

Master Harold and the Boys Study Guide

Master Harold and the Boys by Athol Fugard

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Plot Summary

"Master Harold" . . . and the Boys is a one-act play by Athol Fugard. In the course of an afternoon, two black men and the teenage son of their employer examine the nature of human relationships and societal pressures in 1950 South Africa, enduring an outburst of hatred that threatens to end their long friendship.

On a rainy, windy afternoon, waiters Sam and Willie are practicing for an upcoming ballroom dance competition in the deserted tea room where they work. Willie is upset that Hilda, his girlfriend and dance partner, has not shown up to practice with him for the past few days. Sam quickly points out that she has stopped coming because Willie beats her. Seventeen-year-old Hally, the son of the tea room owner, arrives from school and eats a bowl of soup. The three men talk. Hally becomes visibly upset when Sam tells him that his mother has called and said that his father is being released from the hospital that day. When he calls his home and gets no answer, Hally is convinced that it is not true.

As the afternoon goes on, Hally gets out his books to do his homework, and he and Sam have a discussion about Men of Magnitude -- men who have been social reformers and had a major impact on history. It is revealed that over the years, Hally has shared his textbooks with Sam, enabling him to educate himself and have meaningful discussions with Hally about a variety of topics. The three men reminisce about life in the boarding house Hally's mother owned before opening the tea room, remembering how Hally spent most of his time in the room Sam and Willy shared and a particularly good day on which Sam made a kite and took Hally out to fly it.

Hally's mother calls and says that his father is indeed being discharged, upsetting him greatly because his father is an alcoholic who makes their home life miserable. Hally speaks briefly with his father, hiding his dismay. When he gets off the phone, he erupts in a bigoted tirade against Sam, demanding that he treat him with deference and begin calling him Master Harold. After Hally spits in his face, Sam reveals that he made a promise to himself to keep Hally from feeling ashamed because of his father and to be a better man, but he has failed. As the situation defuses, Sam expresses the hope that Hally will make better choices in the future and after Hally leaves, Sam and Willie resume their dance practice, choosing beauty and romance over the world's ugliness.



Pages 3 - 9

Summary

Seventeen-year-old student Harold, called Hally, has known his parents' black employees Sam and Willie all his life and his fondest childhood memories took place in their room. As the three men reminisce on a rainy afternoon, Hally becomes increasingly distraught over his crippled alcoholic father's imminent release from the hospital and takes out his pent-up anger on Sam and Willie, unleashing a racist rant that threatens to destroy their relationship.

On a wet and windy day, Sam, a black man in his mid-40s wearing a waiter's uniform, is flipping through a comic book in a deserted restaurant as Willie, another black man about the same age, wipes the floor. Willie, who is singing as he works, stands up and begins showing Sam how good he has become at dancing the quickstep. Sam tries to give him pointers, telling him to relax because it should look like romance. Willie is preparing for a dance competition to take place in two weeks, but he is unhappy with his partner Hilda, who has not shown up for their last few practice sessions. Sam asks when he last beat her, and Willie confesses that it was Sunday night. Sam tells him that is why she has not shown up and that soon he will leave her for good. Sam is demonstrating his own dancing techniques with an imaginary partner when Hally enters the tea room.

Analysis

Although Sam and Willie are of similar age, Sam is clearly the more worldly of the two. He speaks better both grammatically and in terms of vocabulary, and Willie treats him somewhat deferentially by calling him Boet Sam, a South African term of respect meaning Brother. Sam is also the better dancer and tries to give Willie tips on improving his quickstep. When Willie describes the problems he is having -- the fact that his partner has poor skills and, in fact, has not shown up for their most recent practice sessions -- Sam is quick to figure out that the problem is that Willie beats her routinely. Despite their surroundings -- a deserted tea room -- and their station in life -- servants of the white owners -- Sam sees romance in the world and tries to impart his vision to Willie both to help him become a more fluid dancer and to enable him to see more beauty in the world.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the characters of Sam and Willie. What characteristics do they share? How are they different? What seems to be the nature of their relationship?



Discussion Question 2

What are Willie's complaints about Hilda? Does he have a right to feel as he does? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How does Sam describe ballroom dancing? How is this description different from how Willie sees it?

