Six Degrees of Separation Study Guide

Six Degrees of Separation by John Guare

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Introduction

The heart of John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* can be summed up ill a few sentences that Ouisa Kittredge directs at the audience: "I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. . . . It's a profound thought. . . . How every person is a new door, opening up into other worlds."

Six Degrees of Separation first opened off-Broadway in 1990. Its original ten-week run was extended almost immediately. Audiences lined up in hopes of ticket cancellations to see this play that explores late twentieth-century society as deftly as it does universal human relationships. Called a tragicomedy by some critics, *Six Degrees of Separation* is a witty, biting, yet ultimately sincere commentary on what drives people: the desire for money, fame, social standing, comfort, and, for the lucky, a desire for meaningful human connection. Guare based the premise of his play on an actual incident-a young African-American man gained access to the homes of upper-class New Yorkers by pretending to be the son of actor Sidney Poitier but the creation of the play is an imaginative tour de force. Guare uses the props of the late twentieth century, such as social issues and art, to create a comprehensive picture of a fragmented society, one in which those simple Six degrees that bind people together are overlooked, blatantly ignored, and, very occasionally, celebrated

Author Biography

John Guare was born on February 5, 1938, in New York. At age eleven, along with another boy. he produced his first play in a garage for an audience of family and friends. He also called up several magazines and newspapers to promote the play. *Newsday* sent a photographer, and the paper ran pictures of the production in July 1949.

As a teenager, Guare attended the theater regularly and listened to cast recordings of musicals. He attended Georgetown University and graduated in 1960. Three years later, he received his M.F.A. from Yale Drama School. Guare expressed dissatisfaction with this course of study. However, claiming that he learned more about plays while at Yale from a design course than from his playwriting course.

After finishing school, Guare wrote several one-act plays and worked as a reader for a London publishing house. In 1965, he began hitchhiking through Europe. His visit to Rome inspired one of his most important plays, *The House of Blue Leaves,* which shows his vision of modern America.

When Guare returned to the United States, some of his plays were produced off-off-Broadway. He eventually was invited to become a founding member of the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Playwrights' Conference, and that is where the first act of *The House of Blue Leaves* had a staged reading in 1966. After working on nine revisions of the second act, Guare concluded that he still lacked the skill to complete a full-length play. Instead, he concentrated on writing more one-act plays, some of which were produced at the O'Neill as well as off-Broadway.

Guare's early plays raise several themes that would continue to interest the author throughout his career. *The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year* (1966) and *Muzeeka* (1967) both rely on a character's act of violence to avoid life's dreary existence. Guare has also attacked the role of the media in several of his plays. He eventually completed *The House of Blue Leaves,* and he staged it in 1971.

Over the next decade, Guare continued to produce his work, which included a rock musical adaptation of a Shakespeare play, a science fiction comedy, and a murder mystery. *Six Degrees of Separation* opened in New York City in 1990. It was an immediate critical and popular success. It was made into a movie several years later and Guare wrote the screenplay.

Guare has won many awards over the years. His screenplay for *Atlantic City,* directed by Louis Malle, garnered an Academy Award nomination. He has been a longtime member of the Dramatists Guild and was elected in 1989 to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Plot Summary

The play opens with a middle-aged, upper-class New York couple-Ouisa and Flan Kittredge eager to share what happened the previous night. Flan and Ouisa invited a wealthy friend, Geoffrey, for dinner. Flan, an art dealer, planned to ask Geoffrey for two million dollars that he needed to purchase a Cezanne. In the midst of their drinks, there is a knock on the door. It is the doorman, accompanied by a young African-American man who has been beaten. The young man introduces himself as Paul, a friend and Harvard classmate of the Kittredges' children. He has been mugged in Central Park. Now he has no money until he meets his father, the famous actor Sidney Poitier, the following day. Ouisa and Flan take care of Paul's wounds, give him a clean shirt, and invite him to go out to dinner with them. Instead, Paul fixes everyone a wonderful meal. He tells them about his theories about the imagination. Ouisa and Flan insist that Paul spend the night at their home and give him fifty dollars. Everyone has a delightful evening, including Geoffrey, who agrees to give Flan the money.

The next morning Ouisa knocks on the door to wake Paul up so he can go meet his father. When she opens the door and turns on the light, a naked man is in Paul's bed. Ouisa calls for Flan, who kicks out the man. Paul tries to explain, but despite his apologies, they make him leave.

Later that day, they meet their friends, Kitty and Larkin, who have a similar story to tell. Paul had shown up at their apartment on Friday night, mugged, and they had also invited him to spend the night. That evening, they awakened to hear someone yelling "Burglar." Paul was chasing a naked thief down the hallway. They believed that Paul saved their lives-until Ouisa and Flan tell their story. The couples try to get in touch with Sidney Poitier, but they are unable to do so. They call the police A detective comes to the apartment but, upon finding out that Paul did not steal anything, leaves. Later, however, the detective tells them of another man who had a similar run-in with Paul. The man told his son about meeting Paul, and the son says he knows no such person-Paul is an impostor.

The only connection between the adults' children is their boarding school. It turns out that Paul learned all about the families from a high school classmate, Trent Conway, who briefly was Paul's lover.

Flan and Ouisa hear no more mention of Paul for a while. Then their doorman spits at Flan and mentions "The Negro son you deny." They learn that Paul had met a young couple in the park. Rick and Elizabeth came to New York from Utah to be actors. Paul made up a story about his father-Flan-who denied his existence. Under their urging, Paul agrees to try and reconcile with his "father." He tells them that he has been successful and that Flan wants to introduce him to the family only he needs money to travel up to Maine to meet his father. Against Elizabeth's wishes, Rick takes all the money out of their Joint bank account and gives it to Paul in celebration, Paul takes Rick to the Rainbow Room and for a carriage ride in Central Park, and the two men

have sex. Upset at what he has done, Rick commits suicide. Elizabeth goes to the police with her story, and the police swear out a warrant for Paul's arrest for theft.

Flan gets the paper to run a story about Paul's shenanigans, and soon thereafter, Paul calls the Kittredges. Ouisa answers the phone and convinces

Paul to turn himself in. She promises to visit him in prison and help him start a new life when he gets out of jail. He wants her and Flan to come with him to the police station. Ouisa says that they will come pick him up, but they also tell the detective his whereabouts. The police arrive and arrest Paul before the Kittredges get there.

