

Sexual Perversity in Chicago and the Duck Variations: Two Plays Study Guide

Sexual Perversity in Chicago and the Duck Variations: Two Plays by David Mamet

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Plot Summary

"Sexual Perversity in Chicago" and "The Duck Variations" are two plays written by iconic playwright David Mamet.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago takes place on the north side of Chicago. The duration of the play is nine weeks during one summer.

The play contains only six characters, four main characters and two that are only mentioned in passing. The four main characters are Bernard Litko, Danny Shapiro, Joan Webber and Deborah Soloman. The two men are friends and colleagues, the women are roommates.

Bernard Litko is a young man who obviously has much less experience than he claims. Litko perceives himself to be a ladies' man with an incredible amount of wisdom. Litko is always preaching to Shapiro about how to handle women. Litko also likes to brag about his sexual prowess.

Shapiro works in the same office with Litko. It is never actually stated where the men work or what they do, aside from filing various tax forms.

Shapiro is a regular guy, wanting sex but is somewhat unsure. Shapiro always listens to Litko but does not always take his friend's advice. Litko sees Shapiro as being naïve.

Deborah Soloman seems to be relatively steady person. On the whole, Deborah, an illustrator, is a relatively friendly woman with an openness that is not shared by Joan or Litko.

Joan Webber is a bitter and hostile woman. Joan puts herself out there and then shoots down everything that comes her way. Joan is critical of Deborah and downright hostile to everyone else, even Shapiro. It is unclear why Joan is so bitter. The reader is left to believe that Joan is buried deeply in emotional distress and uses ridicule and insult as a defense mechanism. This can be seen clearly in the midst of Joan's existential crisis.

There is little action in the play. The characters talk about sex, particularly the men. Litko always has some story or reference to some aspect of sexual perversity. There is not a lot of actual sex in the play. In fact there is almost none.

The plot can easily be boiled down to this: Deborah and Shapiro meet and fall into bed. The couple moves too fast and it ends badly. Joan is simply hostile to everyone all the time. Litko is against the relationship and is continually trying to get Shapiro to wise up.

The second play is titled "The Duck Variations." A short forward from David Mamet tells the reader that "The Duck Variations" is a simple play. The only scene is a park with a park bench.



George and Emil are long-time friends who spend their days together at the local park. Although the men are in their sixties, they act older. Each man takes a turn playing it straight to the other's comedy. Their lengthy friendship is obvious by the way they talk to one another. Both are fascinated by ducks and use every aspect of a duck's life to wax philosophic. No topic is taboo.

George is a bit more fanciful than Emil. George is the type to make himself believe something is true, no matter how absurd.

There are some times when the men truly disagree, but those potential arguments are quickly pushed aside in favor of a new topic that will surely be related to the ducks in some way.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Acts 1-15

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Acts 1-15 Summary

Sexual Perversity in Chicago takes place on the north side of Chicago. The duration of the play is nine weeks during one summer.

Act 1 finds Danny Shapiro and Bernard Litko sitting at a bar. Shapiro is asking Litko about a liaison he had the previous evening. Litko brags about the physical endowments of the woman he met and both men question if she could have been a pro. Litko is obsessed with the woman's breasts. Although the woman's age is questionable, Litko assures his friend that she was at least eighteen and perhaps as old as twenty-five. Shapiro is overly concerned about the woman being of legal age.

The two men ask each other a lot of repetitive questions. Litko quizzes Shapiro about where the event might have taken place. Litko eventually reveals that he met the woman in a pancake house when she approached the counter to buy a pack of Viceroy's. The woman realizes that she forgot her purse upstairs in her hotel room. Litko offers pay for the cigarettes, and in return the woman invites him to have a cup of coffee. Before long, the woman invites Litko up to her hotel room with the pretense of repaying him for the cigarettes.

Shapiro interrupts frequently to express disbelief and ask questions about the girl's age and whether she was a professional call girl.

Litko says that the woman just got into town and wants to know how she could make a little extra money. Then the woman invites Litko to take a shower with her. Litko eagerly accepts and continues to repeat to Shapiro statistics about the woman's amazing physical attributes.

As the couple is getting out of the shower, Litko playfully snaps the woman's bottom with a towel. Litko learns that the woman likes pain. Litko throws a clock at the woman and catches her across the back. The woman tells Litko to hold on as she retrieves a flak jacket from underneath the bed. The couple began to have sex when the woman requests that Litko make loud explosive noises every thirty seconds. Partway through the act, the woman picks up the telephone and called the friend to help her out. The woman on the other end of the phone joins in by making airplane noises. Litko's partner takes a jerrycan out from under the bed and reveals that it is full of gasoline. The woman throws gasoline on the walls and lights the room on fire. Litko makes a hasty getaway.

Litko and Shapiro revisit the possibility that the woman is a pro because, after all, she has all the pro moves.



Act 2 involves Joan and Deborah in their apartment. Joan is getting ready to go out for the evening. The women complain about men. Joan says that men are only after one thing, but that it's confusing because it is never the same thing.

Act 3 finds Joan at a singles bar, seated at a table alone. Litko approaches Joan and asks if she would like some company. Joan says no. Litko talks about how he's in town for one day only, and he simply wants to enjoy the evening. Joan, bored and annoyed, tells Litko to go ahead and give his spiel. Litko says that he is a meteorologist for TWA, and while it is a good job it is lonely.

Litko offers to buy Joan a drink and then goes off on a rant about how working for the airlines makes one conscious of death. Life is too short to not enjoy it.

Joan tells Litko that she is not sexually attracted to him. Litko is offended. The couple begins to trade insults until Litko leaves.

Act 4 shows Shapiro and Litko at the office. Litko shares advice on how to get women, which is to treat them poorly and they will flock to you.

In Act 5, Deborah is seated in the library when she is approached by Shapiro. Shapiro says he remembers seeing Deborah at the Art Institute and wonders if she is a student. Deborah tells Shapiro she is a commercial artist. Shapiro tells Deborah that he finds her extremely attractive. Deborah responds by saying she is a lesbian.

Act 6 shows Litko in his apartment at 3 AM, watching television. Litko wonders aloud about the power of prayer being helpful in getting laid.

Act 7 begins with Shapiro and Deborah in bed at Shapiro's apartment. The couple has just finished having sex and is discussing whether Deborah will spend the night. After much back and forth, it is decided that Deborah will stay. Deborah confesses that she is not a lesbian, but that she has enjoyed "Lesbianic experiences."

