrs. Luddy has adapted to her environment, learned to exist in it; Faith visits with the simplistic hope of extending herself to these people, but in the process she becomes more aware of the unanswered questions that permeate the problems of racial prejudice, poverty, and urban decay.

Racial Segregation

"The Long-Distance Runner" dramatizes how people in an all-black, poverty-stricken neighborhood react when a white woman runs through its streets. Time and shifting populations have separated Faith Asbury from her childhood neighborhood, and when, as a forty-two-year-old, she returns, she is hooted at and challenged by the people on the street. Now a stranger, an interloper, Faith is at risk in the streets where she played safely as a child. The people in the street shout out their comments about her while she tries to make connection with them by talking about the names of flowers. By being in their midst, she learns from them, and they see her as an individual despite her race. Moreover, the fiction allows for Faith to stay with Mrs. Luddy for three weeks. This temporary integration gives Faith understanding about what it is like to live in the urban ghetto and what it is like to be an African American woman who must raise her children in a threatening environment. It also implies the limitations of white drive-by platitudes, such as "Someone ought to clean that up."

Cross-Racial Female Relationships

By enacting a story in which women separated by race, economics, and education spend three weeks living together, Paley indirectly addresses the historical separation of the races in the white middle-class pursuit of women's rights. The feminist movement was mainly a middle-class white woman's movement, which suggested no female

alliance across color lines. "The Long-Distance Runner" enacts an implausible fiction in which two women meet despite those lines, and the white woman's education is achieved through this exposure.

Significantly, the meeting occurs on the African American woman's turf. Mrs. Luddy is immediately in charge: "You in my house. . . . You do as I say. For two cents, I throw you out." Reversing the racial power structure puts Faith in the position to see more and learn more. That arrangement is important because it is Faith who comes with the "answers"; in other words, Faith comes to Mrs. Luddy with conclusions that Mrs. Luddy then challenges. For example, regarding the vacant lot across the street, Faith says, "Someone ought to clean that up." Mrs. Luddy matter-of-factly retorts, "Who you got in mind? Mrs. Kennedy?" Readers get the chance here to see just how this new "meeting of minds" transpires. In effect, Paley creates a world in which the traditional lines that divide African American women from white women are crossed, and it is that crossing that reveals the complicated questions that refuse easy, one-liner answers.

Style

Setting

"The Long-Distance Runner" takes place mostly in Brooklyn, New York, in the childhood neighborhood of Faith Asbury. The story takes place some twenty or more years after her departure from the neighborhood. She now lives in a middle-class white neighborhood. However, Faith takes the train to Brighton Beach and runs along the boardwalk and then into the neighborhood where she spent her childhood. The place has deteriorated, and the residents are now all African Americans. To the crowd who gathers around this forty-two-year-old white jogger, Faith explains: "I used to live here." Crowd members answer back: "Oh yes . . . in the white old days." Since the "white old days," many abandoned houses have been knocked down, vacant lots are littered with discarded furniture and trash, and crime dictates people's behavior on and off the streets. A white woman running through this neighborhood is an anomaly, a person who stands out in every sense from the setting and who residents assume is at risk.

From Mrs. Luddy's apartment window, Faith can look down on empty lots and burned-out houses. She sees what has happened in this neighborhood in the past couple decades. She concludes: "The tenement . . . had been destroyed, first by fire, then by demolition (which is a swinging ball of steel that cracks bedrooms and kitchens). Because of this work we could see several blocks wide and a block and a half long." Whites have moved away, people's homes have been knocked down, and African Americans have remained. Now vacant lots hold overturned sofas, and animals prowl in the trash at night. Setting heightens differences between characters and helps explain why connection cannot be sustained across racial lines.

Characterization

Dialogue is the main tool for characterizing individuals in "The Long-Distance Runner." Otherwise unidentified individuals on the street comment on Faith: "Who you? Who that? Look at her! When you see a fatter ass?" A man from Africa states haughtily, "I will learn the fine old art of sailing in case the engines of the new society of my old inland country should fail." Cynthia, a Girl Scout, asks Faith, "Whyn't you go up to Mrs. Luddy living in your house, you lady, huh?" These disparate voices encircle the intruder, Faith, distinguishing their speakers from one another and from Faith. Grace Paley does not use quotation marks in this story; thus, the voices rather than the punctuation identify separate voices. The way characters use language reveals their background and identifies them as members of certain groups.

Plot

The implausible plot of this story is that a white woman can run through her old neighborhood, which has changed from immigrant Jewish and Irish to poor African

American, and decide to drop in at the apartment her family occupied when she was a child. She gets into the apartment suddenly and unexpectedly and then ends up staying there three weeks, living with the current residents and participating in their daily activities. This imagined storyline reveals some basic truths about what separates racial and economic groups and how that separation leads people on both sides to certain prejudicial conclusions.

