Picnic Study Guide

Picnic by William Inge

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Picnic is based on an earlier short play by William Inge, *Front Porch,* written in 1952. This predecessor was a fragmented character study of several women. In using *Front Porch* as the basis of Picnic, Inge expanded upon the female characters to include several male figures and a more developed plot.

Picnic was a success with audiences when it opened on Broadway in February, 1953. It also earned significant praise from critics, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Outer Circle Award, the New York Drama Critics Award, and a Donaldson Award. The movie adaptation in 1955 expanded the story's appeal and garnered two Academy Awards, a Golden Globe Award, and a listing as one of the ten best films of 1955. Inge's exploration of small town life, his focus on family relationships, and his depiction of the loneliness that permeates so many peoples' lives struck a chord with 1950s audiences and has continued to do so in the decades since *Picnic's* debut.

Because he was writing about subjects with which he was familiar, Inge's plays deliver an authentic tone. The role of alcohol and sexual impropriety is a common theme in his work, which serves as a contrast to the American Dream image so familiar to 1950s audiences□that of white picket fences surrounding perfect people leading perfect lives. The women in *Picnic* are all looking for a way to escape the boredom and loneliness of their lives, and the men of the play are confused and unsure of what they want. While embraced by mass audiences for its superficial charms, critics lauded Inge's play for its much darker themes. *Picnic* has come to be regarded as a pioneering drama for its frank depiction of sexuality and its subliminally cynical take on the "love conquers all" hypothesis.

Author Biography

William Inge, born May 3, 1913, was the fifth and last child of Maude and Luther Inge. He was raised in Independence, Kansas, by his mother; his father was a salesman and was rarely at home. After graduating from the University of Kansas in 1935, Inge attended the George Peabody College for Teachers but left before completing a master of arts degree. After a brief period teaching English at a local high school, Inge returned to college to complete his master's program. He also worked as a drama critic, and it was during this period that he met renowned playwright Tennessee Williams *(A Streetcar Named Desire),* who encouraged him to write. Inge completed his first play that year, and with the help of Williams, *Farther off from Heaven* was produced two years later, in 1947.

Plagued by depression and substance dependencies, Inge joined Alcoholics Anonymous in 1948, having already begun Freudian analysis in an attempt to alleviate his psychological problems. In 1949, he wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba,* which was produced on Broadway in 1950 and earned Inge the George Jean Nathan and Theatre Time Awards. Three years later, Inge scored another hit with *Picnic,* which won the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, the Outer Circle Award, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and the Donaldson Award. Inge had two more hits on Broadway in quick succession: *Bus Stop* (1955) and *The Dark At the Top of the Stairs* (1957; an earlier version was staged in 1947). After this success, Inge's next plays, *A Loss of Roses* (1959), *Natural Affection* (1963), and *Where's Daddy?* (1965) were commercial failures, each closing after only a few performances.

Despite these theatrical failures, Inge had great success with his 1961 foray into screen writing. *Splender in the Grass* earned him the Academy Award for best original screenplay in 1961. Following this success, he moved to Los Angeles to concentrate on cinematic writing, but he never repeated his early success. Inge was deeply affected by negative reviews of his work. He struggled with depression and alcoholism much of his life. Many of his plays focus on the complexity of family relationships and deal with characters who struggle with failed expectations, depression, and addiction. His death in 1973 from carbon monoxide poisoning was ruled a suicide.

Plot Summary

Act I

As *Picnic* opens, Millie is sneaking a cigarette outside, while Hal and Mrs. Potts have just finished breakfast next door. It is the last day before school starts and everyone is getting ready for a Labor Day picnic to be held that evening. The main characters are introduced, and the tomboyish Millie, while pretending not to care, is shown to be envious of her older sister Madge's beauty but contemptuous of her intellect.

Madge enters. Hal, a drifter recently arrived in town and employed doing odd jobs for Mrs. Potts, is immediately attracted to her, and Madge is clearly attracted to him. When Flo enters, her wariness indicates that she perceives Hal as a threat to her plans, mainly marrying Madge off to the wealthy Alan. Flo warns Madge that a pretty girl does not have much time before her beauty begins to fade, urging her daughter to seize the moment and secure Alan's interest. Madge enjoys Alan's company but is not in love with him. Instead, she is fixated on the train whistle in the distance which, to her, symbolizes the prospect of freedom from the small town.

The Owens' roomer, Rosemary, enters the scene and attempts to convince the other women that she is not interested in men or in marrying. But her tone indicates that marriage is the one thing she does desire. She leaves with two other single teachers. Alan arrives and embraces Hal as an old friend from college. The two reminisce, and Hal relates his most recent activities. Alan's acceptance of Hal eases Flo's worries about the drifter and validates Mrs. Potts's fondness for her new handyman. Hal is asked to escort Millie to the picnic that evening, and the act ends with Hal, Alan, and Millie leaving to spend the day swimming.

Act II

It is late afternoon, and Madge has spent the day helping her mother prepare the food for the picnic that evening. Rosemary is getting ready for her date with Howard, who soon arrives. Hal and Alan have also arrived in two separate cars. After Alan goes inside the house to help Flo, Millie sits down to draw Hal's picture. Howard leaves to get something from his car, returning with a bottle of whiskey. After initially pretending that she is unfamiliar with alcohol, Rosemary has several drinks, as does Hal and Howard.

When Rosemary walks to the other side of the yard, both Hal and Howard step back to admire Madge, who they can see primping in the window. Rosemary returns and wants to dance to the music everyone can now hear coming from the park. Although Howard has told Rosemary that he cannot dance, he makes an attempt to please her after she begins dancing with Millie. Hal attempts to teach Millie some new steps; Rosemary is fixated on him as he swoons to the music. When Madge enters, and she and Hal begin to dance, Rosemary, already very drunk, begins a verbal attack on Hal, who has

refused to dance with her. Rosemary correctly assesses Hal's social skills and his insecurities. Her attack leaves him defeated, and when Madge tries to comfort him, he embraces her, carrying her offstage.

Act III, scene 1

It is very late, after midnight, when Rosemary and Howard return. They have had sex and Rosemary expects Howard to marry her. Howard's attempt to escape, by repeatedly promising that they will talk about their future at another time, is not acceptable to Rosemary. She makes it clear that even one more day of the loneliness and emptiness of her life is unsuitable. Although he has claimed to be set in his ways and unwilling to marry, Howard is no match for the determined Rosemary. She pleads and begs until he promises to return in the morning to discuss the issue. A few moments later, Madge and Hal enter. They have also had sex, and both are feeling very ashamed at their betrayal of Alan. The scene ends with Madge running into her house in tears.

Act III, scene 2

It is early the next morning. Everyone is carefully discussing the events of the evening before. Alan arrives and asks to speak to Madge. While he waits, Millie tells him that she has always liked him. As they are waiting for Madge to come outside, Howard arrives to speak to Rosemary, who has packed her bags and is prepared for an immediate wedding. Using the presence of her friends and the Owens, whom she has certainly told of her wedding plans, Rosemary effectively traps Howard into agreeing to an immediate wedding.

Madge comes outside to speak to Alan, who tells her that Hal has left town. But Hal has been hiding nearby, and his entrance provokes a fight between the two young men. Hal easily defeats Alan, who says he is leaving town with his father. Hal is being pursued by the police and must also leave town. He tries to convince Madge to go with him, but she is frightened. He leaves to catch the train to Tulsa without her. After Hal leaves, Madge enters the house crying. She emerges in a few moments with her packed bag and announces that she, too, is going to catch the train and join Hal. In spite of her mother's pleadings, Madge walks offstage.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Picnic starts on Labor Day, early in the morning in a small Kansas town. All of the on-stage action happens on the porches of two neighboring homes. Mrs. Flo Owens lives in one of the homes with her teenage daughters, Madge and Millie. An older woman, Mrs. Helen Potts, lives in the other house, where she takes care of her invalid mother. The scene starts with Mrs. Potts talking with Hal, a very handsome young vagabond she has hired for the day. Mrs. Potts is very kind to him and feeds him breakfast in exchange for his work.