Act 8 finds Deborah and Joan in their apartment. Joan asks Deborah about her evening with Shapiro. Joan is not at all impressed and is quite rude. Joan speaks of working at a primary school and how a coworker was raped. When Deborah expresses her shock, Joan criticizes Deborah.

Act 9 begins with Litko sitting at a bar waiting for Shapiro and Deborah. Shapiro tells Deborah that she will surely like Litko because he is a great guy. Shapiro suggests that Deborah ask Litko about being in Korea, because he has some amazing stories.

The trio engages in typical introductory chit chat. Litko tells Deborah that Shapiro talks about her constantly. Korea is mentioned briefly as is Deborah's career as an illustrator. Litko determines that Shapiro is a lucky guy.

Acts 10 finds Shapiro and Litko filing in the office. The coworkers discuss income tax forms. Litko imparts more wisdom on women, telling his friend that power means responsibility.



Act 11 begins with Joan leaving the apartment and meeting Shapiro in the hall. Joan is curt and tells Shapiro that Deborah is not at home. Shapiro asks if it would be okay to wait for Deborah because she is expecting him. As usual, Joan is hostile, leaving Shapiro baffled.

In Act 12, Shapiro and Litko are filing in the office. The men discuss various places that they have had sex. Litko instructs Shapiro to study history to learn more about the sexual habits of the ancients, including the Greeks, the French, and King Farouk of Egypt. Litko tells a ridiculous story about Farouk.

Litko asks about Deborah and seems to be jealous. The men return to filing income tax forms.

Act 13 finds Deborah and Joan in their apartment. Joan is in some kind of existential crisis and says that the older she gets the less she knows.

Act 14 begins with Shapiro and Litko closing the office for the day. Litko wants to know Shapiro's plans for the next day and is unhappy to find that Shapiro plans to spend the day with Deborah.

Act 15 begins with Shapiro and Deborah in bed. Shapiro wants to know the truth about everything, from menstruation to sex.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Acts 1-15 Analysis

Sexual Perversity in Chicago contains four main characters plus two women mentioned in passing.

Bernard Litko is a young man who obviously has much less experience than he claims. Litko perceives himself to be a ladies' man, with an incredible amount of wisdom. Litko is always preaching to Shapiro about how to handle women. Litko also likes to brag about his sexual prowess.

Shapiro works in the same office with Litko. It is never actually stated where the men work or what they do, aside from filing various tax forms.

Shapiro is a regular guy, wanting sex but somewhat unsure of himself in the romance department. Shapiro always listens to Litko but does not always take his friend's advice. Litko sees Shapiro as being naïve and finds it easy to ridicule Shapiro over the blossoming relationship with Deborah.

Deborah Soloman seems to be relatively steady. The play actually gives her two different ages - one in her late twenties and one at age twenty-three. Deborah is proud of her career as an illustrator. On the whole, Deborah is a relatively friendly woman with an openness that is not shared by Joan or Litko. In this way, Deborah and Shapiro seem to be well suited.

Joan Webber is a bitter and hostile woman. Joan puts herself out there and then shoots down everything that comes her way. Joan is critical of Deborah and downright hostile to everyone else, even Shapiro. It is unclear why Joan is so bitter. The reader is left to believe that Joan is buried deeply in emotional distress and uses ridicule and insult as a defense mechanism. This can be seen clearly in the midst of Joan's existential crisis.

The relationship between Deborah and Shapiro blossoms quickly and moves at the speed of light. Within only a few days, the couple considers living together.

Deborah is open to all possibilities and comes off as a free spirit, telling Shapiro not to be frightened by saying "I love you" because one should not be frightened by words.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Acts 16-34

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Acts 16-34 Summary

Act 16 begins with Joan lecturing to small children. The children were playing doctor and were caught in the act. Joan is at times harsh and understanding.

Act 17 finds Litko and Shapiro in the toy department of Marshall Fields, where Litko is shopping for a birthday gift for his six-year-old nephew Bobby. Litko is outraged because a gay man is working at the games counter. Litko tells a story about being molested as a young boy while at a movie theater watching cartoons. A man reached over another man to grab Litko's penis. Shapiro questions Litko about the experience and wonders if Litko would ever consider being with a man. The men talk about experimenting as children and come to the conclusion that whatever one does as a child is fine, because that is the way one learns.

Act 18 details a diatribe from Joan about a sexual partner feeling guilty about premature ejaculation. Joan says that she does not care when he ejaculates but feels that the man is attempting to torture her in some way.

Act 19 shows Litko at a health club speaking to imaginary friends. Litko is recounting a conversation he had with Shapiro in which Shapiro expresses his affection and lust for Deborah. Litko tells the imaginary friends that it is understandable that a man would be so torn up over sex, but he is convinced in a couple of weeks Shapiro will dump Deborah.

Act 20 starts with Joan and Deborah having lunch. Joan is ranting about sex as an expression and how no matter what people do it will not work out. Joan uses as examples divorce, homosexuality, antisocial behavior and violent sex crimes. Deborah disagrees, as Joan predicted.

In Act 21, Litko and Shapiro are in the office. Shapiro is filing while Litko is on the phone. Litko is telling the person on the phone about an incident with a woman and a dog while Shapiro files tax forms.

Act 22 has Shapiro and Deborah moving things out of the apartment she shares with Joan. Shapiro attempts to separate Joan's music from Deborah's. Deborah tells Joan that there is a sauna in Shapiro's building. Joan and Deborah discuss the custody of the television. Shapiro and Joan trade insults.

Act 23 finds Litko complaining to coworkers about the equal rights amendment. Litko says he approves of special interest groups such as those that want to save baby seals, but writing amendments for women is stupid.

Act 24 begins in Shapiro's apartment. Shapiro and Deborah are getting ready for work. Shapiro wants to know if there is any shampoo. Deborah says she does not know.

Shapiro thinks it strange that Deborah would not know if there was shampoo in the house as it is a staple of her existence. Deborah confesses to knowing about the shampoo situation but refuses to tell Shapiro because she thinks he should go look for himself. The couple argues over her shampoo. Deborah wants to know if Shapiro will still love her when she is old. Shapiro says he will if Deborah continues to look like she's eighteen. The couple also discusses dirty pantyhose and continues to argue.