Historical Context

In the nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth century, when white middle-class women worked for gender equality, many of them refused to make alliances with women of color or with poor women. While all women experienced unequal treatment, African American and Native American women faced the additional oppression that white women exerted over them. This pattern of exclusion by white women was measurable in the so-called social agencies designed to improve women's lives. For example, the Women's Christian Temperance Union denied membership to black women in the South, and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) did not allow African American women to serve on its board. Even in the late twentieth century, this pattern could still be traced in the absence of African American women from some conferences on feminism, from professional associations, and from positions of power in universities and corporations. Toward the end of the twentieth century, cross-racial collaboration increased, and awareness deepened concerning the multi-layered prejudices at work that affected race relations between women.

In 1974, when "The Long-Distance Runner" appeared in *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, the United States continued to be in social and racial upheaval. The 1960s disruption caused by race riots, antiwar protests, the Civil Rights movement, and abortion debate left its aftershocks. Moreover, in 1973, the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* legalized elective abortion in the first trimester. This decision came too late for women like Mrs. Luddy in Paley's story. Mrs. Luddy is a single parent who is responsible for a second-grader, a two-year-old, and twin baby girls. Her poverty and her self-defensive imprisonment in a ghetto apartment surrounded by dangerous streets and crime are made all the more difficult because she has four little children to rear. Mrs. Luddy is oppressed by her class, her sex, and her race. Faith Asbury gets an education by being able to live with Mrs. Luddy for three weeks, an exposure that reveals how complicated Mrs. Luddy's problems are and how resistant they are to easy, liberal solutions.

Critical Overview

Critics have noted the small size of Grace Paley's oeuvre, but her literary reputation is significant, nonetheless. When *The Collected Stories* appeared in 1994, it was nominated for a National Book Award, and the volume drew widespread affirmation of Paley's fiction. Pointing to its central issue, Cynthia Tompkins in her *World Literature Today* review stated that the collection "encapsulates the moral dilemmas" raised by the question: "How are we to live our lives?" Like other critics, Tompkins also pointed out Paley's "'ear' for idioms and speech patterns," which enhances her handling of characterization and depiction of social interaction between members of different groups. Moreover, in the fiction since the 1970s, Tompkins pointed out that "Paley's texts illustrate the feminist dictum: the personal is the political." These various elements in the work□thematic issues, characterization, and social interaction□are all dramatized in "The Long-Distance Runner," the story of a white woman's return to her childhood neighborhood, now an African American ghetto.

This story focuses on the gulf African American and white women have to bridge in order to make connection. The whole question of spanning a chasm is connected to Paley's political activism. Adam Meyer stated that the stories Paley writes "create a forum wherein she can question her own real-life activism" and where the well-meaning but naive white activist can confront realities that check idealistic platitudes. In fact, regarding Paley's lead protagonist, Faith Darwin Asbury, Meyer stated that the reader comes to "question the inconsistencies in Faith's reasoning." Paley's fiction puts liberal beliefs to the test, and stories such as "The Long-Distance Runner" create scenarios that challenge solutions people may actually espouse but do not necessarily run the risk of putting into action. In her article on marginality, Victoria Aarons stated that Paley's stories create characters "*in relation to others*, to a community."

In an interview with three *Paris Review* writers, Paley's stories were described as "rigorously pruned [so] that they frequently resemble poetry as much as fiction." In sum, one might say that Paley's work allows readers to see through new eyes and to witness possible intersections that may not yet be lived in real life. In these ways, the fiction envisions a new reality. That the prose has the intensity of poetry is another plus.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Monahan has a Ph.D. in English. She teaches at Wayne State University and also operates an editing service, The Inkwell Works. In the following essay, Monahan explores the cross-cultural, cross-racial homecoming that is enacted in "The Long-Distance Runner."

Grace Paley's "The Long-Distance Runner" begins with a common enough experience, a long-absent adult's return to the childhood neighborhood. People occasionally drive through their old neighborhoods to look at the homes and buildings in which they spent earlier years. If a new ethnic or racial group occupies the neighborhood, the returning visitors may remark on the culture they remember and contrast it with the culture they now observe. Indeed, as they register local changes, they may wonder about the people who now live in what used to be their homes; they may slow down or park near the old house and imagine themselves reentering it. This commonplace fantasy is literalized with matter-of-fact detail in Grace Paley's story about a woman who not only returns for a look-see but takes up temporary residence in her childhood apartment.