Meanwhile, on the other porch, Millie is bickering with a teenager named Bomber. Madge comes out. She is "unusually" beautiful and eighteen years old. Bomber asks Madge out on a date. She explains she is dating Alan and says Bomber should leave her alone. However, Bomber is persistent and begins to use crude, insulting language to pressure her into accepting a date. Hal appears from next door and tells Bomber to leave. Bomber is intimidated by Hal's football player physique and slinks away. Madge and Hal exchange hellos and appear instantly attracted to each other, but before they can speak further, Flo comes outside and chases Hal off her property.

As the three women stand on the porch, they hear a train whistle in the distance. Millie says that when she hears trains she dreams of getting on one and taking it all the way to New York. Her mother scoffs at her and reminds her that the train only goes as far as Tulsa. Madge says she always hopes some important person will get off the train by accident and discover her working behind the counter at the dime store. She fantasies about the stranger whisking her off to Washington to work in the Espionage Department.

Flo dismisses the girls' dreams and changes the subject to Alan. She quizzes Madge on how far she lets Alan go when they are alone together. Madge says they only kiss. Flo seems less concerned about their physical relationship than trying to convince Madge that marrying Alan would mean a nice home, shopping trips and a membership at the local country club. Flo tells Madge that girls are only young and pretty for a short time and if she wants a secure future, she must catch a good husband before her beauty fades. The subject changes to an upcoming dance. Madge and Mille argue. Mille calls Madge stupid and teases her about not getting good grades. Madge responds by calling Millie "a goon" and Millie attacks her. Flo breaks up the fight, but not before the audience can see the deep animosity between the two sisters. Millie leaves. Madge complains to Flo that she is tired of being pretty and says there is no value to being beautiful.

Rosemary Snyder, a schoolteacher, makes a grand appearance. She is a border who never married. While she likes dating men, she says she has no interest in them once they start wanting a serious relationship. She likes her independence. As they talk, Rosemary is scandalized when she notices Hal working next door without a shirt. Flo

and Rosemary gossip. They discuss Helen Potts' mother and how difficult she is to care for. They also talk about Helen's wedding years ago and how her mother forced her to annul it on the same day, never allowing Helen to have a true marriage.

Alan shows up to see Madge. Helen Potts comes over and tells Alan that she has hired a young man who claims to know Alan from college. Alan has no idea who she is talking about and goes inside to visit with Madge. The women continue to talk about Hal. Throughout this scene, they frequently mention that Hal worked for his breakfast. Flo and Rosemary look down on Hal and think it is disgraceful for Mrs. Potts to hire unknown men. Mrs. Potts defends Hal repeatedly. She is deeply offended by Rosemary's insinuation that she is attracted to the much younger man. Rosemary apologizes and Flo tries to smooth things over between the women.

Madge and Alan come outside. She is wearing a new dress. They all comment on how beautiful she looks. Meanwhile, Millie is reading a book. Rosemary, once again shocked by perceived impropriety, tells Flo the book is filthy and banned by the local library. Alan defends Millie, telling Flo that the book is on the reading list at his college. Flo comments on Millie's odd tastes. Madge agrees and mentions the pictures Millie has hung in her room. Millie says the pictures are by the great artist, Picasso, and says, "Pictures don't have to be pretty."

The women leave the stage. Hal walks over and sees Alan. They yell with glee and start to roughhouse, hugging and jumping on each other. It turns out they were very close friends in college and fraternity brothers. Alan asks Hal what happened to the hundred dollars he loaned him to become a Hollywood actor. Hal recounts his screen test. He says it all went well until they told him he would have to have his teeth fixed to be on camera. He then tells Alan that after Hollywood, he saved money working on a Nevada ranch. However, he lost his money when two girls robbed him at gunpoint after a night of wild sexual encounters. Alan is excited and impressed by the stories, saying nothing like that ever happens to him. The two young men become more serious and talk about their former school days. Hal complains that the other fraternity brothers did not respect him because of his poor upbringing. He says Alan was the only person who treated him like a human being. Hal also tells Alan that his father, a drunk, has died and he has been left with nothing. He asks Alan for a job with Alan's father. Hal dreams of being an executive who wears a suit and tie to an office. Instead of an office job, Alan suggests a job working on a pipeline.

Rosemary comes out of the house wearing an expensive new outfit and hat. She brags that she does not have to ask anyone for money. Two other schoolteachers arrive to take Rosemary to a luncheon. Hal and Millie burst out of the house, pretending to fistfight. The women are shocked by his bare-chested appearance and Flo, who has snubbed Hal, is surprised to find out that he really is a friend of Alan's. Alan, embarrassed by Hal's lack of manners, tells him to put on his shirt. The teachers leave for their lunch and Mrs. Potts invites Hal to a picnic that is to be held later that day. Mrs. Potts wants Alan to be Millie's date. Millie and Hal race off, continuing their play. Flo, still bothered by Hal, asks Alan how Hal could have gotten into college. Alan explains that Hal had a football scholarship. While he was an outstanding athlete, he was not a good

student. Alan tells Flo that the other boys were hard on Hal, but that he thinks Hal is a very nice person and the best friend he ever had. Flo is worried that Hal will be a bad influence on Mille, but Alan says he will keep an eye on the pair.

Madge comes outside and Alan tells her his father is making him return to college. Madge comments on all of the girls that may attract Alan. He says he was never interested in college girls and that he hopes Madge truly cares for him. Hal returns and tells Alan he is worried that he will not know how to act around "nice women" at the picnic. The two joke about Hal's lack of social skills for a moment and then leave, telling Madge they will return to pick up the girls at five o'clock. Flo calls Madge back in the house. As she turns to go inside, she hears another train whistle in the distance. She stops and stands listening to the sound. The curtain closes.

Act 1 Analysis

The women in *Picnic* are filled with longing and regret over their position in life. Madge laments being only valued for her beauty. Millie, who is known for her sharp intelligence, is resentful that Madge gets attention for her good looks. The sibling rivalry keeps the sisters from being friends. Meanwhile, Flo feels despair over her poor choice of husband (who has since died) and wants her daughters to have the security her life lacks. She is determined to see Madge and Alan marry, even though Flo knows Madge does not love him. She places more importance on his family's wealth.

Their boarder, Rosemary, proclaims she does not need a man for security, but her declarations of independence seem hollow. Rosemary's statements of about enjoying her single life contradict how she will behave later in the play. She tries to paint a happy, fulfilled picture of her life; though in reality, she is lonely. The audience is given the impression she is trying not only to fool her friends, but also her self, about what she secretly desires. Rosemary also pretends to be shocked when Hal is working without a shirt, but she makes sure she gets a good look. Her outward disgust with Hal is an attempt to hide her attraction to the handsome young man and her grief at losing her own youth.

The distant train whistle symbolizes Madge and Millie's dreams for the future. However, their dreams are very different. Millie wants to jump on a train to pursue an independent, new life. She has learned not to rely on feminine charms. Millie wants to use her own wits to break out on her own. Madge, the more passive sister, hopes the train will bring someone to save her. She has learned that she is pretty, so there will be a man to provide for her. Millie takes action, while Madge plays by the rules, waiting for someone else to "discover" her abilities and sweep her away to a more exiting existence

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

It is late afternoon on the same day. Millie is by herself on the porch. She has put on a dress and looks attractive, but uncomfortable, in her finery. She is swaying to some music, when Madge comes outside. Madge is angry that Millie did not help her get ready for the picnic. Madge has had to spend the afternoon cooking and making sandwiches. Millie is not interested in Madge's complaints. She is anxious about her appearance. She asks Madge how she looks and Madge reassures her that she looks pretty. Millie is concerned about how to talk to boys. Madge tells her just to say whatever comes into her head. Millie has talked to Hal all day but is now nervous about making conversation with him on a "real date." Millie recounts the day to Madge. She says Hall has been bragging about his past adventures, including parachuting out of balloons and deep-sea diving. She also says that when Alan took them out for Cokes, some local girls were impressed by Hal's good looks

Flo appears and comments on her beautiful daughters. She tells Millie to go show Helen Potts how nice she looks. When Millie leaves, Flo confides to Madge that she is worried about Millie going to the picnic with Hal. She tells Madge to not allow any drinking when they go out.