Vocabulary

anticipation, comic, impressive, display, untrained, advertising, jukebox, solitary, imaginary, launch, intricate, accomplishment, reasonable, absorbed, respond, ad lib, desperate, glide, romance, pretend, disconsolately, handicap, relent, competitor, strict, launch, flourish, demonstration

Pages 9 - 23

Summary

Hally, a 17-year-old white boy and the son of the café's owner, comes in from the rain and applauds Sam's dancing. When he asks where his mother is, Sam tells him she is at the hospital, and it sounds like his father is being released. Hally is shocked. When Sam goes into the kitchen to get him some soup, he questions Willie and insists that his father is to stay in the hospital at least another three weeks.

Hally asks about the dance competition, and Sam teases that Hilda has leg problems – she is like a race horse that gallops. Hally becomes angry when Willie throws a rag at Sam but hits him instead. Hally quickly recovers and asks Sam exactly what his mother said, insisting that his father is not being discharged. Hally calls his home. When no one answers, he is certain his mother is still at the hospital.

Sam asks Hally about his day at school, and Hally says he was paddled. Sam describes the way prisoners are caned in jail, causing Hally to remark that people can be bastards, and it is a good thing the world has made progress. Hally adds that someday things will change, and the two men discuss the concept of social reformers.

Sam begins to read from Hally's math textbook, and Hally explains each phrase as they go along, although he says he really does not understand the subject and does not care because failing an exam does not measure intelligence. Sam begins to read aloud from Hally's history book. Again, the concept of social reformers, whom they call men of magnitude, comes up. Hally disagrees that Napoleon was a social reformer because historical significance does not necessarily mean greatness. As they try to name social reformers, Hally mentions Darwin, and they discuss his inability to convince Sam of the validity of his theories. Sam suggests Abraham Lincoln and William Shakespeare, while Hally suggests Tolstoy, whom Sam remembers from when Hally studied him. Sam suggests Jesus, but Hally dismisses Him unless other religious figures are included also. Then, Sam gives him clues about his next contribution, and Hally eventually guesses Sir Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin. Hally is delighted that he has been successful in educating Sam.

Analysis

This section introduces Hally, the son of the tea room's owner and her husband, who is crippled and an alcoholic. The author's initial description of Hally -- a bit ruffled and untidy with wrinkled clothes -- provides the first hint that his home life is not what it should be. As the section continues, it becomes clear that Hally is not happy about the prospect of his father coming home from the hospital, but the reader does not yet know the full extent of their difficulties.



The nature of Hally's relationship with Sam and Willie also plays out gradually. While Willie is more deferential, calling Hally "Master Harold," Sam is on a more equal footing. Gradually it is revealed that while we do not know how much formal schooling Sam has received, Hally has been contributing to his education for many years by sharing his books with him and discussing the various subjects he studies at school. Despite their different stations in life, Sam is Hally's intellectual equal with enough knowledge to hold his own in the discussion about men of magnitude. He is also comfortable enough to call Hally out on his poor grades in some subjects and the fact that his knowledge of Shakespeare consists of having read only one play. Hally also calls Sam out on his choice of Abraham Lincoln as a man of magnitude, noting that he has never been a slave. Hally's superiority over the two black men is hinted at from time to time when Sam waits on him and when Hally halfheartedly reminds Sam and Willie to do their work, but on the whole the relationship at this point is largely one of equals.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the debate between Hally and Sam about men of magnitude. What historical figures does each man nominate and what are their reasons?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the discussion between Sam and Hally about being caned? What does it suggest about the difference in their lives and experiences?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Hally object to including Jesus in the list of men of magnitude?

Vocabulary

fetch, conspiratorial, pollution, conviction, rummage, interrupt, discharge (verb), barbaric, morbid, progress, oscillate, reformer, magnitude, naught, intend, intrepid, daunted, vestige, abolish, oppression, significance, prejudiced, campaign, digest, revolutionize, bigotry, sentimental, heritage, visionary, distinguish, serf, submit, examination, hypothetical, atheist, straightforward, splendid, gratifying



Pages 23 - 35

Summary

Sam reminds Hally that his first lesson was geography and they begin reminiscing about spending time together in Sam's room in the back of the old Jubilee Boarding House that Hally's parents used to run. Hally has not thought about the boarding house for several years and is impressed with Sam's excellent memory about their time there. Willie joins in, and they talk about how Hally used to hide under Sam's bed. But, his mother would find him and punish him for hanging around the servants' quarters. Hally's life was miserable there, and his only fun came from hanging out in Sam's room.