Ouisa is unable to track down Paul-she doesn't even know his real name. She fantasizes about what happened to Paul, even imagining his suicide. Though Ouisa is unable to help Paul, she recognizes that her connection with him has been meaningful.

Section 1 (pages 3-13)

Section 1 (pages 3-13) Summary

The play opens with a painting by the artist, Kandinsky, revolving slowly above the two-sided stage. One side is geometric looking and rather dark, while the other side is quite bright and even wild looking. The painting stops moving and shows the darker side to the audience.

A couple rushes on stage in their nightclothes, very agitated and excited. They speak directly to the audience. He is Flan and she is Ouisa (Louisa), his wife, the Kittridges. They are an attractive married couple in their early to mid forties. They are alarmed and frightened and seem to have just witnessed a robbery or break-in at their home. They mention some prized possessions, as if looking to ensure they were not taken. Two other actors appear on stage holding up the mentioned items, and they realize that their possessions are safe. They then realize that their very lives might have been in danger. They call out "hello" as if to someone else in the house, but there is no answer.

Ouisa and Flan suddenly pull off their bathrobes and are dressed in fashionable clothing to go out for the evening. They address the audience again to explain what had happened the evening before, before they realized they had an intruder in their home. They relate that they were enjoying their evening with a friend visiting from South Africa. Ouisa criticizes Flan for what she feels is the pretentious way he is explaining who this friend is. Ouisa takes up the explanation of who the friend is and relates that they met him through their children when all were living in New York. Now this friend is visiting, and Ouisa and Flan have asked him to dinner. Ouisa and Flan go on to explain that this friend is very, very wealthy. However, since he lives in South Africa and is white, he is not allowed to remove any funds from the country.

Flan and Ouisa seem particularly excited to see this wealthy friend because

Flan, who is an art dealer, is about 2 million dollars short of the funds he needs to close a lucrative deal. Their wealthy friend is named Geoffrey. Ouisa contends that they were not "sucking up" to their friend, because they like Geoffrey. The couple discusses briefly what it's like to have such a wealthy friend, and the possibility that the wealthy friend may think he is valued only for his wealth.

Geoffrey suddenly appears on stage. He is a typical British South African, and beautifully and elegantly dressed. He appears to be slightly older than Ouisa and Flan. The three have drinks, and Geoffrey comments on how quiet it is. Flan asks Geoffrey why he stays in South Africa when his life is constantly in danger. Geoffrey responds that it is his duty to "educate the black workers" there. Oddly, he comments that when these people rise up and kill their educators, the educators will know they have been successful. Flan and Ouisa comment that he is risking his life. Geoffrey explains that he just doesn't think about it like that, and expresses a wish that Ouisa and Flan would

come and visit him in South Africa. In response, Ouisa says that they would sit in Geoffrey's beautiful home demanding to see the poorest of the poor, and those most victimized by

Apartheid. She comments that it seems not right to sit where they are in a wealthy part of their city talking about revolution in South Africa. Flan, Ouisa and Geoffrey continue to banter about the idea of revolution.

Flan offers Geoffrey another drink before they all go out to dinner. Ouisa, still musing about revolution, imagines "striking coal miners" who are striking as attractive (or striking) people modeling new fashions. Geoffrey asks where they should go to dinner and lists some of the good restaurants (all ethnic) that are near them. Geoffrey remarks that they will have to come to South Africa so he can take them out and repay their hospitality. Flan relates a story about a man who went into a gourmet food store (Dean and DeLuca). Instead of waiting in line at the cash register, this customer put $40 on the counter (for purchases which may have totaled $5) and walks out so he won't have to wait in line. Flan tells Geoffrey that he and Ouisa sent this story to the newspaper, the *Times.* They explain to Geoffrey that this paper publishes such "jokes" reported to them from around town. They all share a companionable laugh.

Ouisa speaks to the audience. She is still thinking about the 2 million dollars they need for their coming deal. She says they are not really auditioning, but she can't stop thinking about the 2 million dollars. Flan begins to address the audience, too. He says that when someone says, "Don't think about elephants," that all you can then think about is elephants. Ouisa chants 2 million dollars over and over again to the audience.

At this point, the doorbell rings.

Section 1 (pages 3-13) Analysis

Ouisa and Flan Kittridge are a wealthy, self-absorbed couple. He is an art dealer. The play opens with the two of them reacting to what they perceive as a robbery attempt. They seem far more concerned about their material possessions than about their lives. At this point, the action of the play goes back in time, to the previous evening when Flan and Ouisa were entertaining a wealthy friend from South Africa. He is white, but is very restricted by what he can do in his homeland of South Africa. This seems to be an ironic device to make the reader wonder who is the "slave," and who is in charge.

The three of them are discussing revolution in South Africa. Instead of focusing on the actual issues of the striking coal miners, Ouisa interprets the term, "striking coal miners" to refer to attractive people who mine coal. She completely misses the point of the issue of the coal miners, or she sees the point, but is so absorbed in her own world that she plays with the word "striking."

Ouisa and Flan are out of touch with the world around them. They relate a story about a man who went into an exclusive store and paid far too much money for his purchases, simply because he did not want to be bothered with waiting in line. Most people are

concerned with day-to-day experiences, like waiting in line, but Ouisa and Flan's world is different. They are currently spending their time obsessing over a huge art deal for which they are 2 million dollars short. That kind of issue is what their lives are filled with, not the mundane experiences like waiting in line.

Section 2 (pages 14-26)

Section 2 (pages 14-26) Summary

Ouisa tells Flan not to think about Elephants, whatever he does. She heads off to the door. Geoffrey asks Flan, who is an art dealer, about the Cezanne. Flan begins a textbook explanation of the elements of color and composition in the painting. He ends by commenting that his Japanese clients don't like the painting, except that they do like the fact that it's a Cezanne.

The doorman enters the room supporting Paul, a young black man, who had been at the door. Paul is well dressed and handsome, in his early 20s, but he has clearly been beaten. He is bleeding through his Brooks Brothers shirt. Ouisa follows them, puzzled. The doorman assists Paul to the sofa where he is seated. The doorman waits.