Everyone continues to get ready for the big picnic. Rosemary's boyfriend, Howard, comes to the house. Flo continues to fret over Hal and Millie's date. She strongly disapproves of him. Hal and Alan return for the girls. Hal has borrowed Alan's clothes, and though he tries to be polite to the women, he is awkward and they are not impressed. Madge has not had a chance to get ready and she and goes inside to dress. As more picnic preparations are made, Hal, Millie, Rosemary and Howard are left on the porch waiting. Howard unveils some bootleg whiskey. He, Hal, and Rosemary all start to drink. Rosemary and Millie began to dance to a band they can hear in the distance. Hal joins the fun and starts dance with Millie. He is a good dancer and the group is impressed. Rosemary cannot keep her eyes off him. Madge returns looking more beautiful than ever in her new dress. She and Hal dance, and it quickly becomes obvious that they are enthralled with each other. Rosemary, angry that Howard will not dance, insists on dancing with Hal. She becomes aggressive, pushing her hips against his. Hal is very uncomfortable and repeatedly tries to get away. She insists and pulls him closer, while telling stories of her past lovers. Finally, Hal breaks away and Howard stops Rosemary from grabbing him once again. Millie, also upset by Hal and Madge's attraction, has been stealing drinks of the liquor. She becomes sick and runs inside. Rosemary, suddenly aware that Hal does not want her, becomes humiliated and lashes out at Hal. Flo comes out on the porch and demands to know who gave Millie alcohol. Howard tries to take responsibility, but Rosemary lies and blames Hal. She then goes into an ugly, spitting tirade, calling Hal names and telling him "the gutter's where you came from and the gutter's where you belong." Howard persists in trying to tell Flo the truth, but Rosemary's loud accusations drown him out.

Flo insists that Madge put on a different dress and leaves with Millie and Alan, saying Madge can catch a ride to the picnic with Rosemary and Howard. However, Rosemary, embarrassed and realizing she has acted terribly, refuses to go to the picnic and instead convinces Howard to take her for a drive. Madge and Hal are left alone. He is depressed because Rosemary's name-calling has opened up all of his insecurities about his background. He says Rosemary looked into him "like and x-ray." Madge, moved by the depth of his feelings, suddenly kisses him. Instead of going to the picnic, he carries her offstage. It is clear they are about to make love. The curtain closes.

Act 2 Analysis

In this scene, the sisters exchange their roles in the family. Now dressed up, Millie is pretty and suddenly out of her comfort zone. She knows she is smart, but longs to know that she is also feminine and attractive. Madge, always the pretty, passive daughter, takes control of her life for the first time.

Howard's alcohol sparks a scene that becomes the climax of *Picnic*. As the group on the porch begins to dance, true feelings are revealed. Everyone is having a good time until Madge comes out and begins to dance with Hal. Their love is painful obvious to the others. Rosemary, presumably drunk, finally shows just how desperate she is for a man by her lewd dancing with Hal. For Rosemary, Hal and Madge symbolize the youth and beauty she has lost and the passion she longs for. Meanwhile, Millie though previously scornful of Madge, also shows the depth of her jealously and insecurity by sneaking drinks of the alcohol and becoming drunk. The twirling, dancing bodies create tension that eventually explodes when Millie becomes sick. Rosemary can no longer contain her bitter jealously and humiliation. She lashes out at Hal, trying to make him hurt as she hurts.

Later, on the porch, Madge shows a hidden strength. No longer willing to let others control her future, she kisses Hal. She had waited for a man to save her. Now, by showing her true feelings, she saves Hal when he is at his most vulnerable.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

It is after midnight. Rosemary and Howard return home. He thanks her for a fun evening. It is clear they have made love. He then tries to leave, but she begs him to take her with him. He says "no." Rosemary falls apart, first demanding, then asking, and then pleading with Howard to marry her. Howard is reluctant but promises to come back in the morning. He leaves and she goes inside. Mad and Hal appear on the porch. She is sobbing and he is apologizing for their intimate encounter. Madge is upset that they let themselves get carried away by passion. When what is supposed to be a brief goodbye kiss turns again passionate, Madge pushes Hal away and says she never wants to see him again. Hal beats his fist into the ground in self-loathing and defeat.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

Rosemary continues to show the depth of her pain as she pleads with Howard to marry her. Although she creates a pathetic scene, at least she is being honest with her emotions for the first time. Howard previously liked her because she was fun and did not require him to offer a commitment. Suddenly, he must decide if can marry a woman he has never known.

Madge is confused by this dramatic turn of events. Although she is upset that she has made love to Hal, she acknowledges that she wanted it to happen. Madge now must deal with the aftermath of her bold actions.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

It is early the next morning. The Owens house is full of activity and drama. Rosemary is running around packing away her summer clothing, even thought it is the first day of school and she is supposed to be preparing to go to work. Two fellow teachers come by to get her just as Alan shows up. He is distraught over Madge not showing up at the picnic the previous night. Millie tells Alan she has always liked him. He is touched by her brave declaration, but he does not return her affection. Once again, Millie is lonely.

Howard also arrives on the scene, demanding to see Rosemary. He goes inside, saying he needs to speak to her. Madge comes outside and sees Alan. She apologizes for the previous night and he tells her it was not her fault. Alan says Hal is to blame but that he has "taken care of" Hal and she will not be seeing him again. He does not say what he has done to Hal.

Suddenly, before they can speak further, there is a buzz of activity as Millie, Rosemary's friends, Rosemary and Howard spill out of the house. Howard and Rosemary are getting married. She has already packed and is wearing a traveling suit. Howard seems confused by how fast Rosemary prepares to get married, but he goes along with it.

Madge is left standing alone of the porch as Alan helps carry Rosemary's bags to the car and the other women follow to wish them well. Hal appears wet and disheveled. He has been bleeding. He tells Madge that Alan's father has reported him to the police for stealing the family's car. He did not steal the car but he still has to leave town quickly. He is about to hop on a train to Tulsa. Flo and Alan return, surprised and angry to find Hal on the porch. Alan tries to fight Hal but quickly realizes he is no match for Hal's impressive strength. He sits down, dejected. Hal turns to Madge and apologizes for all of the trouble. She confesses her feelings for him and he asks her to leave with him. She hesitates, afraid to leave her life. Flo is outraged and tells Hal to get off her property and never come back. Hal quickly kisses Madge goodbye and rushes to jump on the train.

Madge goes into the house crying. Alan, knowing he has lost her, tells the family goodbye. Flo pleads with him to talk to Madge, but he knows it is too late. She loves Hal. Millie leaves for the first day of the new school year. Moments later, Madge appears with a cardboard suitcase. She tells her mother she is taking a bus to Tulsa to be with Hal. Flo begs her not to go and warns that Hal will make a poor husband. Madge tells Flo to apologize on her behalf to Millie for all of the fights they had and to tell Millie that she is proud to have such an intelligent younger sister. Madge walks away from her home, leaving her mother to watch from the gateway. The curtain closes.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

In this scene, Madge's transformation into an active rather than passive, woman is complete. She realizes her dream of leaving home, just not in the way she intended. She will now have a new life, thanks to the train. However, instead of being whisked away, she goes on her own, resolved to find her love. Flo realizes she cannot shield her daughter from love. It remains to be seen if going after Hal will be a mistake for Madge. However, either way, for the first time she will be creating her own consequences.

Characters

Howard Bevans

Howard is Rosemary's suitor. He is his forties and reluctant to marry. He brings a bottle of whisky to a gathering and this leads to several serious problems. Millie drinks and becomes ill. Hal drinks and engages in a sexual encounter with Madge. Rosemary and Howard also drink and this, too, leads to a sexual encounter. When Howard tries to take Rosemary back to the Owens' home early the following morning, she pleads with him to marry her. In spite of his reluctance, he agrees.