They reminisce about various events, including the time Hally caught Sam having sex with a woman named Cynthia. Hally becomes engrossed in the memories, trying to recall the most minute details about the room and its contents, with Sam and Willie helping him when he cannot recall something. Sometimes they played checkers. Since Willie was a poor player, Hally says that sometimes they let him win so he would continue to play.

Hally recalls his best memory in great detail. He found Sam in his room making something with some wood and other items. When he put them together, Hally realized it was a kite. Hally thought a black man could not possibly know anything about flying a kite. When they went outside, he secretly hoped no other kids would be around to laugh at them, but it flew perfectly and he was thrilled. Hally did not want to fly it himself because he was afraid he would damage it. Then, Sam said he had work to do and left Hally sitting on a bench with the kite tied to it. Hally says they must have been a strange sight, a little white boy and an older black man flying a kite, but it would have been just as strange if it had been him and his crippled father.

Hally is lamenting the fact that life has gotten more complicated since then when his mother phones. During a long conversation, Hally learns that his father is being discharged, and he tries to get his mother to find a way to keep him there. After hanging up, he tries to justify himself to Sam and Willie, saying his father can get better care in the hospital. But, he becomes increasingly upset. He complains that just when things are going OK, something or someone spoils everything.

Analysis

As Hally and Sam begin to reminisce, their relationship sounds more like that of brothers or cousins than a white boy and his family's black servant. It is obvious that while Sam is respectful of both Hally and his mother, refusing to let Hally hide in his room when she was looking for him, he valued the time very much because he remembers much about it. As they talk, Hally begins to recall minute details, including the exact location of Sam's room in the back of the boarding house and the location of



every object in the room. They paint a scene of a somewhat idyllic youth, despite the fact that it took place in a rundown boarding house. Hally seems to recall a dysfunctional relationship with his parents although the details have not yet been revealed.

The description of the kite Sam made is particularly significant. The incident seems minor, but it was a pivotal one for him because he recalls it with great detail and color. The first hint that something is amiss comes when he questions Sam about why he made the kite. Sam clams up, then brushes off the rest of the story, indicating that there is more to it than Hally remembers or realizes.

As this section comes to a close, Hally muses that when things seem to be going well, something or someone comes along to spoil everything, foreshadowing the discord he is about to create in the wake of his dismay over his father's impending release from the hospital.

Discussion Question 1

What details are beginning to emerge to explain why Hally is upset about his father being released from the hospital? How do these explain his attitude toward his parents?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the kite Sam made is such a strong memory for Hally? Why was it a significant event for him?

Discussion Question 3

List and describe three things that put the relationship between Sam and Hally in sharper focus in this section.

Vocabulary

strut, phenomenal, imitate, urgent, edifying, deliberately, infuriating, audacity, obvious, fiasco, suicidal, conscious, brusquely, fundamental, perpetual, hysteria



Pages 35 - 59

Summary

Hally gets started on his homework as Sam and Willie continue to practice dancing while doing their work around the tea room and Sam tries to convince Willie to stop beating Hilda. Hally, who is easily distracted from his school work, criticizes them for dancing rather than working. Sam tries to tell him that dancing is beautiful and makes people happy.

Sam and Willie describe the upcoming competition. Hally gradually gets interested, thinking he can use it as the topic for an essay on an event of cultural or historical significance. When Hally asks what happens if two couples collide on the dance floor, Sam explains that there are no collisions because being among the finalists is like being in a dream world in which accidents do not happen. He says that is what we want life to be like, with no one bumping into each other. So, Hally titles his essay "A World Without Collisions."

The phone rings. It's Hally's mother, calling to say that his father is being released and will soon be home. Hally becomes very upset, telling her that this will end their peace and quiet and he is tired of taking care of him as he steals money, drinks too much, and generally makes life miserable. Then she puts his father on the phone and Hally changes his tune, saying he is happy he is coming home, telling him about the comic books he is bringing home and calling him pal and chum. Before hanging up, his mother gets back on the line and reminds him to bring home some brandy.