Paul explains that he has been hurt and is a friend of their children. Ouisa addresses the audience, saying that Paul had mentioned their daughter's name. Flan adds, again to the audience, that Paul also mentioned their school, which is Harvard. Paul explains to his hosts that he was mugged in Central Park while standing near a statue of a Husky dog. Ouisa asks if he is OK. Paul replies that the thieves took his briefcase and cash. His thesis for college was in the briefcase. Flan and Ouisa realize Paul is bleeding. Paul becomes nauseated and explains that he reacts that way around blood. Flan cautions him not to bleed on the rug. Paul says that the thieves got the only copy of his thesis. Flan sends the doorman, Eddie, for a doctor. Paul demurs, but Eddie goes on his errand. Flan helps Paul out of the room.

Ouisa addresses the audience again, telling them that they bathed Paul and dressed his wounds. Geoffrey begins to leave. Ouisa implores him to stay, and says to the audience, "two million dollars, two million dollars." Geoffrey explains that he doesn't have much time in the United States and must see others. Flan, from offstage, asks where the bandages are. Ouisa responds with what appears to be a Red Cross instruction for wound care. Geoffrey asks if he can use the phone. Ouisa tells him fondly to sit down and that this will only take a moment. Ouisa calls to Flan to go into their son's room and get Paul a clean shirt. She also asks Geoffrey if he's seen the new book on Cezanne. Ouisa then addresses the audience again. She is rattled. She gives the gauze to Geoffrey and the book to Flan by mistake, again chanting, "two million dollars, two million dollars."

Flan returns and says Paul will be fine. Ouisa tells the audience that peace has been restored. Paul rejoins them wearing a clean, pink shirt instead of his bloody white one. He pulls on his blazer, but seems to be in pain. Paul remarks that Ouisa and Flan's children told everyone at school that their parents were wonderful. Paul says that once the muggers left him, he realized he was near the Kittredges' home. He also says he knows Mrs. Onassis lives nearby, as do the Babcocks and the Auchinclosses. But he elected to come to them.

Ouisa asks Flan if he heard what Paul said the kids had said about them. Flan addresses the audience to tell them that he and Ouisa mentioned their children's names in this conversation. Paul assures Ouisa and Flan that "Talbot and Woody" mean the world to him. Flan is surprised that Paul calls their son by the family nick-name, Woody. Paul goes on to say that the children described the apartment in detail, to include the double-sided Kandinsky painting. Flan explains that they turn the painting around for variety. Paul recites a short biography of Kandinsky to the audience; including, when and where he was born, a famous quote, and when he died.

Ouisa addresses the audience, explaining that Geoffrey had been quiet until now. He asks Paul if he, too, had criticized his parents. Paul responds that he and the Kittridges' children all love their parents. He then asks if he is in the way. Flan and Ouisa both answer emphatically that he is not. Ouisa asks Paul to talk more about their children. Flan addresses the audience, saying that they have three children, two of whom go to Harvard, and another girl at the prep school, Groton. Ouisa asks Paul how Harvard is. Paul responds with a contradictory response that they are in "luxurious despair and constant discovery and paralysis."

Ouisa, again addressing the audience, explains that she asked Paul where he lives. Flan explains to the audience that Paul lived out West. Paul actually said he's lived all over, that his parents are divorced, and that his dad is remarried and doing a movie. Ouisa asks if Paul's father is in the movies, and Paul responds that his father is directing this movie, but does also act. Flan asks what Paul's father is directing. Paul responds, *Cats*. Ouisa seems surprised that someone would be directing a movie of the play, *Cats.* Paul asks if they know the play by T.S. Eliot. Flan replies that they saw it at a benefit. Flan and Ouisa are still dubious that a movie can be made of this play, and Paul relates that he's going to be auditioning actors for the roles. Paul goes on to explain that his father at first did not want the job, but then saw how it could be done.

Flan and Ouisa are curious as to who Paul's father is. Flan tells the audience that Paul told them, and Ouisa adds that the boy named a very famous black movie star. Ouisa reveals that Paul's father is Sidney Poitier, over Flan's objections that this might result in a lawsuit.

Paul steps forward and delivers a biographical monologue of his father to the audience. The information he relates includes that Sidney Poitier was born in Miami on Feb. 24. 1927 and grew up, the son of poor farmers, on Cat Island in the Bahamas. Poitier came to New York in the winter of 1943 at age 15 and lived in a public pay toilet. He moved later to the roof of a building in the area known as "Tin Pan Alley" and got a job washing dishes for $4.11 a night. He learned to read by reading the newspaper. In the paper, he read, the theater page was opposite the want ad page, so he saw it regularly. Paul goes on to list some of Mr. Poitier's 42 films, and that he won an Oscar for *Lilies of the Field*. Between 1977 and 1987, Poitier worked as a director and author and did not act in films. After this monologue directed to the audience, Paul returns to the sofa and speaks to the others on stage. He explains that his father will arrive tomorrow and will stay at the "Sherry" which apparently refers to the Sheraton. Paul remarks that he had intended

to stay in a fleabag hotel for adventure. He says he knows Rome, Paris and Los Angeles much better than New York.

Ouisa says that they are going to dinner and that Paul should join them. Paul questions why they are going out. Ouisa suddenly panics, thinking they may have lost their reservations, and this is a city like Florence, in which there is a genius on every block, referring to the talented chefs in restaurants they favor. Paul says they must have some food in the house, and questions why they would go out when he can cook for them. He explains that cooking calms him down and to allow him to provide them a meal would help pay back their kids.

Ouisa speaks to the audience, reminding them that Paul has mentioned their children's names. Flan also speaks to the audience, reminding them of the excellent schools the kids attend. Paul remarks that the kids have been wonderful to him, but Ouisa replies that the kids have never mentioned Paul. Flan challenges her, and asks what the kids were supposed to say to introduce their friend. Geoffrey remarks to Paul that his "father" means a great deal in South Africa. Ouisa explains to the audience that even Geoffrey was impressed. Paul says he is glad of that and relates that he once went to Russia and was surprised at how much his father meant there.