Grace Paley's implausible story is a fictional attempt to span the geographical, social, economic, and racial chasms that separate Faith Darwin Asbury's white middle-class life from the urban ghetto she once called home. Purportedly out for some exercise, Faith takes a train to Brighton Beach, runs along the boardwalk for a mile or so, and then veers off into a once-familiar Brooklyn, New York, neighborhood. Returning after the 1960s' White Flight and rampant urban decay have gouged this landscape, Faith is both struck by the setting's deterioration and made to feel all the more the outsider by her conversation with people on the street. Nonetheless, the street talk, particularly with Cynthia, a Girl Scout who encourages Faith to enter her old apartment house, propels Faith to knock on the door that once marked entry to her family's home. In this imagined encounter, the current residents take her arrival in stride and accept the way in which the white woman immediately begins to share their everyday lives. When Faith returns to her current home three weeks later, her own family greets her with little surprise and less inquiry. In the interim, she has gone all the way back to her childhood, geographically and in some ways psychologically, and she has remained there long enough to connect with the present tenement and a few of its residents. The truism that Thomas Wolfe used as a title, *You Can't Go Home Again*, is thus tested in Grace Paley's "The Long-Distance Runner."

Grace Paley's use of dialogue to capture diversity and her radical activist stand for civil rights and gender and racial equality intersect in "The Long-Distance Runner" to dramatize specifically a white middle-class woman's encounter with an African American mother, Mrs. Luddy, who is raising four children alone and mostly behind a bolted tenement door. Suddenly afraid of the people outside the apartment building, Faith runs toward her old apartment door and knocks and begs for entry. This point in the story is curiously and tellingly handled. Quotation marks are not used in the text, and a reader might miss the shift that occurs at this point. When Faith knocks, Donald Luddy, a second-grader, refuses to open the door: "Mama not home, I ain't allowed to open up for

nobody." Faith responds, "It's me," and then, as if suddenly a child herself running to her own mother, she says, "Mama! Mama! let me in!" Suddenly she is a little child, fearful of strangers outside, begging her mother to open the door. In letting Faith in, Mrs. Luddy takes charge as if Faith were indeed a child. Mrs. Luddy insists, "You in my house. . . . You do as I say."

Thus the intersection is created, and once on site Faith sees (perhaps more like a child might see) how her naive solutions and well-intended aspirations bump up against local realities. Looking down on the vacant lots strewn with discarded furniture and trash, Faith remarks, "Someone ought to clean that up," to which Mrs. Luddy counters, "Who you got in mind? Mrs. Kennedy?" When Donald expresses his mother's criticism of the porch slackers, "They ain't got self-respect," Faith intellectualizes, "he ought to learn to be more sympathetic." She tells him, "There are reasons that people are that way." Then Mrs. Luddy checks her, "Don't trouble your head about it if you don't mind." When Faith thinks about leaving the apartment, she admits feeling trapped by fear: "I'd get to the door and then I'd hear voices. I'm ashamed to say I'd become fearful. Despite my wide geographical love of mankind, I would be attacked by local fears." Just being on Mrs. Luddy's turf, inside her reality, informs Faith about the daunting complications inherent in social problem solving.

Regarding improving Donald, Faith suggests bringing him "up to reading level at once." She tells him he is "plain brilliant" when he composes a poem full of his mother's words. But Mrs. Luddy corrects her: "You fool with him too much." Then Mrs. Luddy tells the story her grandmother told her mother, about standing in the slave cabin door when a field boy came running through announcing, "Sister! It's freedom." Ironically, Mrs. Luddy, who daily copes with a necessarily locked-in existence, is the teller of this tale about sudden freedom. Paley's handling seems to suggest that story is one way of learning what was and is. As she tells her grandmother's story, Mrs. Luddy's circumscribed existence is juxtaposed with the cabin-door slave girl's life. The fiction gives us a sense of history, but not a sense of progress. Faith's hopes for making a difference here are diminished by the long shadow slavery casts, a darkening that reaches into the 1960s and 1970s to engulf its descendents. Then, as abruptly as Faith arrives and takes up residence, she is forced to leave. Mrs. Luddy tells her, "This ain't Free Vacation Farm."

Returning home via the park where she played with her own children, Faith sees young mothers and thinks, They will "be like me, wrong in everything." What she has learned at Mrs. Luddy's makes her doubt her initial certainties. At home, her family greets her with mild surprise. When she explains where she has been, Richard tells her to "Cut the baby talk." It is as if she has come home younger, more childlike, more aware, as children are freshly aware when they have made unexpected connections. The grown-up Asbury family members cannot understand what she has learned because only she has had the chance, Paley states at the end, "to [learn] as though she was still a child what in the world is coming next."