Act 25 finds Shapiro speaking with an imaginary coworker regarding an incident with the elevator. Shapiro admits to being in a bad mood because of the rocky relationship with Deborah and kicks the elevator. Litko is at Shapiro's side, telling his friend not to attempt to get affection from inanimate objects.

Act 26 Shapiro and Deborah are in bed late at night. Deborah is asleep. Shapiro cannot sleep and insists on waking Deborah and pretending that he didn't mean to wake her.

Act 27 Shapiro and Litko are watching a porn flick in a movie theater. Litko is incredulous over the size of the actor's penis. Litko says if the penis is not enhanced he is going to go home and blow his brains out. Shapiro tries to comfort Litko by saying that it is probably a stand-in. Litko complains about the theater and how it is full of scum. Litko is also outraged by the fact that the cameraman has changed the angle to give the viewer the impression that the man is able to go all night. Litko is convinced that the men on film have no self control.

In Act 28, Shapiro and Deborah are in the apartment late at night, arguing. The conflict seems to be that Shapiro is happy with the way things are and Deborah wants them to get closer. Shapiro complains that Deborah has been talking nonstop for twelve hours. The couple exchanges harsh words, apologize, and Deborah finally says that Shapiro's words mean nothing to her and that she wants to know how he really feels.

Act 29 finds Deborah alone in the apartment. Deborah recounts an incident when she was four years old. Deborah had asked her mother for a cookie and got a hug instead. Deborah attempts to analyze the incident.

In Act 30, Shapiro and Litko are at Litko's apartment. It is late at night and the men are drunk. As usual, Litko is ranting on about how Shapiro is willing to throw his life away for sex. Shapiro is uncertain about his relationship with Deborah. Litko's advice is that Shapiro should never lose his sense of humor.

Act 31 shows Shapiro and Deborah at their apartment, separating their possessions. Once again, the couple is trading insults. Shapiro insults Joan and Deborah's job as an illustrator. Shapiro tells Deborah that she is bad in bed. Deborah returns the insult.

Act 32 is staged at Deborah and Joan's apartment. Joan is telling Deborah that it is time to move on and that she cannot live in the past. Deborah believes that the breakup is her fault. Joan disagrees and says that it is a mistake to take a man with a child's outlook and attempt to change it. Deborah says that someday she will thank Joan. Joan tells Deborah she is hostile.

Act 33 details Joan reading a fairy tale to her imaginary students. The story is about a Princess who must spend half the day as hag.

Act 34 finds Shapiro and Litko on the beach, ogling women. Litko is in a bad mood over some incident involving a woman. Shapiro keeps trying to turn Litko's attention to various women on the beach. Although Litko gives in and looks, he continues to complain about unflattering attributes of certain women and how they should not be flaunting their bodies on the beach. Litko talks about his physical preferences in women and seems offended by women that do not meet his standards. The act and the play end when a woman walks by and ignores the men's greeting.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Acts 16-34 Analysis

This part of the play deals with the learning experiences of children and how they will affect the sexual experiences as an adult. As hostile as Joan is, she catches herself before instilling shame in the children caught playing doctor. Joan seems to be accepting of the growth process, as is evident through her profession as a kindergarten teacher.

In the case of Litko, there is shame regarding the incident in the movie theater when he was a boy. Litko finds it shocking that a man would simply reach over and grab his penis while cartoons are being shown on the screen. It is even more disturbing to Litko that the man had to reach over the body of another man to do it. Although Litko is outraged at the thought of a man touching him as a child, it is shown that the incident did not bother him overmuch at the time. It is also clear that while Litko is repulsed by the behavior, the incident has caused him to think about homosexuality, even if the two are not directly related. Shapiro and Litko banter about and eventually decide that whatever sexual learning experiences one has voluntarily a child, in the process of exploration it is perfectly natural.

Litko continues to be angry, ranting at the screen at the caliber of people in the movie theater. Shapiro assumes his usual role of being a peacekeeper, always trying to appease Litko.

Litko's anger is always just below the surface if it is not out in the open. It is not clear why Litko is so angry beyond the fact that life is not exactly the way he wants it and he is determined to find out who is at fault.

Shapiro is a classic example of passive aggressive behavior. This is especially true in the relationship with Deborah. Shapiro is very quick to back down and lacks a bit of backbone. Shapiro has a lot of self doubt. Litko has more harsh feelings toward himself but the anger covers up some of those insecurities.

Deborah seems to be a normal woman although she, too, exhibits passive aggressive behavior. The arguments between Deborah and Shapiro are utterly ridiculous and clichéd but appropriate for the relationship. It is clear that the couple moved much too

quickly and that there were bound to be regrets. As open as Deborah tries to be to all experiences, she is searching for answers like all the rest of the characters in the play.

It is confusing whether Deborah is confident in her career or feels insecure about it.

Joan is just mean. The woman is hostile and bitter. Nearly every exchange Joan has with another person, regardless of topic or situation, contains rudeness and hostility. Like Litko, Joan turns the blame onto others. The characters of Joan and Litko are quite a lot alike. There are a couple of instances in which Joan shows self doubt and confusion about the meaning of life. There are also few times when Joan might let some compassion slip out, but Joan is always quick to recover.

The end of the play is comical in that Litko and Shapiro seem to have changed places. Now it is Litko who is torn up by a woman and Shapiro is the one offering advice. Shapiro works hard to redirect Litko's attention, which works for as long as Litko's short attention span will allow. The interaction with the woman at the very end is classic.

Duck Variations, 1st - 9th Variations

Duck Variations, 1st - 9th Variations Summary

A short forward from David Mamet tells the reader that "The Duck Variations" is a simple play. The only scene is a park with a park bench. Mamet leaves it to the actors to decide how to do the blocking and whether they want to add a single prop such as a wire garbage can.

First Variation - "It's Nice, the Park Is Nice"

The First Variation begins with Emil and George commenting on the fact that the park is nice. The two men are watching a boat out on the water. Emil comments that it is early in the day to be seeing a boat. The men discuss the temperature and how the water is colder than the earth. The men wonder if the people riding the ferry are cold and George comments that they probably have sweaters. The men also discuss where the boat might be going; it is decided that the boat is probably going behind the pier. Emil comments that it won't go far because the boat is expensive. The men talk about the size of the boat and how small boats compare to large boats with regard to expense. George comments that sometimes small boats are even more expensive than large boats. According to George, the cost of the boat depends on many factors including the engine and speed. The men continue to watch the boats and seem to have lost track how many boats they have seen so far that day. There have been at least two. The men are amused by the sight of a clipper and a water pump house.