Ouisa protests, asking that he tell some negative stories about the famous man. Paul says he wanted to write a book about his father, but there wasn't any dirt, and adds that he admires his father. Ouisa asks if Mr. Poitier isn't married to a white actress. Paul confirms that he is, but that the woman is not his mother. He says his father left his mother shortly after Paul's birth, even though Paul's mother had stuck with him before he became a famous author. Ouisa apologizes for bringing up a painful subject, but Paul assures her that he and the other children from that marriage are all friendly. He adds that he'd love to get into the kitchen. Flan asks Ouisa what they should do. Ouisa remarks to the audience that this is Geoffrey's only night in New York. Geoffrey says he'd rather stay in, and they all enthusiastically concur. Paul moves off toward the kitchen.

Section 2 (pages 14-26) Analysis

When Geoffrey comments about the Cezanne Flan and Ouisa have, Flan begins a very dry, academic explanation regarding the color and composition of the painting. It is clear that he is not talking about a piece of art he loves, but a commodity. He is not entranced with the painting's beauty, but the painting's worth.

When the doorman brings the injured Paul to the Kittridges' apartment, Paul passes himself off as a friend of their children. He uses their children to enter their world. He mentions Harvard. He talks about his thesis, all to impress Flan and Ouisa. Flan, ever conscious of their material possessions, cautions Paul not to bleed on the rug.

Ouisa tells the audience that she and Flan bathed and dressed Paul, reminding us of when Jesus was rescued and bathed and cared for. Ouisa responds automatically, not

empathetically, to Paul's need for bandages. She sends Paul into their son's room, treating him as if he is their child. She and Flan continue to be pre-occupied with the 2 million dollars they hope to get from Geoffrey. Once Paul is cleaned up, he joins the others. He tells Ouisa and Flan that their children have said wonderful things about them at school. This is his hook to get himself into their lives. He also name-drops shamelessly, mentioning Mrs. Onassis and other famous people.

Paul says that the children have mentioned the double-sided Kandinsky hanging in their home. Flan describes it, like an art catalog, not like someone who loves the piece. It is another possession, not a piece of art. The painting is double-sided, and we will find out later in the play that life, as portrayed here, is also at least double-sided.

Ouisa prompts Paul to talk more about their children and the relationships they have with their parents. Flan steps out and addresses the audience, cataloging their children and where they go to school, much as he cataloged the painting. This is not a father's loving and proud statement about his children, but a description of another possession. He recites their pedigrees, not their personalities.

In questioning Paul about himself, Paul reveals himself as essentially unconnected and not grounded. He does not have a home base. He also does not have a "base" in which to ground his life. Paul tells Ouisa and Flan that his father is going to make a remake of Cats as a musical. Finally, they ask who Paul's father is. He claims to be the son of Sidney Poitier. Paul addresses the audience with a textbook biography of Sidney Poitier. His words are not at all how a son would talk about his father. Paul talks about moving all over the world, again emphasizing the fact that he has no base, no roots.

When they start to go out to dinner, Paul offers to cook for them at home, and for them to share a meal like a family. Paul's continuing discussion of his father and family life go on to emphasize that he does not have a solid or stable family life.

Even this early in the play, the author is emphasizing the theme of family relationships, and letting us know how important family is to Paul. It is also important to Flan and Ouisa in that they want to believe their children think well of them. Another theme, which is stressed even this early in the play, is the orientation of Flan and Ouisa. They are generally empty, self-absorbed, wealthy and out of touch with the "real" world.

Section 3 (pages 26-44)

Section 3 (pages 26-44) Summary

Ouisa and Flan again speak to the audience and tell them that their group watched Paul cook, and that he used just leftovers and ingredients they had on hand and created a delicious meal they all enjoyed. They eat in the kitchen. Ouisa asks Paul what he is majoring in at Harvard. The adults talk about some of the creative names the students have given courses at Harvard. They all compliment Paul on his cooking. Paul and Geoffrey talk awkwardly about Geoffrey being from Johannesburg, South Africa. Paul launches into a sort of speech in which he explains to the others that his father took him to South Africa once when he was making a movie. Paul relates the part of the movie where the camera shifted from riots in the streets to a beautiful villa where people sat on a terrace picking at their lunches. Paul says he told his father he did not understand this part of the movie. Paul's father explains that it was a sort of metaphor about the blacks in South Africa who were completely uneducated, yet took over the governing of their country in 1976 at the time of the Soweto riots. Paul concludes that the theory that

people who have bad childhoods (as these South Africans did) and cannot function must not be true. The three white adults seem entranced by Paul's explanation. When he finishes, they resume eating. They are really enjoying the meal Paul has cooked.

Geoffrey asks Paul about being black in America. Paul responds that he has never felt "American" since attending boarding schools in other countries. Ouisa interjects that there is a boarding school in Switzerland that will take children at 18 months of age. Paul responds that he has always been just himself, and did not have the usual problems being the child of a famous parent. He asks if he may have some brandy, and Flan says yes. They continue to enjoy a companionable meal. Paul explains that he never felt black in what he describes as "that racist way" until he came back to the United States at age 16. He goes on to say that he was protected as a child and had white servants, but that after his parents divorced, he and his mother and brother moved to Switzerland. He concludes by saying that he doesn't "feel" black and comments that this must be lucky for him, although Freud says there is no luck---just what you make of your life yourself.

Ouisa asks if it was, indeed, Freud who said that, and suggests a toast to the fine time and fine meal they are all having together. Geoffrey expands the toast to *Cats*, the musical Paul's father is supposedly directing. Flan suddenly asks Paul what his father is like. Ouisa, in very crude terms, cautions Flan not to fawn over stars, and he denies doing so. Paul explains that his father really has no identity that is his own, and that he simply assumes the identities of the characters he plays. He talks about his father's response to a question of how he's doing. The father, rather than relating how he, himself, is doing, relates a long tale about the character he's just been asked to play. Paul uses this scenario to explain that his father does not have any real self, just the characters he plays.

Ouisa, speaking to the audience, says how much she likes Paul, and that she wants to reach out to him. Flan explains to the audience that he then asked Paul what his thesis topic was. When Paul hesitates, Geoffrey prompts him, explaining that they are referring to the thesis that was stolen from Paul.