After the phone call ends, Hally lashes out at Sam, saying they have wasted their time during the afternoon because life is a fuck-up and will never change. As he derides his father, Sam begs him to take back his words because it is a sin for a son to mock his father, but this causes Hally to turn his rage on Sam. He demands that he mind his own business. When Sam gives up and turns away, Hally becomes even more infuriated and reminds Sam that he is only a servant and that from now on he should call him Master Harold like Willie does. Sam warns him that if he proceeds, he must be prepared for what happens, but Hally continues to rant, saying that his father always says he should teach Sam and Willie to show him more respect. Then, he relates a racist joke that he claims he and his father laugh about routinely. When Sam reacts, Willie spits in his face. Sam calls him a coward because he really wants to spit in his father's face. Sam relates a story from several years earlier about carrying Hally's drunk father home from a bar and cleaning him up. After that, Sam promised he would try to keep Hally from feeling ashamed of himself because of his father. He says that the reason he made the kite was to give Hally something to look up to, and the reason he left was that the bench Hally was sitting on was for whites only.



Sam stops talking. Hally, appearing deflated, prepares to leave. But, before Hally leaves, Sam tells him that a lot of teaching went on that day and that Hally can choose to leave the bench any time he chooses.

Analysis

This is the play's pivotal section in which the relationship between Hally and the two black men changes dramatically, as Hally foreshadowed with his comment that when things are going well, something or someone spoils everything. In this case, it is Hally himself who spoils his friendship with Sam and Willie, perhaps irreparably.

Although Hally is the only one of the three who has received a formal education, it is clear that he has a degree of ignorance that school or books cannot help. Despite his expressed wish for a social reformer to come along and make positive changes in the world, he is not willing to or capable of effecting change in his own relationships. As his frustration with his father boils over upon learning that he is leaving the hospital, he does not address the issue with the source of his anger but rather turns on Sam, who displays a degree of wisdom that Hally neither possesses nor recognizes. Sam has been more of a parent to Hally than his own mother and father have been, but despite their long and rich history together, when Hally is confronted with feelings he is not prepared to handle, he falls back on the racism and bigotry that his father has passed on to him and that is pervasive in his country during the time of apartheid. No social reformer or man of magnitude can make his world a better place until he faces his own demons and, using Sam's analogy, walks away from the whites-only bench. While Hally has provided Sam with something of a formal education through his books, it is Sam who actually has a great deal to teach Hally.

Despite the anger and bitterness of Hally's ugly outburst, Sam proves himself the better man. In the end, he reaches out by calling him Hally again and giving him hope for the future. The author leaves it unclear, however, whether Hally will be able to rise above the prejudice and hatred that is buried deep within his psyche and help to effect the change he wants to see in the world.

Discussion Question 1

How does Sam relate ballroom dancing to problems in society?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sam say he has failed Hally? Why does he feel responsible for Hally's attitude?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the experience Sam and Hally had with the kite. What did it mean to each of them?

Vocabulary

withdraw, adamant, vicious, despot, vent, establishment, lenient, tirade, philosopher, climax, precisely, anthropological, primitive, abandon, deportment, aghast, discretely, desolate, blunt, stern, meddle



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Summary

After Hally leaves, Willie tells Sam that everything will be OK tomorrow. He says that Sam is right and he will apologize to Hilda and will not beat her anymore. Then when they practice, he will romance her as Sam advised, and he imagines himself and Hilda winning the prize for most promising newcomers in the dance competition. Saying he will walk home, he puts the money set aside for his bus fare into the jukebox. Both men begin dancing.

Analysis

The play ends on a hopeful note. After Hally leaves, Willie and Sam resume their dance practice and Willie's promise to stop beating Hilda, indicating that people can indeed change if they so desire. This implies by extension that societal change is also possible. The author leaves it unclear whether the day's events will have an effect on Hally, but Willie and Sam will continue to dream.

Discussion Question 1

Analyze the lyrics to the song Sam and Willie dance to as the play concludes. How do they relate to the plot?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the concept of romance in this last scene and in the play overall. What does Sam mean by his frequent references to romance and why is it so important to him?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Sam's words had any effect on Hally? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

promising, select (verb), spectrum

Characters

Hally

Hally is a 17-year-old white boy in 1950 South Africa. His mother owns the St. George's Park Tea Room in Port Elizabeth and his father is a crippled alcoholic and a racist. Hally has had a lifelong friendship with Sam and Willie, two black men in their mid-40s who have long been employed by his mother. Hally is obviously intelligent but struggles with some subjects at school because he simply is not interested and does not care, but he has taken it upon himself to educate Sam by sharing his schoolwork with him over a period of years.