George points out the ducks. The men agree that the appearance of ducks is a sure sign of spring...as well as autumn. Emil and George discuss the migration of ducks. George comments that ducks have something inside them that lets them know when it's time to migrate. Something tells the ducks that it is getting a little too cold. The ducks also know when it is time to return.

George talks about the leader of the ducks. There is a duck that starts out and learns the route. That duck will come back and stay with the rest of the flock. The lead duck will serve as the guide. The lead duck is important. According to George, "Maybe he's got a little more on the ball" (p. 64).

Eventually the lead duck will die and will be replaced by the second duck. By this time, all of the ducks know the route from one home to the other, but it is still important for there to be a lead duck. Like the first, this duck will also step down one day or die and be replaced.

Second Variation: "The Ducks Life"

The Second Variation begins with George saying that a duck's life is not as easy as one might think. According to George, "You know, the duck's life is not all hearts and flowers.

He's got his worries, too. He's got fleas and lice and diseases of the body. Delusions. Wing problems. Sexual difficulties. Many things" (p. 65).

Emil agrees and George continues to talk about how the ducks must deal with the elements, airplanes, and traps. Emil adds the danger of small vicious children. George continues by adding chain stores and the existence of the blue heron. According to George, the blue heron is the hereditary enemy of the duck. Each bird continues to exist because of the other. Blue herons eat ducks. Because the duck has speed and endurance as well as the ability to conceal itself, it is able to elude the Heron easily. The Heron will travel to the point of exhaustion in search of a duck. The two seem to be locked together in an eternal embrace, the innate need to enter into combat.

Third Variation: "Also, They Got Barnyard Ducks"

Emil talks about barnyard ducks and how people raise them as food for Thanksgiving and Easter. George is sure that Emil is confusing ducks with turkeys. Emil argues that ducks are also raised for the same purpose and that farmers are able to keep them in the barnyard because of their clipped wings. Because the ducks can no longer fly, the wildness goes out of them. George wants to know if the grounded ducks are allowed to mate. Emil says that he does not know. "The mating of ducks is a private matter between the duck in question and his mate." Emil adds, "It is a thing which few White men have witnessed... and those who claim to have seen it... strangely do not wish to speak" (p. 68).

George thinks perhaps there are things that we should not know.

The men agree that everything happens for a purpose. For example, ducks most likely have beaks so they cannot be forced to speak of their mating rituals and other secrets. The men also discuss the purpose of sweat glands. Absolutely everything on earth has a purpose and one should not waste one's time attempting to find something that does not have a purpose because it is impossible.

Fourth Variation: "The Duck Is Not like Us"

Emil discusses how ducks are not like us in that they are egg-bearing creatures. George questions whether humans are egg-bearing creatures. Emil explains that what he meant to say was that the hatchlings learn to do things much sooner than humans. For example, they learn to swim early on and to follow behind their mother.

Emil and George discuss whether a duck is able to fly at birth. Emil says that a duck cannot fly until later in life. George disagrees. Emil says that while it is possible that ducks can fly at birth, he still thinks George is wrong. George attempts to convince Emil that he read somewhere something about ducks being able to fly at birth. Emil argues and George responds that it may be some obscure group of ducks that can fly at birth. Emil will not agree. Both men think that swimming isn't such a big deal. Flying is the amazing thing. Only birds can fly. Emil points out that insects know how to fly. George agrees, but says that it is completely different.

Fifth Variation: "Did You Know What I Was Reading"

George broaches the subject of something he read about the stratosphere. According to George, the entire stratosphere, particularly the lower stratosphere, is being covered with gook. George has this on good authority from the weatherman. The gook turns out to be various types of pollution from dirt to cigarette smoke and automotive emissions. George states that it is easy to tell the way people live by the types of things that are embedded into the stratosphere. George proves his point by talking about airplanes. When airplanes go up, they are clean. Then they return to the earth they are filthy and must be cleaned immediately. Emil agrees.

Unfortunately, ducks do not have anyone to wash them. George talks about the fact that there are ducks being found with lung cancer.

George recounts a story about some hunter being in the forest. The hunter had attempted to shoot a bunch of ducks as they lay on the ground. The hunter missed but went to investigate. The ducks were coughing and sneezing. The ducks had runny noses and rheumy eyes. According to George, the hunter could not get the scene of his mind. After some prodding, George says that the hunter claimed the ducks looked like they were trying to bum a smoke. Emil says that is ridiculous and that someone is obviously trying to pull George's leg. After all, you're not even supposed to smoke in the forest.

Sixth Variation: "What Kind of a World is it"

George wants to know what kind of world is it when people can't even manage keep the streets clean. Emil says that we live in a self-destructive world. The world is cruel and dirty. George realizes that he sounds like a curmudgeon, talks about being old. George says that it almost makes a man want to stop trying to get himself a simpler life. His conversation leads back to the life of a duck, whose only responsibilities include flying, sleeping, swimming, washing himself and mating. Emil points out that the duck also has to worry about getting shot. This only confirms George's belief that we are all doomed to death. George wonders what a duck might say on his deathbed if he could speak. George believes that the duck would have no regrets, no remorse or guilt, because the duck is in tune with nature. The men get into a silly argument about ducks and man being a part of nature.

Seventh Variation: "Yes, in Many Ways"

George states that in many ways, nature is the window to the world. Emil comes back with nature is the world's. George remarks, "Which shows you how easy it is to take a good idea and glop it up" (p. 75).

The men realize that they don't want to complain. It is good to have someone to talk to, and to complain to and to listen to. Neither man desires to be alone in the world. Emil states that nothing that lives, lives alone. One will never find a single flower, tree or duck. George mentions the cactus. The cactus lives alone. Emil chooses to ignore George, because he doesn't want to hear about the cactus living alone.

Eighth Variation: "Ahh, I Don't Know"

The eighth variation starts out with Emil saying he thinks the park might be more trouble than it is worth. George questions his friend. Emil says that it might be too much trouble to come to the park to look at the animals, sun, lakes and trees for little while before going back to a joyless apartment filled with linoleum and imitation stuff. When at home, one has the ability to go but to the park; at the park, the only place one has to go is home. George wonders if Emil would be better off without a park. What about the zoo? Would the world be better off without a zoo? What would happen to the turtle? Would the turtle be forgotten? Where would children go to watch animals? George suggests that maybe the children should stay home and watch their guppies eating their young. Emil mentions several places that the children would be able to go to see animals if there was not a park or zoo.