Bomber

Bomber is the teenage newsboy. His role is small, primarily to comment upon Madge's beauty and to leer at her.

Hal Carter

Hal is young and very handsome. He has no ties and frequently moves from town to town, changing jobs as he goes. While he qualifies as a drifter, his charm and good looks raise him above the typical transient. Hal has led a colorful life. He was a football hero in college and was promised a Hollywood movie career, but when that did not work out, he worked as a cowboy. Hitchhiking to Texas, he was picked up by two women and robbed. He is in town, hoping that his college buddy Alan and his father can get him a job.

Despite his past popularity, Hal reveals that he does not know how to act around socially refined young women and has not engaged in even the most typical of social functions; he has never been on a picnic. His childhood was spent in near-misses with the law, his father died from alcohol abuse, and he is estranged from his mother. Although he belonged to a fraternity in college, it was only his football heroism that paved the way for social acceptance. In reality, Hal is insecure, socially inept, and frightened that others will see through his bravado. When he has too much to drink, he seduces a willing Madge. Alan's father has him pursued on a trumped up charge of auto theft, and Hal must leave town. Before he goes, however, he stops to see Madge one final time. To Madge, the freewheeling Hal represents the opportunity for which she has been longing: a means out of the small town in which she has spent her entire life. She agrees to leave with him.

Irma Kronkite

Irma, is a teacher and a friend of Rosemary's. She has been to New York during the summer and returns in the fall to teach.

Mrs. Flo Owens

Mrs. Owens is a widow of about forty. She thinks that a marriage between wealthy Alan and her oldest girl, Madge, would improve the family's status and guarantee a better life for her daughter. Flo pushes Madge to encourage Alan, telling her daughter that youthful beauty will not last and another opportunity for marriage may not come her way. Flo is especially afraid that Madge will end up struggling and poor just as she did. She is nervous about Hal's intrusion into their lives, recognizing in him a threat to Madge's future with Alan. Although it is never stated, it is implied that when she was young, Flo succumbed to an inappropriate love affair. This explains her disapproval of Madge's involv ement with Hal.

Madge Owens

Flo's oldest daughter is eighteen and exceptionally beautiful. She works part-time as a store clerk but is sensitive about this occupation; she is hoping for better. But Madge also understands that it is her beauty that men admire and not her intelligence. Her mother, Flo, has trained Madge to cook and sew—attributes considered essential for a "good," domestic wife, and she is the daughter who stays home to cook, while the other young people go off to swim. The train whistle in the distance represents freedom for Madge, who wants to travel and experience life away from the small town in which she was born and raised. Her opportunity for escape occurs after a night spent with Hal. After he leaves, she realizes that she loves him, and although she also understands that he may amount to little in life, she wants to take the chance of being with him. The play ends when she leaves with her few belongings packed in a small suitcase.

Millie Owens

Millie is one of Flo's daughters. She is sixteen, shy but boisterous, and assertive in an effort to appear confident. She is not as attractive as Madge, but she is a better student. Millie is something of a tomboy, preferring sports and the company of boys to staying home and learning how to perform domestic chores. Millie wants to go to college, become a writer, and escape to a life in New York.

Helen Potts

Mrs. Potts is a widow, almost sixty years old. She and her mother share a house. She hires Hal to do some chores and in doing so, sets in motion the events that will change all their lives. Mrs. Potts's mother is demanding; it is clear that she has kept her daughter from ever having a real life with a man. The rumor is that after Helen married Mr. Potts, her mother had the marriage annulled. Helen kept his name just to remind her mother of those few hours of freedom. She encourages Hal because she is attracted to him and wants him to find the happiness in life that was denied her.

Christine Schoenwalder

Christine is a new teacher who has just moved to town. She socializes with Rosemary and Irma.

Alan Seymour

Alan is a wealthy young man and Madge's steady boyfriend. He and Hal are acquainted from their college days together. When Alan realizes that Hal is working next door, he is overjoyed to find his friend. Alan's father is sending him back to college, probably to get him away from Madge, who is from the wrong side of town. Alan loves Madge and turns on Hal when he realizes the two are attracted to one another. He leaves town after it becomes clear that Madge loves Hal.

Rosemary Sydney

Rosemary is a roomer in the Owens' household. She is an unmarried school teacher who assumes an attitude of indifference to what happens around her. She pretends to be uninterested in men, and she also implies that she is younger, although she is close to Flo's age. The reality is that Rosemary wants very badly to marry. After alcohol loosens her inhibitions, she has sex with Howard and then pleads with him to marry her.

Themes

Beauty

Beauty is important to the play, as it is the initial quality by which both Madge and Hal are judged, the same quality that Millie and Rosemary desire. Madge is afraid that her beauty is all that she has, and her fear is affirmed by her mother, whose lectures on *carpe diem,* seizing the day, reinforce the idea that she will be worth nothing once her beauty has faded. That a rich man desires her□Alan states that he is so overwhelmed by her beauty that he can scarcely believe that she notices him□only serves to convince Madge that she has no other attributes or at least any that are equal to her looks. Hal's beauty has always offered him a means to survive. He has used his attractiveness to help him succeed with women, and it is their mutual good-looks that first attract Madge and Hal to one another. In addition, Hal's appearance, along with his athletic prowess, has enabled people to overlook his social shortcomings. Millie is envious of her sister's beauty, but she also appears to realize that it is ultimately intellect, not superficial beauty, that will lead to success. Millie has set her sights on college and a career. For Rosemary, it is faded youth and beauty that are her greatest enemies. She is desperate to marry Howard before her last opportunity for marriage escapes.

Choices and Consequences span > p>

When Howard brings the bottle of whisky into the Owens' yard, he sets in motion a series of events that will change all the character's lives. Rosemary's drinking loosens her inhibitions enough that when she is rejected by Hal, she responds with a vehement attack on his insecurities and his fears. Although Rosemary's sexual encounter with Howard occurs offstage, it is implied that the alcohol led to her willingness to have sex with him. Her insistence that Howard pay the consequence, marriage, is a product of a long-standing realization that he may be her last chance to marry. If she wants marriage, Rosemary has no choice but to convince Howard to marry her; she seizes on the opportunity to use their sexual encounter as leverage in coercing Howard into marriage.

The choice that Hal and Madge make to have sex will also have unanticipated consequences. Hal's friendship with Alan will be destroyed; Madge will choose to leave her home; and her mother's dreams of a better life (elevated status by marrying into Alan's wealthy family) will be lost.

Freedom

The train whistle in the background represents freedom to Madge□when she hears it, she yearns to be on that train, heading to a new, exciting future. The small town offers no new opportunities for her. Madge is the prettiest girl in town, but no one will give her the chance to be anything else. It is not clear if she can be more than a small-town

beauty, but she wants to try. Hal, with his wanderings and exciting stories, represents freedom from such a repressive, small town life. Although she is eighteen years old, Madge needs Hal to stimulate her escape into another world. If she does not take this step, Madge might end up like Mrs. Potts□tied to lost dreams and her elderly mother.

Love and Passion

When Madge and Hal first see one another, there is an instant attraction. This passion contrasts with Madge's relationship with Alan, which seems to consist of hesitant, passionless kisses. The quickly ignited fire between Madge and Hal leaves little doubt that their passion will be consummated. It is only when Hal is forced to leave, however, that Madge is able to admit that what she feels for him is love.

Loneliness

Loneliness is an important theme for several characters in *Picnic*. All of the women are lonely in one way or another. Mrs. Potts and Flo Owens are lonely and filled with regret at missed opportunities. Both are alone, but Mrs. Potts appears as an especially sad victim of her mother's interference. She is described as a sixty-year-old woman who was married only briefly before her mother had the marriage annulled. It's not clear what happened to Flo's husband, but her biggest concern is in protecting her daughters, for whom Flo has been both father and mother for ten years. Millie feels isolated by her lack of beauty and the image of an older sister, whose beauty she cannot match. However, Madge is isolated by the very beauty that too many people envy but are afraid to touch. And finally, Rosemary is lonely. Although she has friends with whom she can spend time, Rosemary is lonely for the companionship of marriage and love. Hal's arrival amidst this group of lonely women provides the center for the drama that occurs.