Paul launches into a story about a substitute teacher on Long Island, who lost his job for fighting with a student. The teacher returned some weeks later and shot the student, but did not kill him, held the class hostage, and eventually killed himself. A neighbor of the substitute teacher was supposed to have said that he was a nice boy, and always was reading *Catcher in the Rye*. Paul then references Chapman, who shot John Lennon, and who also read and re-read *Catcher in the Rye*. Next, he speaks of John Hinckley who shot President Ronald Reagan and Reagan's press secretary. Paul claims that Hinckley referred the authorities to *Catcher in the Rye* as his defense.

Flan muses that he has not read *Catcher in the Rye* in years, and Ouisa shushes Flan. Paul continues his monologue. He says he borrowed a copy of the book from a friend to see what she had underlined while reading it. Paul was puzzled as to how this story could have become a "manifesto of hate." Paul relates words from several pages of the book and then mentions page 22, on which Holden Caulfield, the main character in the book,

says he is wearing a hunter's capages. Only his cap is not for hunting deer, but people. Paul explains that he then realized that this book was more significant than he had originally thought, and was actually preparing people for pivotal moments in their lives. He quotes another speech from the book, on page 89, assuming that his audience will see the connection. He tells them he finished the book, and his analysis of it as both comic and tragic, and actually a pretty accurate picture of the male adolescent.

Paul goes on to further explain that he found the book alarming, because it talks about the paralysis its characters feel. They seem unable to make changes or movement in their lives. He goes on to say there is nothing wrong with writing about "intellectual paralysis" and gives some examples of famous writers who have done so; such as, Checkov and Beckett. He even references the last line of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in which the characters agree to move off, but don't, and are apparently unable to do so.

Paul continues to pontificate about Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, saying that everyone, except young men, should probably read it. He says the book is about the death of imagination, and that that is what paralysis actually is. He talks about how imaginative movies like Star Wars, shows like Star Trek, and the tale of Lord of the Rings are. He mentions schizophrenia as a condition where the real world does not match up with the imagination. He quotes Karl Jung, a famous psychoanalyst, who is supposed to have said that the greatest sin is unconsciousness. Paul then goes back to Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*, and the character's commentary on facing yourself. Paul says that this is the most difficult thing we have to do, and that God's gift to us is to "make the act of self-examination bearable."

Ouisa comments, "Well, indeed," and Flan adds that he hopes the muggers read the dissertation. Geoffrey contributes that he plans to buy a copy of *Catcher in the Rye* at the airport, and that he will read it cover to cover. Paul replies that he will test Geoffrey once he's read the book. Paul adds that he should be going. Ouisa asks where he's staying, and insists that Paul stay with them when he admits that he doesn't have a nice place to go to. Paul protests that he has to be at his father's hotel at 7 in the morning, or his father will be upset. Ouisa volunteers to wake him, and Flan adds that there is an alarm clock in the room where Paul will stay. Paul again protests weakly, but Flan and Ouisa insist. Paul says he will get up at 6:15 and leave quietly. Flan answers that they want to be in the performance of *Cats* that Paul's father is supposedly directing. Ouisa chides Flan, but Paul says they will be in the production. Geoffrey says he will fly back with his wife to see it. Paul assures Ouisa that they are not being pushy, and that he, Paul, is actually in charge of the extras for the production, so they would be extras. Flan asks if they will wear cat suits, and Paul replies that they would be humans. Flan says that should be in their contracts.

Geoffrey observes that they have gotten no business done that evening. Paul apologizes for being in the way, but Geoffrey invites Flan to walk him to the elevator. Ouisa explains to the audience that Flan and Geoffrey left. Paul and Ouisa are still in the apartment, and begin to argue about cleaning up, with Ouisa encouraging him to leave the cleaning up for their servant. However, the servant does not come for several days, so Paul begins to do the dishes. Ouisa mentions to the audience that Paul is washing up. Flan returns, and is amazed. He says that Geoffrey is going to give them 2 million dollars for their plans with the Cyzanne. Geoffrey thinks they will pay 6 million for it and then turn around and sell it to the Japanese for 10 million dollars. Ouisa is very happy. Paul asks about the 2 million dollars. Ouisa explains that while Geoffrey can't buy dinner in New York, he can put up 2 million dollars toward the painting purchase. Flan says they should give Paul a commission.

Paul says he knows from Flan and Ouisa's children that Flan is an art dealer, but Paul does not understand why there is no gallery. Flan explains that people come to him looking for particular things, but that they don't want museums to know where these paintings are. Flan further explains that he has a Japanese client looking for a Cezanne, and that Geoffrey helped with the additional 2 million dollars they needed to make the deal work. Paul says he is glad he was of help. They realize it's late and decide to go to bed.

Flan offers $50 to Paul in case he needs it. Paul protests that his father will be there in the morning, but Flan and Ouisa think of a number of things which could delay him, and Paul finally takes the money, saying he will pay them back tomorrow, and that he wants them to meet his father. Ouisa says they would love to, and invites Paul to bring him up for dinner. They joke about Paul cooking again. They show Paul where his room is, and he leaves the stage.

Flan and Ouisa get ready for bed, which consists of pulling on their robes over their evening clothes. They again congratulate themselves on their good fortune for having gotten the money from Geoffrey. Flan frets that he does not want to "lose their life"

where they are now. He does not want the debt they incur to bury them. Ouisa reassures him that they are safe. Flan says that they almost did lose everything and might have without the Cyzanne. Ouisa asks why he had not told her sooner, and he says he did not want to worry her. She reminds him that she is his partner. They are relieved and grateful, and that "there is a God." Flan seems to think "God" is Geoffrey, but Ouisa refers to God as Sidney. Flan exits and Ouisa curls up on the couch.

Section 3 (pages 26-44) Analysis

The group eats the meal that Paul prepared in the kitchen, as a family would, further emphasizing a family theme. While they eat, Paul talks about a part of one of his father's movies. In the movie, wealthy people were sitting on a terrace eating lunch and just sort of picking at their food. Paul's father explained that this metaphor was supposed to reflect the very uneducated Africans who took over their own country despite being very ill equipped to govern. The others enjoy his conversation and the meal he has prepared.

At one point in the conversation, Ouisa remarks that there is a boarding school in Switzerland that takes children at 18 months of age. Ouisa and Paul are used to this disruption of the family, and the author begins to let us know here that Paul wants something different than Ouisa and Flan are able to provide. He wants family, and they live in and accept a world in which babies are sent to boarding school.