Ninth Variation: "At the Zoo They Got Ducks"

Emil talks about ducks at the zoo. The zoo has a mallard. Emil struggles with the name of the bird, which sounds something like a cantaloupe. George thinks Emil means antelope, which is, of course, an elk. The men go round and round trying to figure out the name of the mallard. Their conversation switches to panda bears and swans and how the giant panda had to be put to sleep because it was too expensive to feed.

Duck Variations, 1st - 9th Variations Analysis

George and Emil are long time friends who spend their days together at the local park. Although the men are in their sixties, they act older. Each man takes a turn playing it straight to the other's comedy. Their lengthy friendship is obvious by the way they talk to one another. Both are fascinated by ducks and use every aspect of a duck's life to wax philosophic. No topic is taboo.

George is a bit more fanciful than Emil. George is the type to make himself believe something is true, no matter how absurd. This is especially apparent in the tale about ducks being able to fly at birth. George becomes sure that he read somewhere that ducks can fly at birth. Emil stands his ground. Although it may be possible Emil says, he thinks that it is untrue. George attempts to save face by saying that maybe it's a little known group of ducks that can fly at birth. Emil will not accept it. George goes on to say that it may be a very small group that has not yet been discovered. The men eventually agree to disagree, although it is clear that Emil has won the battle.

The second example of George trying not to appear foolish is related to the story of the ducks with lung cancer. Half way through the story, George knows the entire tale is ridiculous but says it anyway. Emil delivers a classic comedic line when he says, " You aren't even supposed to smoke in the forest" (p. 81).

There are some times when the men truly disagree, but those potential arguments are quickly pushed aside in favor of a new topic that will surely be related to the ducks in some way.

Duck Variations, 10th - 14th Variations

Duck Variations, 10th - 14th Variations Summary

Tenth Variation: "It's a Crying Shame"

This variation starts out with Emil saying it's a crying shame about the oil slicks in the oceans. There are oil slicks from there to Africa. Emil states that the oil slicks are so bad people are not allowed to smoke on ocean liners anymore, for fear someone will drop a cigarette overboard and set the ocean on fire.

There are dead ducks covered with oil floating up onto the beaches. Beaches are closing and there is no place to swim. Emil states that the surface of the ocean is nothing but dying wildlife. In Australia, scientists are discovering fish that are going blind from the lack of light. There are new species developing that eat only dead birds. Emil laments the loss of thrushes, ducks, blue jays, and cardinals. The birds are dead and their lungs are a sodden lump of gasoline. The birds do not deserve that.

That is when Emil asks, "Can you imagine, being the last man alive to see the blue heron? Or a wild buffalo?" (p. 82).

George assures Emil that those animals exist at the zoo. Emil claims that it is not the same because those animals are living in captivity. George says he certainly hopes so.

Emil is content having proved his point.

Eleventh Variation: "You Know, I Remember"

The Eleventh Variation begins with George saying that he remembers reading somewhere... Emil stops him, not wanting to hear another one of George's ridiculous stories. George's feelings are hurt. Emil apologizes and tells George to go ahead with what he was going to say. According to George, the balance of nature is dependent on a professional spectator sport. Emil thinks that is stupid. According to an article George may have read in Reader's Digest, the continuation of nature will be dependent on a major league sport. Unfortunately, George does not know which sport, but it probably is not baseball.

George says he also read that they have found a cure for cancer. The men returned to talking about spending money frivolously. Money should be spent on nature. Nature continually gives back. Examples include a blue heron at sunset, the flight of ducks, a breeze from the lake, and so on.

Emil and George compare a duck to a pigeon. George says there is no comparison between the two—that it is a difference of self respect. The men finally realize that they are arguing about birds. There is a pause and then the discussion continues. George wants to know if a pigeon is nobler than a duck. Emil says that it is not a fair comparison

because the duck has no rules. George objects to the comment, claiming that ducks are ruled by the law of seasons, the act of mating for life, the sun, and moon.

George continues on to say that various societies are modeled after animals. George uses the French as an example. Emil discounts George's comments. George states that it is historically proven that the French society is based on animals and he will find the information to prove it. Emil says he wants to see it.

Twelfth Variation: "Whenever I Think of Wild Flying Things"

Emil begins by saying that whenever he thinks about flying things he wonders what it would be like to fly wild over boundaries such as rivers and lakes, imaginary boundaries, through winds and over the equator. One would never stop for anything. One could fly over unsettled terrain, barren and cold. The men turn their thoughts toward the dangers of flying so high in various weather conditions. It would be hard to imagine what it would be like; flying in bad conditions when there was nowhere to go. The men use examples of high wind and hail. With nowhere to go to, hail could easily make ribbons of the ducks' wings. George comments that it is the Law of Life. They are ones that must die so that others can live. George says it makes sense, if you stop to think about it.

Thirteenth Variation: "They Stuff Them"

Emil talks about people shooting ducks and then stuffing them so they can hang the dead birds on the wall. George comments that people also stuff ducks to put them in the oven. Emil finds it much harder to take that people will kill a duck simply to have it stuffed; to kill the duck for no reason. The men discuss duck season and the rules around it. Tools needed to hunt ducks are examined, including a large tract of land, a gun, telescope, hats, blatter, boots, raincoat, radio, lunch, license, and perhaps, most important of all, a whole lot of luck.

Emil says that it would be important to practice shooting every day. George says that devoting time to practice is the point where the men are separated from the boys. Once that commitment has been made, there is no turning back. The men talk about spotting a duck and what it would be like to shoot the duck. They include every movement up to and including the death of the duck as it goes out into a marsh. George says it all comes back to the Law of Life.

Fourteenth Variation: "For Centuries Prior to This Time"

The Fourteenth Variation begins with Emil talking about how men have watched birds for centuries prior to this time. Emil says that it is different now, because in the ancient days men watched birds to learn the secrets of flight. George says man is better off without that secret. The ducks will take the secret to their graves. Emil talks about the ancient Greeks and how they would sit all day just looking at birds. The men would do nothing but sit and look at the birds and wonder. George says that he would wonder, too. The men are in the middle of a crumbling civilization and they're spending their time in the park looking at birds. Emil points out that these were the ancient Greeks, that they

were old and incapable of working. The men were no longer useful in their society. They had nothing to do but watch the birds. At first light, the men would go to watch the birds. At last light, the men would stop watching the birds and go home. There were swallows and falcons, the forerunners of modern birds. The Greeks were forerunners of modern states.