Style

Act

An act is a major division in a drama. In Greek plays the sections of the drama were signified by the appearance of the chorus and were usually divided into five acts. This is the formula for most serious drama from the Greeks to the Romans and to Elizabethan playwrights like William Shakespeare. The five acts denote the structure of dramatic action. They are exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. The five act structure was followed until the nineteenth century when Henrik Ibsen combined some of the acts. *Picnic* is a three-act play. The exposition and complication are combined in the first act when the audience first learns of Madge and Hal's attraction. The climax occurs in the second act when Hal is verbally attacked by Rosemary and Madge is attracted by his vulnerability. This leads to their sexual encounter later that evening. Rosemary and Howard also have a sexual encounter, and these trysts provide the falling action. The catastrophe occurs in the third act when their deception is revealed to Alan and when Madge realizes that she loves Hal and chooses to run away with him.

Scene

Scenes are subdivisions of an act. A scene may change when all of the main characters either enter or exit the stage. But a change of scene may also indicate a change of time. In *Picnic,* the second scene of Act II occurs later on the same day, and thus, indicates the passage of time in the play.

Character

A person in a dramatic work. The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individu-al's morality. Characters can range from simple, stereotypical figures (the jock, the damsel in distress, the fool) to more complex multi-faceted ones. "Characterization" is the process of creating a lifelike person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who he will be and how he will behave in a given situation. For instance, in the beginning of the play, Madge answers her mother's questions about Alan in a manner that hints that her attraction for him is not as intense as her mother hopes. With the introduction of Hal, Madge begins to realize that what she feels for Hal is love. All the passion that was missing from her relationship with Alan is present with Hal.

Drama

A drama is often defined as any work designed to be presented on the stage. It consists of a story, of actors portraying characters, and of action. But historically, drama can also consist of tragedy, comedy, religious pageant, and spectacle. In modern usage, the term drama is also used to describe a type of play (or film) that explores serious topics and themes yet does not achieve the same level as tragedy.

Plot

This term refers to the pattern of events in a play or story. Generally plots should have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also be a series of episodes that are thematically connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. Thus the plot of *Picnic* is the story of how a drifter passing through town changed the lives of five lonely women. But the themes are those of loneliness, lost opportunities, and passion.

Setting

The time, place, and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The location for Inge's play is the porch and yard of two homes in a midwestern city. The action occurs over a period of twenty-four hours.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of one object to replace another. Symbolism has been an important force in literature for most of the twentieth century. The symbol is an object or image that implies a reality beyond its original meaning. This is different from a metaphor, which summons forth an object in order to describe an idea or a quality; the motorcycle that Hal refers to is a metaphor for freedom, representing the means to travel and explore new places. Hal is a symbol of sexual opportunity and the latent sexual desire that several of the women feel but do not recognize. He is also a symbol of freedom to Madge.

Historical Context

When *Picnic* debuted in February of 1953, the United States was still embroiled in the Korean Conflict half a world away. Josef Stalin, having ruled the Soviet Union, since 1928, was nearing the end of his life, but communism appeared stronger than ever and seemed ready to expand into many of the world's developing nations. There were rumblings in Vietnam, then a French colony, and requests by the French for American assistance in maintaining order marked the beginning of America's long involvement with that Asian nation.

In the United States, fears of spreading communism and apprehensions regarding atomic weapons (the first such devices were used eight years earlier on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan) lead to the persecution of many people from suspected spies to common citizens with only the most tenuous of ties to communist politics. Feeding on the public's communist paranoia, Senator Joseph McCarthy and his House Committee on Un-American Activities were able to ruin the lives of many people suspected of having communist sympathies. While on the surface, television and film tried to maintain the illusion of quiet perfection in America, political unrest was beginning to make itself felt. Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible* used the Salem Witch Trials to demonstrate the parallels between the hysteria of that seventeenth century persecution of innocent women and the McCarthy hearings into communism that cost many people their careers and families.

While horrifying, Miller's play could not capture the reality of the paranoia, tension, and fear that swept across America during this period. In 1953, Hollywood stars such as Charlie Chaplin were banned from entering the United States, based on their politics. The U.S. government also convicted spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were tried for giving plans for the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. They awaited execution in 1953.

In America's small towns, this political unrest seemed a long distance away, at least on the surface. But it revealed itself in the growing unrest among young men and women, who, moved by a growing dissatisfaction with small town life, began to search for the happiness and promise of the American Dream. While music from the opening years of the 1950s is barely distinguishable from that of the late-1940s, within a year of two, rock' n roll would prove to be a social catalyst, turning the dissatisfaction and unrest of youth into a motivated, focused force. Parents in the 1950s blamed personalities such as Elvis Presley and James Dean for their children's rejection of traditional values, but it was really a culmination of political and social events that led young adults, such as Madge Owens and Hal Carter, to look to the open road and large urban areas for excitement. Even a fifteen-year-old, like Millie, is already planning ahead to the day when she can leave for the big city and a more exciting life. This burgeoning sense of wanderlust and thirst for new experiences would pave the way for one of America's most experimental and significant decades, the 1960s.

Picnic begins with Millie sneaking outside to smoke. The 1950s was notable as a decade in which the earliest warnings about the dangers of smoking surfaced. One of the first messages to reach the public was a *Reader's Digest* article, "Cancer by the Carton," which warned about the risks of smoking. Cigarette manufacturers responded with the introduction of filter cigarettes, which they promised would reduce many of the risk factors. Now, after forty-five years of health warnings, the audience of 1998 would view Millie's opening cigarette very differently from the 1953 audience. During World War II, smoking was so acceptable that cigarettes were airlifted to the troops, even behind enemy lines. Cigarettes were also included in the food packets (c-rations) that were provided to each soldier in Korea. But in those cases, cigarettes were intended for men; women smoked, but there was still an element of disrepute attached to young women smoking. That would soon change. Although women had always smoked less frequently than men, Hollywood films showing glamorous stars smoking had helped to change the idea of smoking into a more respectable image for women. Thus, Millie, who begins each day with a cigarette, reaffirms the message sent by Hollywood films, but she also signals the change toward a greater acceptability for young women smoking.

Critical Overview

Picnic was very popular with theatre critics when it debuted in 1953, with special notice given to the theme of ordinary people living ordinary lives in small town America. Brooks Atkinson, writing for the *New York Times,* observed that "Inge has made a rich and fundamental play" from these "commonplace people." Atkinson found the female characters particularly well drawn and praised the way that Hal effortlessly brings all the women to life. Calling *Picnic* an "original, honest play with an awareness of people," Atkinson, also noted that while most of the characters may not demonstrate an awareness of what they are doing, "Mr. Inge does, for he is an artist."

In a review for *New York Journal American,* John McClain stated that Inge's characters "are easily recognizable from anybody's youth, and if the author has not chosen to bring them to grips with any problems of cosmic importance, he can certainly be credited with making them powerfully human." Although McClain argued that *Picnic* lacks the depth of Inge's earlier work he did note that "it succeeds wonderfully well in bringing a small theme to a high level."

An even more glowing review appeared in the *New York Post.* Richard Watts, Jr. singled out the work of Inge's director, Joshua Logan, for special praise, referring to *Picnic* as "excellently acted and sympathetically staged by Mr. Logan." Watts's greatest praise, however, was reserved for Inge, who he said, "revealed the power, insight, compassion, observation and gift for looking into the human heart that we all expected of him." Watt argued that Inge's writing has "great emotional impact" and that it is Inge's "capacity for looking into the human heart" that gives *Picnic* its major claim to distinction. As did so many other reviewers, Watt also focused on the characters, especially the women, who he said are "depicted with enormous understanding and compassion, so that they are not only striking as theatrical characters but moving and genuine as human beings." Watts argued that there is no "figure in the play that Mr. Inge doesn't seem to understand and see into." Concluding that Inge "is a dramatist who knows how to set down how people behave and think and talk," Watts stated that the playwright is "able to write dramatic scenes that have vitality, emotional power and heartbreak. There is a true sense of the sadness and wonder of life in this new dramatist."