Hally readily admits that the happiest moments in his unhappy childhood have been spent with Sam and Willie, usually hiding out in the room they shared at the boarding house his mother used to run. However, racism is deep-seated in his country and his family, and over time, Hally has unwittingly absorbed some of his father's bigoted ideas. During an emotional afternoon in his mother's deserted café, he unleashes some of those thoughts on Sam and Willie in the ugliest manner possible, threatening to destroy what are possibly the most meaningful relationships in his life.

Sam

Sam is a black man in his mid-40s who waits tables and performs other duties at a tea room in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He has worked for Hally's mother for many years and has also served as a friend and confidant for Hally as he has grown up. Sam is intelligent but has little formal education, so he has soaked up knowledge from Hally's studies and enjoys debating with his young friend.

Sam is also an accomplished ballroom dancer and a mentor to Willie, who is around his age but less sophisticated. He advises Willie not only on improving his dance moves, but also on handling relationships. Even in the face of the unexpected racist tirade unleashed by Hally and the seemingly hopeless bigotry that pervades his country, Sam remains optimistic about the future of the world.

Willie

Willie is a black man in his mid-40s who serves as a janitor and general worker at the St. George's Park Tea Room in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Less accomplished than his friend Sam, Willie routinely beats his partner Hilda and has no interest in academics. He spends much of the play practicing for an upcoming ballroom dance competition. In the end he begins to share Sam's optimism and sense of hope.



Symbols and Symbolism

Men of Magnitude

Men of Magnitude is the title Sam and Hally give to their list of people who have been significant social reformers.

Hally's Books

Hally uses his school textbooks to educate Sam in topics like history and mathematics.

Sam's Room

Sams' room at the Jubilee Boarding House became a safe haven for Hally while he was growing up. It was there that he and Sam forged their close relationship.

Kite

The kite that Sam made from a couple of wooden sticks and Hally's mother's old stocking brings back fond memories for Hally. To him, it symbolizes a fun day in his childhood but to Sam, it symbolizes his effort to get Hally to look up and avoid feeling shame.

Ballroom Dancing

Throughout the play, Sam and Willie are preparing for a ballroom dancing competition. Sam equates dancing with beauty, fluidity and a world in which people do not collide into each other.

A World Without Collisions

A World Without Collisions is the title Hally gives to the essay he plans to write about the ballroom dance competition, using Sam's metaphor in which the finalists do not bump into each other.

Bench

After flying the kite, Sam made an excuse that he had to go back to work because the bench on which Hally was sitting was for whites only although Hally did not realize it at the time. Sam later uses the bench as a symbol of the divide between blacks and whites



and tells Hally that he can choose to leave it at any time simply by standing and walking away.

Jukebox

Sam and Willie use the tea room's jukebox to provide music for their dance practice. In the final scene, the box provides romantic colors to reflect Sam's view of dancing and romance.

Crutch

Hally's father's crutch, which supports him because he has lost a leg, symbolizes his need to lean on Hally and others because of his own weaknesses, and Hally's disdain of his father for being a cripple and a drunk.

Brandy

Hally's mother asks him to bring home a bottle of brandy for his father, signifying that everything will be the same when he returns home, with his father having not changed after his hospitalization.

Settings

The entire play takes place in the St. George's Park Tea Room in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The establishment is owned by Hally's mother. It is deserted on a rainy afternoon, providing a backdrop for the interaction between Hally and his mother's two black employees.

Themes and Motifs

The Nature of Family

The concept of what does and does not constitute a family is a major theme in "Master Harold" . . . and the Boys. Just as Hally's parents are never seen during the course of the play, they are in many respects absent in his life as well. Despite the difference in their ages, Sam, and to some extent Willie, served as brothers for Hally when he was a child. Now, Sam has stepped in as a father figure and mentor. He has seen the problems in Hally's relationship with his father and quietly taken it upon himself to teach the boy a better way of living. This is most clearly demonstrated in his description of the kite incident. While Hally saw the experience simply as a fun afternoon of play, Sam reveals that he built the kite in order to give Hally something to look up to and be proud of.