The men discuss what the ancient Greeks might have fed the birds. The men assume that the birds were fed rice, although there is no historical documentation on that point. All day long, the ancient fat men and the birds would just be sitting and watching each other, each one having something to contribute. The play ends with the men contemplating the action and how the world might turn one more day. "A fitting end. To some very noble creatures of the sky. And a lotta Greeks" (p. 94).

Duck Variations, 10th - 14th Variations Analysis

Variations 10-14 tend to lean slightly more toward the philosophic side. The author is clever in the way he manages to tie virtually any situation to ducks. Despite their differences, Emil and George can always agree on the importance and legitimacy of the noble duck.

While the duck may seem to have an easy life, the men realize that it is not entirely true. The duck is governed by laws of nature, just as much as man. Emil and George explore what it must be like to be able to fly free like a duck, regardless of time or place. It is realized that ducks may also have difficulties there, particularly when the weather was bad and there was nowhere to turn. The ducks simply had to brave it out, often with fatal consequences.

Despite all of the freedoms that being able to fly would offer man, it is determined that it is wiser that man does not possess such a gift. Such knowledge and power would surely lead to some unfortunate event. It would be a veritable Pandora's Box.

The comparison of animals to society is enlightening. It is known that most animals are typically social, and it makes sense that George believes that modern society has fashioned itself after those patterns. As usual, George takes it a step too far and claims to have proof that the French have modeled their culture after the animals. Emil calls George's bluff.

Perhaps the most philosophic conversation is the one about the Ancient Greeks. The Ancient Greeks spent so much time just observing and trying to learn from the birds. The Law of Life comes into play, and it is shown that there is a complete circle for both man and animal.

Characters

Bernard Litko

Bernard Litko (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago*) is a twenty-something man who works in an office with friend and colleague Danny Shapiro. Litko is a single man who only seems to be out for sex, paying little mind to the woman behind the body. Litko is a master of facades, often hiding his true self under a layer of constant anger, disgust, and feigned superiority.

Litko's most vulnerable moment comes when he tells the story about the incident in the movie theater when he was a boy. Litko finds it shocking that a man would simply reach over and grab his penis while cartoons are being shown on the screen. It is even more disturbing to Litko that the man had to reach over the body of another man to do it. Although Litko is outraged at the thought of a man touching him as a child, it is shown that the incident did not bother him overmuch at the time. It is also clear that while Litko is repulsed by the behavior, the incident has caused him to think about homosexuality, even if the two are not directly related.

Litko's anger is always just below the surface if it is not out in the open. It is not clear why Litko is so angry beyond the fact that life is not exactly the way he wants it and he is determined to find out who is at fault.

Like Joan, Litko turns the blame onto others. The characters of Joan and Litko are quite a lot alike. There are a couple of instances in which Litko shows self doubt and confusion about the meaning of life and relationships, revealing that Litko is not as completely shallow as he pretends to be.

Joan Webber

Joan Webber (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago*) is a single woman in her twenties. Joan shares an apartment with her friend Deborah. Joan is a kindergarten teacher who often complains about primary school, although it is clear that she loves the work. Joan is the type that feels everything in the world would be alright if other people just listened to her advice.

Joan Webber is a bitter and hostile woman. Throughout much of the play, Joan is just mean. Nearly every exchange Joan has with another person, regardless of topic or situation, contains rudeness and hostility. Like Litko, Joan turns the blame onto others. There are a couple of instances in which Joan shows self doubt and confusion about the meaning of life. There are also few times when Joan might let some compassion slip out, but Joan is always quick to recover.

Even when Joan puts herself out there and receives some attention for her efforts, she shoots down everything that comes her way. Joan is critical of Deborah and downright



hostile to everyone else, even Shapiro. It is unclear why Joan is so bitter. The reader is left to believe that Joan is buried deeply in emotional distress and uses ridicule and insult as a defense mechanism. This can be seen clearly in the midst of Joan's existential crisis.

Danny Shapiro

Danny Shapiro (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago*) is a twenty-eight-year-old single man living in Chicago. Danny becomes involved in a relationship with Deborah Soloman.

Deborah Soloman

Deborah Soloman (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago*) is a twenty-three-year-old single woman living in Chicago. Deborah becomes involved in a relationship with Danny Shapiro.

A Woman at the Bar

A woman at the bar is the one who picks up Bernard in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. The woman sets the hotel room on fire.

Patrice

Patrice is a friend of the woman at the bar in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*.

Emil Vare

Emil Vare is a gentleman in his sixties in *Duck Variations*. Friends with Aronovitz.

George S. Aronovitz

George S. Aronovitz is a gentleman in his sixties in *Duck Variations*. Friends with Vare.

Bar patrons

In the scenes in which the singles meet in the local bar, they interact with other patrons that are mentioned in passing.

Twenty-somethings

The four characters in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* are twenty-somethings, people who have not yet figured out what they want in life.

Objects/Places

Chicago

Sexual Perversity in Chicago takes place in various settings around North Chicago. There are few actual references to the city itself, save for the atmosphere of the city and the fact that it borders Lake Michigan. Mamet simply refers to it as "a Big City on a lake" (Introduction, p. 3).

The places in Chicago are typically nondescript, leaving a lot of latitude for the actors and set designers who would otherwise be locked into a specific style and atmosphere. The only places that are mentioned by name are the Art Institute, the toy department at Marshall Fields, and Commonwealth, Yak-zies, and Grunts, which are presumably night clubs or bars.

Mamet takes a bit of a risk in making the location so vague, but is undoubtedly secure that the variation in the stage productions will serve him, and the play, well.

The scenes in the play include: a pancake house and hotel room where Litko meets the perverse semi-pro; a bar in which Litko meets Joan and Deb meets Litko for the first time; the apartments of each character, Litko and Shapiro's unidentified office, and a library.

Ducks

There are dead ducks covered with oil floating up onto the beaches. Beaches are closing and there is no place to swim. Emil states that the surface of the ocean is nothing but dying wildlife. In Australia, scientists are discovering fish that are going blind from the lack of light. There are new species developing that eat only dead birds. Emil laments the loss of thrushes, ducks, blue jays, and cardinals. The birds are dead and their lungs are a sodden lump of gasoline. The birds do not deserve that.