A few critics focused on the comedy of *Picnic* in their reviews. John Chapman's review, which ran in the *Daily News,* called Inge's play "an absorbing comedy of sex as sex is admired and practiced in a small town somewhere in Kansas." Although, Chapman found the romance between Hal and Madge "pitiful" and "shabby," he did find that "Inge has created his characters so well and they are so persuasively acted that they become fascinating." This occurs because "Inge looks upon them all with understanding, humor and affection." The *Daily Mirror*'s Robert Coleman, agreed, calling *Picnic,* a "stirring, hilarious click." Coleman, citing Inge's "admirable skill," declared that "it is amazing how well rounded and real all the people are in his play."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D. specializing in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico. In this essay, she discusses the manner in which Inge's play forecasted future trends in sexuality, particularly with regard to women in the entertainment world.

At the end of *Picnic,* Madge packs her bags and leaves town to follow Hal. But this was not the ending that Inge originally envisioned when he wrote the play. The playwright's initial view of love was much darker and not so easily reconciled, and he left Madge to continue much as she had before Hal's arrival□minus the security of her relationship with Alan. The 1953 stage director, Joshua Logan, wanted, and received, a happier ending, but Inge's original conclusion reappeared in a rewrite of *Picnic,* published in 1962 as *Summer Brave*. Inge's desire to portray young love as sexually charged and rebellious revealed an America hidden behind the perfect world so often depicted in 1950s entertainment, a world that would further reveal itself in the films, music, and plays of the coming decades.

While ignoring the realities of the Cold War, the Korean Conflict, and other prevalent threats of the era, television and film generally tried to convey American life as romantic, carefree, and lightheart-ed, subscribing to an unwritten code of conduct. As depicted on Broadway in the 1950s, *Picnic* suitably reflected those ideals. When Madge leaves for a life with Hal, she bolsters the idea that sexuality, though wrong in a premarital situation, is a prelude to marriage. The ending that Inge initially envisioned, however, more accurately reflected the America of the late-1960s, a country where women did not always fulfill society's expectations of proper behavior. In *Summer Brave,* Inge implies that Madge is no worse for having spent a night with Hal, and that her experience does not lead to promiscuity or a lower station in life. But in the early-1950s, single women who engaged in sex were expected to marry their lover or face a life of social damnation.

Inge first challenged this restrictive social edict three years earlier in *Come Back, Little Sheba.* In that play, the character Marie uses a boy named Turk solely as a sexual partner, a plaything, one whom she has no interest in marrying. Turk does not represent Marie's future, but he is an interesting diversion while she waits for the marriage with the man she truly desires. In this instance, sex is divorced from both love and marriage. The idea that sex might not lead naturally to marriage resurfaces in the original *Picnic,* when Madge chooses to remain behind after Hal leaves. Had director Logan left that last act intact, the audience would have seen two very different endings evolve from similar experiences. Instead, the conventions of sexuality and marriage are maintained for both couples; Rosemary and Howard will marry and an eventual union is implied for Hal and Madge.

Inge uses Rosemary's story to provide the conventional ending in *Picnic,* the one expected by a 1950s audience. After she and Howard engage in drunken sex, Rosemary insists that Howard do the honorable thing and marry her. Her entrapment of the reluctant suitor provides much of the comedy in the play. With that couple's romantic

plot, Inge is using the comedic formula adapted by William Shakespeare in so many of his comedies, when, after a suggestion of sexual misconduct, the woman and man are wed in the play's happy conclusion. Rosemary and Howard are unconventional lovers, both older and yet both naively expecting a different outcome from their tryst: Rosemary expects a more romantic Howard, one who wants to marry her while Howard expects that nothing has changed and that Rosemary will simply continue dating him. Instead, Rosemary seizes upon Howard as the only opportunity she will have for marriage.

R. Baird Shuman stated in *William Inge* that Rosemary reaches out "pitifully toward Howard, not because she really loves him, but because she fears she will continue to live her life 'till I'm ready for the grave and don't have anyone to take me there.'" Howard underestimates Rosemary's desperation for marriage and the fact that he is her sole marital target. While funny, this element of comedy is also tragic, in that it reveals all of Rosemary's insecurities and fears and makes clear the stereotype that she represents: the spinster schoolteacher, too unattractive to marry and resigned to a lifetime of devotion to her students. Their romance contrasts with the Madge/Hal relationship, which deviated from the expected in Inge's original ending. When the playwright changed the ending to fit Logan's vision, he not only reaffirmed traditional expectations of conventional comedic theatre but also rendered Picnic as a non-threatening social commentary.

Jane Courant argued in *Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present* that these romances represent much more than "faithful renderings of cliches of culture, language, and behavior during a period characterized by extreme social conformity." She reminded readers that Inge's plays almost predicts the changes that would come in film and music in the next few years. The advent of films depicting freedom-craving bad boys like Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Peter Fonda seems to echo Hal's observations about his theft of a motorcycle. Hal stole the motorcycle because he "wanted to get on the damn thing and go so far away, so fast, that no one'd ever catch up with me." The motorcycle is a symbol of freedom, a means for escape, rebellion, and adventure□all things that Hal needs to survive. These are the same elements that motivate the film rebels of Brando's *The Wild One* (1954), Dean's *Rebel without A Cause* (1955), and Fonda's *Easy Rider* (1969). Just as importantly, they are the same needs that appeal to Madge, who finds Hal's story romantically exciting. When she says, "I think□ lots of boys feel that way at times," she is also silently adding□and girls, too.

The sexuality of music and dance that Inge incorporates into Act II establishes the mood for the sexual encounters that follow. When Hal begins to dance with Madge, the act is seductive, as Inge intended it to be. His stage directions refer to their dance as a "primitive rite that would mate the two young people." Inge is confirming that music and dance can serve as a prelude to physical love, planting the seed of fear that would flower in many parents' suspicions of teenagers and rock and roll. Courant wrote that a year after *Picnic* opened in 1953, the first volley of rock and roll songs, by such artists as Bill Haley and the Comets, would shake the world of popular music; Elvis Presley's subsequent arrival would herald a new era of sexuality in music. Hal's appropriation of music and dance as foreplay is a prologue to the pattern that would be established in the "teenybopper" films of such entertainers as Presley, Frankie Avalon, and Annette

Funicello. In these films, young people were brought together through music and dance, and while these movies are chaste in comparison to the explicit films of later decades, the implication of sex was very clear. Inge used Madge and Hal to establish a picture of youthful love and sexuality that was just on the horizon.

In an interview that he gave to writer Walter Wager in *The Playwrights Speak,* Inge said that he was not a social activist and that he thought very little in political terms. Yet later, in the same interview, he stated that he saw a new generation of American youth "challenging the cliches of the established culture ... [and] creating cliches of their own." It is this questioning of convention that Inge tries to capture in his play. Madge rejects the image of beauty that encapsulates her life. She wants to be noticed and admired for qualities that have nothing to do with her appearance. She also wants more than the American Dream marriage ideal that her mother envisions in a union with Alan. She recognizes her intellectual limitations and laments her future as a clerk; it is her jealousy of Millie's academic achievements that creates much of the sisterly conflict in the play. But while Madge may be less intellectual than her younger sister, she is pragmatic. At the play's ending, when Madge is challenged by her mother, Madge tells her that she does not believe that loving Hal will provide all the answers. She acknowledges Hal's poor record with women and his lack of economic prospects.