Paul goes on to discuss his father more in regards to his theatrical work. Paul explains that his father, as an actor, has no identity of his own, as he is always being other people. Paul again emphasizes that he has no family, no father. He goes on to say that his "father" does not have any real self, and that he is just the character that he plays.

Paul begins to talk about the book, *Catcher in the Rye*, as having some real significance in the lives of young men. He claims that the men who shot John Lennon and Ronald Reagan were influenced by *Catcher in the Rye*. Paul also talks about what he sees as intellectual paralysis reflected in this book as well as in the works of other writers. He mentions Checkov and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. (The characters in Godot constantly say they are going somewhere, but never do). Paul is also "paralyzed" in his own way. He continues to pretend to be someone he is not in order to feel that he is part of a family. He says that God's gift is to "make the act of self-examination bearable." Paul is not engaged in self-examination, because he is so deeply engaged in self-deception.

Paul, Flan and Ouisa prepare to go to bed, and Geoffrey prepares to leave at this point. All of them want to be part of the "family" performing in *Cats*. When Flan and Geoffrey leave, Paul and Ouisa argue about cleaning up, as families do. When Flan returns from walking Geoffrey to the elevator, he relates that Geoffrey has committed to giving them the 2 million dollars. The author points up the contrast Geoffrey lives in. He is a white man from South Africa who cannot even buy dinner in the United States, but he can come up with 2 million dollars for a painting. Flan offers to give Paul $50, just as a father

would offer money to his son. They show Paul to the room of one of their own children to spend the night.

At the end of this part, Flan confides to Ouisa that he has been frightened about the possibility of not getting the money they needed for this deal. Flan has been afraid that their life would crumble without this money. They are grateful that the money has come through. They decide, "There is a God." The author seems to be playing with the question of who is worshipped here. Flan seems to worship Geoffrey who gave him the money, but Ouisa seems to regard "God" as Sidney Poitier. In this context, Mr. Poitier seems to represent fame, and perhaps surface grandness.

Section 4 (pages 45-54)

Section 4 (pages 45-54) Summary

Ouisa is curled up on the couch, and she relates to the audience that she dreamt of Sidney Poitier and his successful career. She dreamt that he sat on her bed, and she asked him what was bothering him, and if it was the production of *Cats* he was worried about.

Paul comes back on stage, dressed as Sidney Poitier in dinner clothes. Paul/Sidney answers Ouisa. He says he knows what *Cats* is, but that he is interested in human rights, constitutional amendments, and the rights of the unborn, and such heavy things. Ouisa asks if he can really get all of that into *Cats*. Paul/Sidney replies that he will try to, and Ouisa expresses confidence that he will be able to do so.

Flan appears and tells the audience about what he dreamed. He talks about his attitude toward the paintings he handles, and that he loves them. Flan relates a story about talking to his children's second grade teacher. He had observed that the artwork done in 2nd grade was far superior to artwork from the 1st or 3rd grades, and he asked the teacher how she had managed to cultivate such artistic talent in her students. She replied that she merely took the paintings away from them before the kids could ruin them. Flan goes on to say that he had been dreaming of color, and of their son's pink shirt. He muses about various famous and valuable paintings, and wishes he had one by van Gogh. He remarks that he has beautiful hand made shoes, but van Gogh had "tragic" shoes. He says he was about to lose a painting when their South African friend came to dinner and saved them.

Ouisa appears out of the darkness. She speaks to the audience, telling them that she woke up at 6 AM and was happy about the previous evening and the fact that her kitchen was all cleaned up. She is doing the crossword puzzle in ink and realizes it's nearly 7 and that she has not heard Paul. She didn't want him to be late, and was even worried that he might not be well after his mugging the night before. She tells the audience that she went down the hall to the room where Paul was staying. She remarks that the hall is 18' long. She calls at the door, and Paul moans an answer. She is concerned, so she opens the door and turns on the light. The stage is now VERY bright, and there is a naked man standing on the bed, and Paul is in the bed. The man standing on the bed asks what is going on, and whom Ouisa is.

Ouisa calls for Flan, who appears tying his robe on. The hustler continues to stand on the bed. He is wearing only white socks, and is naked otherwise. The hustler greets them, and Flan, shocked, says, "Oh my God!" Ouisa screams. The hustler says that he needs some sleep and lies down on their sofa. Paul runs into the room while trying to get his clothes on. He throws the hustler's clothes on the sofa. Ouisa confronts Paul and asks if he went back out after she and Flan retired and picked up the hustler. Paul apologizes. Flan is outraged, and throws the hustler out. He tips the sofa over so the

hustler lands on the floor. The hustler jumps aggressively at Flan. Ouisa yells for them to stop, and says the hustler might have a gun. The hustler elaborates, saying he might have a gun, or he might have a knife. Ouisa interprets this to mean he does have a gun and knife, and the hustler chases her around the room. Paul says he can explain. Flan demands his $50 back, but Paul has spent it. Ouisa tells him to get out. Flan tells him to take his clothes and go back to the gutter. Flan throws the hustler's clothes into the hall, and the hustler grabs Flan by the labels of his robe. The hustler says vulgar, threatening things to Flan and throws him back. Then he retrieves his clothes and leaves. Ouisa is terrified.

Paul begs them not to tell his father, and says he does not want his father to know. He explains that he got lonely. He says they have so much, and that he did not want to be alone, and was afraid, so he brought the hustler back with him.

Ouisa tells him to just go. Paul apologizes again, and leaves. Ouisa and Flan straighten the couch. They are exhausted. They speak to the audience. Ouisa says, "That's that." Flan is shaking. Ouisa says they must do something, and asks if anything is gone. Flan again repeats that he is shaking. Ouisa again asks about missing possessions. Flan advises her to think about herself. She says she wants to know if they took anything. Flan tells her to calm down. Ouisa says they could have been killed. Flan mentions the inkwell they spoke of before. Ouisa changes course and asks him how he can think of things when they could have been killed. An actor enters holding up the ink well. Ouisa goes on to say their throats could have been slashed.