Emil talks about barnyard ducks and how people raise them as food for Thanksgiving and Easter. George is sure that Emil is confusing ducks with turkeys. Emil argues that ducks are also raised for the same purpose and that farmers are able to keep them in the barnyard because of their clipped wings. Because the ducks can no longer fly, the wildness goes out of them. George wants to know if the grounded ducks are allowed to mate. Emil says that he does not know. "The mating of ducks is a private matter between the duck in question and his mate." Emil adds, "It is a thing which few White men have witnessed... and those who claim to have seen it... strangely do not wish to speak" (p. 68).

Vare and Aronovitz are comical in their comparisons of life to ducks and nature and frequently get into disagreements on ridiculous aspects, such as whether ducks are able to fly at birth.



Emil and George discuss whether a duck is able to fly at birth. Emil says that a duck cannot fly until later in life. George disagrees. Emil says that while it is possible that ducks can fly at birth, he still thinks George is wrong. George attempts to convince Emil that he read somewhere something about ducks being able to fly at birth. Emil argues and George responds that it may be some obscure group of ducks that can fly at birth. Emil will not agree. Both men think that swimming isn't such a big deal. Flying is the amazing thing. Only birds can fly. Emil points out that insects know how to fly. George agrees, but says that it is completely different.

(The Duck Variations)

Bar

The bar is the location in which Litko meets Joan and Deb meets Litko for the first time.

(Sexual Perversity in Chicago)

Joan and Deb's apartment

Joan and Deb's apartment is one of the scenes used frequently, featuring interaction between Joan, Deb, and Shapiro.(Sexual Perversity in Chicago)

Shapiro's apartment

Shapiro's apartment is the location of much of the interaction between Shapiro and Deb during their short-lived and turbulent relationship. (Sexual Perversity in Chicago)

Litko's apartment

Litko's apartment is briefly visited when Litko suffers from insomnia. (Sexual Perversity in Chicago)

Park

The Park is the daily meeting place of Vare and Aronovitz in The Duck Variations.

Park Bench

The park bench is used daily by Aronovitz and Vare and is the only prop in the play. (The Duck Variations)

Unidentified Office

There are several scenes in which Shapiro and Litko appear in an unidentified office where they file tax forms. (Sexual Perversity in Chicago)

Library

The library is where Shapiro first encounters Deb. (Sexual Perversity in Chicago)

Themes

Sex

Sexual Perversity in Chicago is a play about four single people and their thoughts and experiences on sex. There are many sexual references throughout the play. However, there is less sex in the play than one might think. Rather, there is much talk about getting sex, various conquests and attempts. The only actual sex scene is between Bernard Litko and the unnamed woman in the hotel room. Even then, the act is not fully completed because the woman sets the hotel room on fire and Litko decides to get out while he can.

There are some mentions of bestiality involving dogs. Litko also relays a story about a sexual encounter he had as a boy. A man in a local theater groped Litko. Although Litko shrugs it off, it is obvious that the event has left its mark.

There is a discussion of the frailties in the porn industry, led of course, by Litko. Joan only really talks about sex once, when she is having an issue with a lover who suffers from premature ejaculation. In true Joan style, the act seems to have happened as a form of torture to her even though she swears that it doesn't matter.

Sex is also used as a weapon when it comes to hurling insults. When Shapiro and Deborah break up, each tells the other what a lousy time it was in bed. This is obviously just a way of the couple hurting each other.

Anatomy

Anatomy is a major topic in David Mamet's Sexual Perversity in Chicago. The men in the play are fond of talking about a woman's anatomy. This is particularly true of Bernard Litko, who waxes poetic about a woman's breasts and bottom. Litko is obsessed with the female form. When Litko tells Shapiro the story about the woman in the hotel room, there is much talk about how the woman looks naked. The men discuss anatomy at every opportunity, as one would expect.

There is one conversation about the male anatomy that takes place in the movie theater when Litko talks about the near molestation and also complains about the size of the actor's penis on screen.

Deborah and Shapiro talk about anatomy briefly when each asks the other what it is like to possess certain body parts.

At the end of the play, Litko and Shapiro are on the beach. Litko is licking his wounds, as is Shapiro to a lesser degree. The thing that cheers up Shapiro is the number of scantily clad women flaunting themselves on the shore. After some prodding, Litko finally looks and agrees that there are some hot women out there. Litko talks about how

he is an ass man, although he wouldn't turn down a good pair of tits. Many women are discounted if they are not in superior shape. Litko goes on a rampage about women not taking care of themselves. Litko's rant leads the reader to believe that if a woman is not perfect, she should never leave the house.

Nature

The discussion of nature is a main theme in Mamet's *The Duck Variations*. The play is an exchange between two men in their sixties—Emil Vare and George S. Aronovitz. The men have a great fondness for ducks and nature as a whole. Although the men commonly disagree on various aspects of each, the basic admiration is always there. There are many comparisons to the life of the duck and its connection with nature, one often ignored by man.

Although Vare and Aronovitz often argue, the men do agree that the appearance of ducks is a sure sign of spring...as well as autumn. Emil and George discuss the migration of ducks. George comments that ducks have something inside them that lets them know when it's time to migrate. Something tells the ducks that it is getting a little too cold. The ducks also know when it is time to return.

Emil tells George that whenever he thinks about flying things, he wonders what it would be like to fly wild over boundaries such as rivers and lakes, imaginary boundaries, through winds and over the equator. One would never stop for anything. One could fly over unsettled terrain, barren and cold. The men turn their thoughts toward the dangers of flying so high in various weather conditions. It would be hard to imagine what it would be like; flying in bad conditions when there was nowhere to go. The men use examples of high wind and hail. With nowhere to go, hail could easily make ribbons of the ducks' wings. George comments that it is the Law of Life. They are ones that must die so that others can live.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in both plays is third person omniscient.

In "Sexual Perversity in Chicago", third person is crucial due to the various angles and characters. It would be impossible for a first person point of view to be used, as the crux of the dialogue lies in the interaction of the characters. Through this point of view, the reader is able to clearly discern the personalities of each character. The reader can also get a broad view of the time period, which is 1976. Mamet has also made it possible to hide parts of the characters underneath various facades to add depth to each person and not reveal every thought and motive.

In "The Duck Variations," the third person point of view is also essential. Although Emil and George are in their sixties, they act older. The third person point of view allows readers to relate to the characters, even if there is a great age difference. Also, it is important when each man takes a turn playing it straight to the other's comedy. The overall point of view lends a great deal of humor to the play.