Madge's awareness of the love's limitations contradicts critic Gerald Weales's appraisal of *Picnic* in *American Drama since World War II.* Weales argued that "the prevailing message of the play is that love is a solution to all social, economic, and psychological problems." Certainly this is not true of the original ending that Inge intended for his play, but even the sanitized Broadway version permits Madge to raise doubts about her future, serving up a cynical view of love and its power to solve problems. When Flo tells Madge that Hal "will never be able to support you ... he'll spend all his money on booze. After a while there'll be other women," Madge replies, "I've thought of all those things." Isolated in this last scene, these words indicate that Madge is rejecting reality in favor of romance, but that perception ignores Madge's earlier expressions, her stated desire to leave town and find freedom. It ignores her longing glances toward the train and her fear that all the town has to offer is a lifetime of clerking in a small store. This information makes Madge's decision to follow Hal far more plausible. To her, Hal represents the best opportunity for escape from the nothingness of small town life, from an existence based solely on beauty. At the beginning of the play, Madge is, indeed, "marking time," as Ima Honaker Herron noted in the *Southwest Review,* she is waiting for something better to come along. By the end of the third act, she has found that something. In leaving she is taking a chance, but she is also hoping to insure that she will not end up one of the lonely, aimless women of this small Kansas town. She has escaped.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

*In this review of a 1994 revival of*Picnic, *Simon finds that several decades have not diminished the theatrical power of Inge's 1953 play. The critic praises the work for both its sharply drawn characters and its tangible sense of place, which he feels delivers "a sense of something pent-up longing to break out."*

When is a classic born? When a once highly successful commercial play, revived several decades later, is found to be speaking just as strongly to the time of its revival. At that point you exclaim, "Damn it, this is art, after all!" That has now happened to *Picnic,* thanks to the Roundabout Theatre revival, and one only wishes that the playwright, William Inge, a lonely suicide in 1973 who would have turned 81 this year, could have lived to see it.

Picnic (1953), Inge's second hit after *Come Back, Little Sheba,* ran for two years in sold-out houses, but the one person it never made happy was its author. Inge had originally written a much bleaker play, *Front Porch,* which Joshua Logan helped him rewrite less hopelessly as *Picnic,* and which he later rewrote again, gloomily and unsuccessfully, as *Summer Brave*. What Logan correctly perceived is that a happy ending need not be sappy. When the beautiful but very ordinary Madge leaves her rich boyfriend Alan to run after the handsome, likable, but shiftless Hal, a romantic yearning in the audience is satisfied. But whether the resultant union will be a fulfillment or a fiasco is anybody's guess. Similarly, when the homely schoolteacher Rosemary begs, bullies, and wheedles the bibulous shopkeeper Howard into converting their affair into a marriage, there is no sense of triumph in it. Over all hangs the shadow of Flo, whose husband died young, and who had to raise Madge and her younger sister, Millie, a tomboy with artistic leanings, all by her weary, lonesome self.

Hal, a college chum of Alan's, dropped out and became a drifter. He returns to their Kansas town in the hope of employment, which Alan warmly offers him. In the end, he doesn't take the job but gets Madge, Alan's girl, leaving his would-be benefactor shaken. Ditto Flo, who so wanted her pretty daughter to marry up, not down. Hal also brings early sorrow to Millie, who forsook her tomboyish ways and put on a dress for a date with him for the Labor Day picnic. That eponymous bucolic romp, which we never actually see, also eludes the hero and heroine, who find a fiercer, less innocent, joy. A happy ending? Sort of, but with shadows lurking all around.

Scott Ellis, who directed, has made small, helpful changes in the text, mostly cutting out the "Baby"s that Hal keeps hurling at Madge. He also set the action in the thirties to achieve a sense of distance. And he has done wonders with train whistles that weave their siren calls around these hinterland-locked characters. He has called on his (and our) favorite choreographer, Susan Stroman, to devise the crucial dance in which Hal and Madge first make contact. And he has eliminated the two act breaks, thus allowing the hot, clotted atmosphere of Indian summer to hold uninterrupted sway. From Louis Rosen, he got the right, ingenuous music.

Ashley Judd is not so beautiful a Madge as was Janice Rule ("Pre-Raphaelite," Logan called her), yet she gives a slow-building, implication-laden, almost too intelligent performance that prevails. Kyle Chandler does not have the animal magnetism of Ralph Meeker's 1953 Hal but brings to the role a sinewy, idiosyncratic presence that gradually scores. Polly Holliday is a touchingly oversolicitous Flo, and Debra Monk a rendingly desperate Rosemary, while Larry Bryggman makes Howard into a splendidly tragicomic figure. The others all contribute handsomely, but none more so than Tony Walton's spot-on scenery, William Ivey Long's canny costuming, or Peter Kaczorowski's lyrical lighting. The true protagonist, though, is the atmosphere: a sense of something pent-up longing to break out. Some escape, others resign themselves; hard to tell the winners from the losers.

Source: John Simon, "Hairy Fairy Tale" in *New York,* Vol. 27, no. 18, May 2, 1994.

Critical Essay #3

Hayes reviews the original 1953 production of Inge's play, labeling it a powerful work of drama. The critic praises the playwright's fictional world, finding it to have "more energy and vitality than that of any American dramatist of his generation."

It is the supreme distinction of Mr. William Inge's world to exist solidly, as an imaginative fact, with more energy and vitality than that of any American dramatist of his generation. Neither deliquescent, as is that of Tennessee Williams, nor shaped by Arthur Miller's blunt polemic rage, it is a world existing solely by virtue of its perceived manners□a perception which, as Mr. Lionel Trilling observed in another connection, is really only a function of love. The poetry, in Mr. Inge's plays, is all in the pity; he gives us the hard naturalistic surface, but with a kind of interior incandescence. What Elizabeth Bowen said of Lawrence defines Mr. Inge also: in his art, every bush burns.

At the center of *"Picnic"* is a sexual situation, common and gross, but orchestrated by the playwright with a subtlety of detail and a breadth of reference dazzling in their sensibility; the form, then, is that of a theme with variations. Into a community of women□widowed, single, adolescent, virgin□comes an aggressively virile young man. What the play studies, in all its disturbing ramifications, is exclusively his sexual impact on them: the initial movements of distaste and scorn, then a kind of musky stirring of memory and desire, followed by passion and willful hatred, subsiding in quiescence and resignation. It is a graph of emotion most beautifully and skillfully described, issuing in the simple wisdom of Mr. Inge's old spectator who, after this savage eruption of "life," can still see that "he was a man, and I was a woman, and it was good."

I have done the fine articulation of Mr. Inge's play the injustice of paraphrase. But nothing in *"Picnic"* lacks the sting of truth. All of its observation springs from some point of hard personal knowledge, some perception to which Mr. Inge has come by pain. His characters are small, but genuine in their pathos, most moving in their naked impotence before life. The script has, moreover, the benefit of a remarkable production, somewhat coarsened perhaps by Joshua Logan's strident direction, but otherwise limpid, sensual, grateful to the eye and ear.

Its second act concludes with a sustained, complex scene that is among the more notable achievements of the American theatre. It is a kind of ritual dance, involving the boy and girl only as sexual objects, but merciless in its exposure of the skein of envy, desire and psychic desolation which surround them.

Having committed myself to this degree, I feel ungrateful at expressing some fears as to the limitation of Mr. Inge's talent. He seems to me, at this juncture, an artist whose sensibility still exceeds the dispositions of his intellect□that is, his power to order and clarify experience is inadequate to his imaginative apprehension of it. Mr. Inge's "detachment," of which we hear so much, may be estheti-cally desirable, but I suspect a deeper search might reveal it as the characteristic attitude of a mind stunned, numbed by life. How else account for the curious inertia of Mr. Inge's plays, their lack of moral

reverberation, their acquiescence in disaster? I offer these observations not as a reproach, but only as points of departure for an inquiry into the mysterious blemishes which mar this most remarkable American talent.

Critical Essay #4

One of the most respected critics of drama, Clurman reviews the 1953 production of Inge's play. He finds the acting and staging to be substandard, failing to do justice to the playwright's written text.