Parents teach their children by the example of their own lives and in this respect, too, Sam proves to be a better parent to Hally than his real mother and father. The example set by Hally's dad is one of drunkenness and hatred, passing along his bigotry in the form of racial jokes that the two share. His is a legacy of shame, while Sam, despite his race and his station in life, serves as an example of pride, hope and forgiveness. Like any good parent, he forgives Hally for his behavior toward him and uses the experience as a teaching opportunity.

Choice

Author Athol Fugard weaves the theme of choice throughout this play. Willie chooses to beat his girlfriend Hilda and she, in return, chooses to abandon their dance practice, but as the play concludes, Willie has been inspired by Sam to make a different, more uplifting decision. Hally's inherent bigotry and hatred have been passed down to him by his father, but Sam tries to make him see that he does have a choice about how he thinks and behaves. He uses the analogy of the whites-only bench on which Hally sat when they flew the kite, telling the young man that he can leave the bench -- and his hatred -- any time he choose simply by getting up and walking away.

Sam also makes a choice about how to respond to Hally's cruel attack on him. He considers hitting him after Hally spits on him, but Willie convinces him that such behavior will do no good. Instead, Sam chooses to impart a lesson to Hally by telling him the reason he built the kite and the reason he did not stay longer to continue flying it. As the play concludes, Sam also chooses to return to calling Hally by his nickname rather than Master Harold as a gesture of forgiveness and in the hope that their relationship has not been irreparably damaged by the day's events. Willie also decides to walk home and use his bus fare to feed the jukebox, choosing beauty, romance and dreams over the ugliness that has transpired.



Racism and Bigotry

The overarching theme of "Master Harold" . . . and the Boys is the concept of racism in 1950 South Africa. The play takes place during the time of apartheid when there was a deep division between the country's black and white population and racial segregation was the law of the land. In the beginning of the play, however, Sam and Hally treat each other almost as equals and it is clear that the two have a deep friendship. However, Hally has been raised by a father who clearly harbors the deep feelings of racism that pervade his country and despite Hally's resentment toward his father, he has passed those attitudes on to his son.

Early in the play, there are a few subtle hints that Hally is not as evolved as he believes himself to be as he reminds Sam and Willie to get to work and mentions that when he was growing up, his mother believed he should not get too close to the two black men. When Hally becomes frustrated and distraught over his home situation, however, his first instinct is to turn his anger toward the men he continues to believe are beneath him. He even goes so far as to spit in Sam's face -- an act that is seen as acceptable under these circumstances but would be unheard of if a black man had spit on a white one.

Despite Hally's despicable treatment of him, Sam proves himself to be the bigger man by rising above his anger and hurt to teach Hally a lesson about human nature. Whether Hally will embrace that lesson remains to be seen.

Styles

Point of View

"Master Harold" . . . and the Boys is a play, so there is no narrator per se. Instead, the reader learns from the conversation among the three characters as well as the stage direction and author's notes that provide information about the setting, the physical appearance of the characters and the mood.

Language and Meaning

The play takes place in 1950 South Africa, so the language includes native terms and slang expressions from that time and place. For example, all three of the characters use the word "ja" in place of yes. Hally's vocabulary and manner of speaking reflects his education and higher station in life, while Willie is deferential to both of the other characters, calling Hally "Master" and Sam "Boet Sam," a respectful term for brother.

The author has styled the play's title to reflect something of its plot, placing "Master Harold" in quotation marks and referring to the two black characters as "the boys" as a sign of their lower station in life.

Structure

"Master Harold" . . . and the Boys is a one-act play that takes place in one afternoon in a single location. While the three characters occasionally enter and exit, there are no formal breaks in the play.



Quotes

Sam: It must . . . Ja . . . it must look like romance. Willie: Now another one! What's romance? Sam: Love story with happy ending.

-- Sam and Willie (Page 5 paragraph 14 - 16)

Importance: As he tries to help Willie improve his dancing skills, Sam equates ballroom dancing to romance, setting up his optimistic attitude even in the face of serious racial issues that arise later.

I've heard enough, Sam! Jesus! It's a bloody awful world when you come to think of it. People can be real bastards.