The men's descriptions of a duck's flight and death are riveting. The writing takes the reader into the place of the duck through the men's eyes. The result is that the reader can see what the men see, which is a very clever use of this point of view.

Setting

The settings used in "Sexual Perversity in Chicago" and "The Duck Variations" are almost non-existent. Mamet prefers to keep the stage clear and gives actors carte blanche on blocking and placing any appropriate props, of which there are few or none.

"Sexual Perversity in Chicago" takes place on the north side of Chicago. Locations include the unidentified office where Shapiro and Litko work, a bar, and the apartments of each of the characters. No descriptions are given.

In "The Duck Variations", there is a short forward from David Mamet which tells the reader that "The Duck Variations" is a simple play. The only scene is a park with a park bench. Mamet leaves it to the actors to decide how to do the blocking and whether they want to add a single prop such as a wire garbage can.

The only items mentioned by Emil and George are a park bench, a body of water and two boats.

The lack of setting allows the reader to focus more on the characters and to pay closer attention to the dialogue, which is a highlight of the plays.

Language and Meaning

The language in "Sexual Perversity in Chicago" is typical of people in their twenties. The dialogue is fragmented and repetitive, showing a sense of eagerness and anticipation. At times the conversation moves so rapidly that it comes off as being frenetic.

Good examples can be seen in the men's conversations in particular. When Litko tells Shapiro about his experience with the semi-pro woman at the hotel, Shapiro asks repeatedly how old the woman is and if the activity is legal. The two men ask each other a lot of repetitive questions at various parts in the story which makes the reader jump around and attempt to keep up with the actual thread of the story. This works well in a play but would not work in a book.

Deborah's language is nothing unusual. Joan's language is almost always short, choppy and curt, revealing the woman's unlikable personality.

In "The Duck Variations," Mamet has created two men in their sixties. The language used in the play often hints at older men, particularly when Emil and George discuss the Law of Life.

It is clear that both men are relatively well educated. As this play also takes place around Chicago, there are no distinct regionalisms or accents traceable in the dialogue.

Structure

"Sexual Perversity in Chicago" and "The Duck Variations" are two plays written by iconic Chicago playwright David Mamet. The comedies are contained in the same book. The first, "Sexual Perversity in Chicago," is mostly chronological in its structure. There are some flashbacks that are relevant to the present conversation. The reader is able to follow along with the characters from the first meeting to the break up of Deborah and Shapiro and the slight downfalls of Joan and Litko.

The play is essentially one scene. The setting uses various settings on the north side of Chicago during the summer months. There are thirty-four acts contained in the scene, divided up between characters. The entire play is fifty-five pages long. As the acts are not separated or numbered as such, it is not possible to establish an average length.

"The Duck Variations" is a comedy consisting of fourteen variations. The variations are subtitled to reflect either the opening line or the overall context of the passage. The fourteen variations are: First Variation - "It's Nice, the Park Is Nice"; Second Variation: "The Ducks Life"; Third Variation: "Also, They Got Barnyard Ducks"; Fourth Variation: "The Duck Is Not like Us"; Fifth Variation: "Did You Know What I Was Reading"; Sixth Variation: "What Kind of a World is it"; Seventh Variation: "Yes, in Many Ways"; Eighth Variation: "Ahh, I Don't Know"; Ninth Variation: "At the Zoo They Got Ducks"; Tenth Variation: "It's a Crying Shame"; Eleventh Variation: "You Know, I Remember"; Twelfth

Variation: "Whenever I Think of Wild Flying Things"; Thirteenth Variation: "They Stuff Them"; and Fourteenth Variation: "For Centuries Prior to This Time."

Overall, the play is thirty-eight pages in length.

Quotes

"It's these young broads. They don't know what the fuck they want."

Bernard Litko

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Act 1, p. 13

"A person makes an effort to enjoy himself, why pin a label on it, huh?"

Bernard Litko

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Act 3, p. 15

"You're torturing me with your pain and aloofness. You know that?"

Bernard Litko

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Act 4, p. 16

"When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are. If, on the other hand, you apply for a personal loan, all sorts of circumstantial evidence is required."

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Act 6, p. 19

"So I tell him, "Dan, Dan, I can advise, I can counsel, I can speak to you out of my experience... but in the final analysis, you are on your own.""

Bernard Litko

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Act 19, p. 37

"Everything was fine. Sex, talk, life, everything. Until you want to get "closer," to get "better.""

Danny Shapiro to Deborah Soloman

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Act 28, p. 45

"Nature has given the duck speed and endurance and the art of concealment."

George Aronovitz

The Duck Variations, Second Variation, p. 66

"The young of the duck at birth are already trained to do things most humans learn only much later. Swim. Follow their mother."

Emil Vare

The Duck Variations, Fourth Variation, page 69

"You know, it is a good thing to be perceptive, but you shouldn't let it get in the way."

Emil Vare

The Duck Variations, Sixth Variation, page 75

"Can you imagine, being the last man alive to see the blue heron? Or a wild buffalo?"

Emil Vare

The Duck Variations, Tenth Variation, p. 82

"A crumbling civilization and they're out in the Park looking at birds."

Emil Vare

The Duck Variations, Fourteenth Variation, p. 93

Topics for Discussion

What causes Bernard Litko and Joan Webber to be so hostile and angry to everyone they encounter? Compare and contrast the characters.

Danny Shapiro seems to be an average guy, although he often exhibits passive aggressive behavior. Discuss Shapiro's method of handling conflict.

Examine the arguments between Deborah and Danny Shapiro. The arguments are obviously not about shampoo and pantyhose. What is the couple really arguing about? Why the façade?

Why do Litko and Joan tend to blame other people for their unhappiness? Is the anger a defense mechanism? Do these characters feel that happiness is attainable? Explain.

Joan caught two small children playing doctor at school. Discuss how Joan handled the situation. Were Joan's actions appropriate? Explain.

Ducks, like most animals, grow up very quickly. Discuss the maturation of ducks compared to the maturation of humans.

Conservation and preservation are two topics discussed by George and Emil in *The Duck Variations*. Discuss what can be done to clean up the oceans and shores so that animals are not dying from pollution.

In *The Duck Variations*, Emil Vare asks, "Can you imagine, being the last man alive to see the blue heron? Or a wild buffalo?" (Tenth Variation, p. 82).

What would it be like to know that you have seen the last blue heron or wild buffalo?