The young girl in William Inge's new play, *"Picnic"*: (Music Box Theater), like Shaw's "ingenue," is waiting for something to happen. But the environment of the American play□specifically Kansas□ is a place where nothing can happen to anybody. The women are all frustrated by fearful, jerky men; the men are ignorant, without objective, ideals, or direction□except for their spasmodic sexual impulses. There is no broad horizon for anyone, and a suppressed yammer of desire emanates from every stick and stone of this dry cosmos, in which the futile people burn to cinders.

If you read my description and then see the play you will be either vastly relieved or shockingly disappointed. For though what I have said may still be implicit in the words, it is hardly present on the stage. I happen to have read the playscript before it was put into rehearsal, and I saw in it a laconic delineation of a milieu seen with humor and an intelligent sympathy that was not far from compassion. What is on the stage now is a rather coarse boy-and-girl story with a leeringly sentimental emphasis on naked limbs and "well-stacked" females. It is as if a good Sherwood Anderson novel were skilfully converted into a prurient popular magazine story on its way to screen adaptation.

In this vein the play is extremely well done. It is certainly effective. Joshua Logan, who is a crackerjack craftsman, has done a meticulous, shrewd, thoroughly knowledgeable job of staging. He has made sharply explicit everything which the audience already understands and is sure to enjoy in the "sexy" plot, and has fobbed off everything less obvious to which the audience ought to be made sensitive.

All pain has been removed from the proceedings. The boy in the script who was a rather pathetic, confused, morbidly explosive and bitter character is now a big goof of a he-man whom the audience can laugh at or lust after. The adolescent sister who was a kind of embryo artist waiting to be born has become a comic grotesque who talks as if she suffered from a hare-lip; the drained and repressed mother is presented as a sweet hen almost indistinguishable from her chicks; the tense school teacher bursting with unused vitality is foreshortened as a character and serves chiefly as a utility figure to push the plot. Even the setting, which□for the purposes of the theme□might have suggested the dreary sunniness of the Midwestern flatlands, has been given a romantically golden glow and made almost tropically inviting.

Having seen the play with this bifocal vision□ script and production□I cannot be sure exactly what the audience gets from the combination. Lyric realism in the sound 1920 tradition of the prairie novelists is being offered here as the best Broadway corn. In the attempt to make the author's particular kind of sensibility thoroughly acceptable, the play has been vulgarized.

The cast is good□Kim Stanley is particularly talented, though I disliked the characterization imposed on her□and it follows the director with devoted fidelity. There is a new leading lady, Janice Rule, who besides having a lovely voice is unquestionably the most beautiful young woman on our stage today.

Here at any rate is a solid success. But I am not sure whether the author should get down on his knees to thank the director for having made it one or punch him in the nose for having altered the play's values. It is a question of taste.

Adaptations

Picnic was adapted to film in 1955. The film, starring William Holden as Hal, Kim Novak as Madge, and Cliff Robertson as Alan, was very successful, winning two academy awards for art direction and editing; it also won a Golden Globe for the director, Joshua Logan.

Topics for Further Study

Research the economic future of small town America in the period immediately after World War II. Consider the importance of agriculture, as well as job opportunities for young men and women. Why do so many of the young people in *Picnic* seek to escape?

Explore the overt sexuality of *Picnic* and Inge's 1949 play *Come Back, Little Sheba.* Compare and contrast how this topic is handled in each play.

Compare Madge and Millie. In their common desire to escape, they appear very alike, and yet, each seems to have different plans for their respective futures. Discuss their similarities and differences and argue for each young woman's chances for success in achieving their goals.

Research the role of alcohol in Inge's plays. Consider its function as a catalyst for change. Is alcohol portrayed positively or negatively in these works?

Compare and Contrast

1953: The article "Cancer by the Carton" is published in *Reader's Digest.* It warns the public of the health hazards of smoking cigarettes.

Today: Evidence surfaces that tobacco companies have known for many years about both the health risks and addictive nature of cigarettes. Many states sue tobacco manufacturers for heath care costs incurred in treating sick smokers. A settlement that will reach into the billions of dollars is reached.

1953: *Playboy* magazine begins publication with a nude photograph of Marilyn Monroe. Conservative groups are shocked by this wanton display and predict the end of traditional American values.

Today: Nudity and sex are no longer topics that generate much controversy. Magazines, such as *Playboy* have been eclipsed by nudity in film and on the internet. Many conservatives still contend that the quality of American life has been reduced by such open displays of sexuality.

1953: On January 22, *The Crucible* opens at New York's Martin Beck Theatre. The play's historical witch hunt parallels the persecution of innocent people by the McCarthy Hearings in the senate.

Today: Many refer to independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr's investigation of President Clinton as a "witch Hunt," a reference to both Miller's play and the McCarthy Hearings of the 1950s.

1953: Drought plagues much of the Midwest. Parts of thirteen states are declared disaster areas.

Today: The summer and fall of 1998 have seen several extremes of weather, from flooding and tornadoes to hurricanes. Damage to crops, livestock, property, and citizens of small towns reaches record highs.

1953: Frozen TV dinners are introduced by C. A. Swanson & Son. They sell for ninety-eight cents and prove to be extremely popular among people who don't have time to prepare a meal.

Today: American lifestyles have become more frenetic and busy; many still embrace frozen meals for their convenience. They prove to be particularly popular with single people.

What Do I Read Next?

Andrew Marvell' s "To His Coy Mistress," published in 1681, is an early poem that argues that time is fleeting and that young lovers should seize the opportunity to be happy together, especially with respect to sexual intimacy; and "To the Virgins to Make Much of Time," a short poem written by Robert Herrick in 1648, that warns young women to marry quickly rather than wait for the perfect mate

Splendor in the Grass is a film written by Inge. Released in 1961, the film focuses on the love affair between a young teenage couple who cannot deal well with the sexual pressure and family interference that beset them.

Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy,* published in 1925, explores the tragedy of young love when social status and economic gain push a young man to commit a horrible crime.

Bus Stop, written by Inge in 1955, is considered by many to be the playwright's finest comedy. In the play the young lovers' theme takes on a new twist when a naive young man attempts to force a reluctant young woman to be his wife.

Further Study

Leeson, Richard M. *William Inge: A Research and Production Sourcebook,* Greenwood, 1994.

This is a thorough critical overview of Inge's plays with information about reviews and critical studies.

McClure, Arthur F. Memories of Splendor: The Midwestern World of William Inge,Kansas State Historical Society, 1989. This book contains production information and photographs of Inge and his work.

Shuman, R. Baird. *William Inge,* Twayne, 1996.

This book is primarily a biography of Inge. It also contains a detailed discussion of each of his works.

Voss, Ralph F. *A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph,* University of Kansas Press, 1989. This is a critical biography of Inge's life.

Wager, Walter. "William Inge" in *The Playwrights Speak*,Delacorte, 1967.

Wagner presents interviews with several contemporary playwrights. This book presents an opportunity to "hear" each writer express his or her thoughts about the art of writing.

Bibliography

Atkinson, Brooks. Review of *Picnic* in the *New York Times,* February 20, 1953.

Chapman, John. Review of *Picnic* in the *Daily News,* February 20, 1953.

Coleman, Robert. Review of *Picnic* in the *Daily Mirror,* February 20, 1953.

Courant, Jane. "Social and Cultural Prophecy in the Works of William Inge" in *Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present*, Volume 6, no. 2, 1991, pp. 135-51.

Hawkins, William. Review of *Picnic* in the *New York World-Telegram* and the *Sun,* February 20, 1953.

Herron, Ima Honaker. "Our Vanishing Towns: Modern Broadway Versions" in the *Southwest Review,* Volume LI, no. 3, Summer, 1966, pp. 209-20.

Kerr, Walter F. Review of *Picnic* in the M*New York Herald Tribune,* February 20, 1953.

McClain, John. Review of *Picnic* in the *New York Journal American,* February 20, 1953.

Watts, Richard, Jr. Review of *Picnic* in the *New York Post,* February 20, 1953.

Weales, Gerald. "The New Pineros" in *American Drama since World War II,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962, pp. 40-56.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

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

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

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 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.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama 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 DfS 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.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama 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 DfS, 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 Drama 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 DfS, 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 Drama 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, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535