In her essay, "The Value of Not Understanding Everything," Grace Paley suggests an alternative to the writer's first rule, to write what one knows. Paley argues it is better by far to write about what one does not know. She admits that she has written a number of

stories with Jewish themes because she was an outsider to Judaism. "There were families of experience I was cut off from. You know, it seemed to me that an entire world was whispering in the other room. In order to get to the core of it all . . . I made fiction." Now in this 1960s essay, she believes she "knows" her Jewish past and can no longer write those stories. Now she needs to enter new questions life presents. Paley states, "The writer is not some kind of phony historian who runs around answering everyone's questions with made-up characters tying up loose ends. She is nothing but a questioner." In "The Long-Distance Runner," Paley imagines a plot that literalizes an encounter, that dramatizes a most unusual kind of connection. This story maps out the what-ifs that generate from the fictional premise of a white woman's taking the time to see and learn about the life of an African American mother living in the ghetto. Marginalizing the easy solutions such a white woman might have, the story privileges the hard questions such an encounter causes. Facing those questions constitutes the homecoming education Faith Asbury achieves.

Source: Melodie Monahan, Critical Essay on "The Long-Distance Runner," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2005.

Topics for Further Study

Research urban decay in the early 1960s, and make a chart that correlates social unrest of various forms with the rate at which urban poverty increased and white populations decreased.

Read about Grace Paley's social activism, and then write a report on "The Long-Distance Runner" that analyzes how her socialist views and stand for equal rights are suggested in the fiction.

Return to a former neighborhood, noting the changes that have taken place during your absence. Write a short story in which the main character not only returns but takes up residence among the more recently established neighborhood dwellers. Let the story expose the differences between the character who returns and the current residents, and hint at ways in which these differences can or cannot be bridged.

Research the correlations between poverty and three factors: race, gender, and single head of household with dependent children. Draw a chart to show how these factors correlate in three decades: 1950s, 1970s, and 1990s.

Study a map of a metropolitan area with which you are familiar, and research population according to race across the area. Then reproduce the map so that you can color it in for racial distribution. Reach conclusions about the frequency of segregation and integration based on your research.

Compare and Contrast

1970s: After decades of resistance to the distribution of contraceptive information or devices, contraception devices are now available. *Roe v. Wade* legalizes abortion in 1973, and women gain the right to choose to end unwanted pregnancies within the first trimester. However, in 1976, Congress outlaws the use of Medicaid funding for abortions, a decision that mostly affects poor women.

Today: While thousands of elective abortions are performed across the United States, pro-life advocates continue to fight against legalized abortion.

1970s: The 1970s are shaped by the possibility of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution that would state that men and women are equal before the law. In 1972, Phyllis Schlafly organizes Stop ERA, but in 1973 the proposal for an Equal Rights Amendment passes in Congress. State ratification gets bogged down, however, and by 1979 the ratification period has ended, and ERA fails.

Today: Equality between the sexes is sought in the workplace via the 1964 Civil Rights Amendment, particularly Title VII, which makes discrimination based on "race, color, religion, sex or national origin" illegal.

1970s: The ratio of poverty among African Americans compared to that of white Americans is three to one.

Today: While the percentage of poor African Americans has declined (for example, from 55.2 percent in 1959 to 31.9 percent in 1990), the ratio of poverty among African Americans to white Americans remains three to one. Among all African American households, the highest rate of poverty occurs in those with a single female head of household and dependent children. The occurrence of poverty for this group exceeds 50 percent.

1970s: The Civil Rights Act of 1968 becomes fully operational in January 1970. It makes discrimination in housing and apartment rental on the basis of "race, color, religion, sex or national origin" illegal, and it applies across the U.S. housing market with small exceptions, such as privately owned, single-family homes sold without the assistance of a realtor.

Today: The Civil Rights Act of 1968 has little effect on housing discrimination because of its limitations in enforcement.

What Do I Read Next?

Grace Paley's essays are collected in *Just as I Thought* (1998). This compilation includes her views on topics ranging from abortion to women's action for peace to reflections on Paley's father and her life in Vermont.

In *The Collected Stories* (1994), readers can find selections of stories from *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974), and *Later the Same Day* (1985).

Gloria Naylor's novel *The Women of Brewster Place* follows the lives of seven women living in Brewster Place, a ghetto housing project in a northern U.S. city. The poignancy of these women's lives and their hopes and challenges clearly depict the difficulty poor African American women face living in poverty and coping with racial and sexual prejudice.

Further Study

Feagin, Joe R., comp., *The Urban Scene: Myths and Realities*, Random House, 1973.

This book is a compilation of excerpts from other books on the subject. Topics covered range from grieving for a lost home to the American dream to perspectives on poverty and the political economy of the African American ghetto.

Jargowsky, Paul A., *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City*, Russell Sage Foundation, 1997.

In this book, Jargowsky examines the inner city and the urban poor. He also addresses the importance of community development and race relations.

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□□□, "The Value of Not Understanding Everything," in *Just as I Thought*, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998, p. 188.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535