Another actor appears with the portrait of their dog, which they recognize. Ouisa says they could have been murdered. They call their children, but there is no answer. Then the phone rings, and they hold onto one another, afraid. Ouisa is sure it's Paul, and tells Flan not to answer it. However, he does answer it, and it's Geoffrey. Geoffrey tells them he will supply another $250,000 if they need it for the bidding for the Cyzanne. He also tells them he has been thinking about a Black American Film Festival in South Africa. He says Spike Lee would come, and Poitier, and says he knows Bill Cosby and loves Eddie Murphy. He goes on that his wife and he went fishing in Norway with Diana Ross and her new Norwegian husband, and there must be some "*new* blacks - "

Flan agrees that this is a wonderful idea, and Geoffrey says he will call Poitier at the Sheridan. Flan, a little panicked, says that they will call. Geoffrey says they are calling his plane and mentions the night before again. Flan cuts him off, saying they will see one another soon. Geoffrey mentions "the banks," and Flan, "my lawyer." They hang up, in agreement, and Flan wishes him a safe trip.

Section 4 (pages 45-54) Analysis

Ouisa is doing the crossword puzzle in ink, an indication that she is always right, that she does not make mistakes. Ouisa realizes that Paul is not up yet. She acts like a "mom," fretting that he has not gotten up yet. She does not want him to be late. She walks down the hall to his room. (The hall is described as 18 feet long, a very long hall

for an apartment!) Ouisa is concerned about Paul not getting up yet, so she opens the door to his room and turns on the light, and like an outraged mother, finds him in bed with his lover. Flan (Dad) throws the hustler out. Strangely, they don't seem as angry at Paul, but they do throw him out.

The hustler is male. The theme of homosexuality, which is another duality, surfaces. The author has now used the two sides of the painting, the contrast of blacks and whites, the fact that Geoffrey is both rich and poor, and now sexual duality as contrasts. Paul begs them not to tell his father (who is imaginary). He says he did not want to be alone, or without family.

Ouisa and Flan concentrate on whether or not any material possessions have been taken. At the beginning of this exchange, Ouisa is focused on the possessions, and Flan is focused on feeling frightened. Then the two of them seem to switch roles, with Ouisa realizing that they could have been killed.

Geoffrey calls and offers even more money for the Cyzanne should they need it. He talks about wanting to do an African American Film festival in South Africa and mentions several famous black artists he knows and could convince to attend. Geoffrey offers to call Poitier at the Sheridan to invite him, and Flan panics now that he realizes Paul is a fraud. Flan gets rid of Geoffrey.

Section 5 (pages 54-67)

Section 5 (pages 54-67) Summary

Another couple, about the same age as the Kittridges, appears. They are Kitty and Larkin. Ouisa and Flan take their robes off and are dressed for the daytime. Ouisa tells Kitty and Larkin that they have a story to tell them. She turns to the audience and explains that Kitty and Larkin have a son at Harvard with their two children. Flan begins to tell their story, and Larkin asks when it happened. Flan said it had happened last night. Kitty says that their story happened first, so they get to go first. Larkin tells Flan and Ouisa that he and Kitty are going to be in the movies, in the movie of *Cats*. Ouisa and Flan exchange a glance. Ouisa invites them to go ahead and tell their story first. Larkin says that they were at home last Friday night when their doorbell rang, and it was a young man who had been mugged. He was waiting for his father, who was taking the red-eye flight. Kitty and Larkin are very pleased. Larkin says that they heard a burglar in the night. They went into the hall where they saw Paul chasing a naked blonde man out. Then, their alarm went off. They believe Paul saved their lives.

Flan tells them there was no burglar, and Ouisa adds that they actually had another houseguest. Kitty and Larkin laugh. Larkin says they feel guilty, that Paul could have been killed. Ouisa asks if any of their possessions were missing. They said nothing was missing. Flan asked if they had given Paul money, and they had given him $25 until his father arrived. Flan turns to the audience and explains that he and Ouisa told Larkin and Kitty about their encounter with Paul. Ouisa asked if they had spoken to their children. Kitty says they had not been able to get through. Ouisa makes a phone call, apparently to the Sheridan to speak to Sidney Poitier. She argues with the person on the phone that she is not a fan. The doorbell rings, and Flan goes to answer it. The hotel hangs up on Ouisa. Larkin says Poitier must be there under another name. Ouisa now calls a business called Celebrity Services. Kitty remarks that Greta Garbo used the name Harriet Brown. Ouisa, still on the phone, asks if they track down celebrities. She continues to try to find Poitier. The person on the other end hangs up on her. Larkin and Kitty have other suggestions about how they might find Poitier.

Flan has gone to answer the door and returns with a large floral arrangement with a pot of jam down in it. It is from Paul, with a card that says, "To thank you for a wonderful time. Paul Poitier." Flan and Larkin wonder about the jam. Kitty says they should call the police, and a detective appears on stage. He asks what the charges are. Ouisa says that Paul came into their house, and Flan adds that he cooked dinner. Ouisa says he talked about *Catcher in the Rye*. Flan says he told them he was Poitier's son. The detective asks if he was, and Ouisa admits they don't know. Flan says they gave him $50, and Kitty adds that they had given him $25. Larkin quiets them. Ouisa adds that Paul picked up a hustler, and Flan adds that Paul left. Kitty says that Paul chased a burglar from their home. Ouisa adds that Paul did not steal anything. Larkin and Kitty say they looked over their home carefully and nothing was gone. The detective explains

that the police are very busy, but that if they come up with charges, he will come back. The detective leaves.

Ouisa tells the audience that their children came down from Harvard. Woody and Tess enter with Kitty and Larkin's son, Ben. Flan is explaining that Paul knew many details of their lives, and Ouisa asks again if any of them may know him. Tess says sarcastically that Ouisa and Flan should have kept Paul and divorced their own children. She points out that he also sent flowers. Flan reminds them that he also sent jam. The children pretend to be impressed, saying, "Oooooo." Ouisa wishes she could reach Sidney Poitier, still referring to him as Paul's father. Kitty eagerly relates that she knows someone in entertainment law who might know Poitier. Larkin begins to question her about this "friend," and she evades his questions, eventually screaming at him that he is nobody. Ben asks them to stop. Ben, Kitty and Larkin leave, and they are quite upset.