-- Hally (Page 15 paragraph 8)

Importance: This foreshadows Hally's own despicable behavior that is to come shortly.

I know, I know! I oscillate between hope and despair for this world as well, Sam. But things will change, you wait and see. One day somebody is going to get up and give history a kick in the backside and get it going again.

-- Hally (Page 15 paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote sets up the discussion on men of magnitude between Sam and Hally.

Tolstoy may have educated his peasants, but I've educated you.

-- Hally (Page 23 paragraph 10)

Importance: This establishes Hally's habit of sharing his books and thoughts with Sam, enabling the black man to get an education he would not otherwise have been able to obtain.

I mean, seriously, what the hell does a black man know about flying a kite?

-- Hally (Page 29 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is among the first hints that despite their long, close history, Hally harbors feelings of racism toward Sam and Willie.

It's just that life felt the right size in there . . . not too big and not too small. Wasn't so hard to work up a bit of courage. It's got so bloody complicated since then.

-- Hally (Page 32 paragraph 9)

Importance: In this passage, Hally laments the mess his life has become at the hands of his father and longs for the simple boyhood days when he could hide under Sam's bed.



Old Doc Bromely -- he's my English teacher -- is going to argue with me, of course. He doesn't like natives. But I'll point out to him that in strict anthropological terms the culture of a primitive black society includes its dancing and singing. To put my thesis in a nutshell: The war-dance has been replaced by the waltz. But it still amounts to the same thing: the release of primitive emotions through movement.

-- Hally (Page 43 paragraph 5)

Importance: Here Hally once again gives an indication that he is not as advanced in his view of racial equality as he would have one believe.

There's no collisions out there, Hally. Nobody trips or stumbles or bumps into anybody else. That's what that moment is all about. To be one of those finalists on that dance floor is like . . . like being in a dream about a world in which accidents don't happen.

-- Sam (Page 45 paragraph 14)

Importance: Sam equates the finals of the dance competition with a life in which people, races and societies, like the accomplished dancers, are able to skillfully avoid colliding into each other.

Look at the three of us this afternoon: I've bumped into Willie, the two of us have bumped into you, you've bumped into your mother, she's bumping into your Dad . . . None of us knows the steps and there's no music playing. And it doesn't stop with us. the whole world is doing it all the time.

-- Sam (Page 46 paragraph 3)

Importance: Sam likens the world to a crowded dance floor in which opposing forces are constantly bumping into each other, foreshadowing the collision that is about to occur between him and Hally.

My mother is right. She's always warning me about allowing you to get too familiar. Well, this time you've gone too far. It's going to stop right now. You're only a servant in here, and don't forget it.

-- Hally (Page 53 paragraph 6)

Importance: Hally is beginning to draw the racial line between Sam and himself, drawing his parents into the mix.

To begin with, why don't you also start calling me Master Harold, like Willie.

-- Hally (Page 54 paragraph 10)

Importance: Hally begins to cross a line that Sam warns him will change their relationship and his view of himself forever.

You've hurt yourself bad. And you're a coward, Master Harold. The fact you should be spitting in is your father's . . . but you used mine, because you think you're safe inside your fair skin . . . and this time I don't mean just or decent.

-- Sam (Page 56 paragraph 6)



Importance: Sam finally gets angry enough to call Hally out on his behavior and reveals the real reasons he is lashing out at Sam

If you really want to know, that's why I made you that kite. I wanted you to look up, be proud of something, of yourself.

-- Sam (Page 58 paragraph 3)

Importance: Despite everything Hally has just said and done, Sam continues his effort to make him a better person by explaining his reasons for making the kite Hally loved so much.

You sure of that, Hally? Because it would be pretty hopeless if that was true. It would mean nothing has been learnt in here this afternoon, and there was a hell of a lot of teaching going on . . . one way or the other. But anyway, I don't believe you. I reckon there's one thing you know. You don't have to sit up there by yourself. You know what that bench means now, and you can leave it any time you choose. All you've got to do is stand up and walk away from it.

-- Sam (Page 59 paragraph 11)

Importance: Despite everything that has happened, Sam remains optimistic and gives Hally -- whom he is calling by his nickname again -- an opportunity to be a better man through the metaphor of the whites-only bench.