Flan tells Tess not to tell her little sister that Paul and the hustler used her bed. Tess says she will not be involved in any conspiracy, and Flan says it's not a conspiracy, but a family. Tess and Flan are irritated with one another. Ouisa stretches out on the couch, and Paul appears wearing the pink shirt they gave him. Paul speaks a monologue about imagination. He says the imagination must be listened to, and that he is the "4 AM voice" you hear. He warns that this voice should be listened to, to lead a person out of his nightmare. If the voice is not listened to, it will die away.

Paul opens a switchblade knife. He continues to say the imagination is not an escape, but the place they are all trying to get to. Paul stabs himself with the knife. Ouisa screams and sits up, and Paul is gone. The detective calls on the phone. He mentions that he's had a call that might interest the Kittridges.

A new character, Dr. Fine, appears and addresses the audience. He is an obstetrician in New York. He says a young man came to his office claiming to be a friend of his son's. The young man had a knife wound. Paul appears onstage, and Dr. Fine explains that he treated the young man, who thanked him and said his father was coming. Now four parents, Flan and Ouisa and Larkin and Kitty, all appear on stage. Paul says that his father is making a film of *Cats*.

Dr. Fine says Paul claimed his father was a black man who had forged ahead despite being black. Dr. Fine relates that he is Jewish, but he still identified with the young man's father, saying the actor's films had given him confidence. He says he pays back his debts, referring to helping Paul. Then Dr. Fine's pager went off and he left, giving Paul the keys to his home. Paul catches the keys.

Paul is now talking to Dr. Fine, telling him his son, Doug, told him all about their home, and that they had gotten it for a great price, because of its history. Dr. Fine went off and delivered twin boys. He thought of his own son, and called him at Dartmouth. Doug appears on stage. Dr. Fine tells him about Paul, but Doug does not know him. Doug accuses his father of being a "cretin" and criticizes him for giving Paul the keys to their home. Doug goes on to vilify his father, saying that his mother told him that Dr. Fine

beat her, was a rotten lover, and drank too much. Dr. Fine tells him there are two sides to every story. Doug calls him an idiot, and goes off into the dark, screaming.

Dr. Fine explains that he then went home with a policeman, and told the policeman to arrest Paul, who is drinking brandy, wearing a silk robe. Paul says that Dr. Fine gave him the keys. Dr. Fine says his son does not know Paul, that Paul is an imposter. The Policeman screams, "Did you give him the keys to the house?" Dr. Fine confirms that he did, but that Paul approached him under false pretences. He calls Paul a crack addict.

Paul offers to pour back the rest of the brandy and says he did not take anything. He leaves. Dr. Fine again demands Paul be arrested, but the policeman leaves, and Doug returns. He again insults his father, calling him a cretin, and saying it is no wonder his mother left. Doug leaves. Dr. Fine again says there are two sides to every story.

Ouisa holds up a book, an autobiography of Sidney Poitier. Flan points out that Poitier had four daughters, no sons. Dr. Fine comments that Knopf published the biography. Kitty relates that it was published in 1980, and Larkin that the book is out of print.

Section 5 (pages 54-67) Analysis

Kitty and Larkin are another couple similar to Ouisa and Flan. They are also wealthy and have a son at Harvard. Flan and Ouisa want to tell Kitty and Larkin about their experience, but Kitty and Larkin competitively insist on "going first." They are excited about being in *Cats*. Paul, who also told them he was waiting for his father, too, has scammed them. Paul also had a lover in their home at night, but passed him off as a burglar. Kitty and Larkin believe Paul saved them from an intruder. They believe he was protecting their family. Kitty and Larkin find nothing missing.

Ben, Kitty and Larkin's son, and Ouisa and Flan's children all come in. These children obviously detest their parents. Paul wants to be in these families, but these families are awful. Flan tells Tess not to tell her younger sister that Paul was in her bed. Tess says she will not be involved in a conspiracy, and Flan says it's a family, not a conspiracy; yet, Paul's deceptions are actually a sort of conspiracy. Paul even stabs himself, because he is so desperate to belong to a family.

Still another family member appears. He is Dr. Fine, another victim of Paul's deception. Dr. Fine is Jewish, which the author seems to be using as another minority. Dr. Fine's son comes in then and harshly criticizes his father, as the other children have done to

their parents. Again, these families that Paul wants to infiltrate are not solid units, and are instead, very unhappy groups. At one point, Ouisa reads an autobiography of Sidney Poitier that reveals that the actor has only daughters, no sons. She now has proof that Paul is not part of the Poitier family.

Section 6 (pages 68-82)

Section 6 (pages 68-82) Summary

Ouisa, Larkin, Flan and Kitty discuss how strange it is that Paul was able to take all of them in. They wonder what they all have in common. Ouisa suggests that the common thread linking all of them is an "overwhelming need to be in the movie of *Cats*."

Ouisa says that their common link is that all their children went to boarding school together. Flan asks Dr. Fine how it is that they have never met before. Dr. Fine explains that his wife has custody, and that he and his ex-wife moved to opposite coasts once their son graduated from high school.

Larkin says that they should all forget Paul now. Kitty asks him if he is afraid their son, Ben, is mixed up in the fraud. Larkin replies that he does not want to know too much about his son. Kitty says she's going to find out what happened, and asserts that her son has nothing to do with anything like this. She asks the doctor what he said about crack. Larkin repeats that he doesn't want to know. Dr. Fine says that he just said it without any proof. Flan says they should take a vote. He asks if they should pursue this incident no matter what they should find out about their children.

Ouisa says they should. Dr. Fine says that he trusts Doug, and agrees. Larkin says no, but both Kitty and Flan say yes. Kitty begins to look through the Poitier autobiography. She quotes a passage from the end of the book that she does not like the sound of. She seems upset. Tess, Woody, Ben and Doug enter the room. Flan says the answer is obviously that Paul is someone they went to High School with, since they all go to different colleges. Ouisa adds that Paul knows details about their lives. Flan asks the children who in their high school was homosexual or into drugs. Tess responds that about 15 people fit that description, and Larkin repeats again that he does not want to know.

Tess protests that she finds it insulting that the adults assume a male is involved. She points out that the movie star's son could have had a relationship with a girl in high school. Ben remarks that she is so limited. Tess says that's why she's going to Afghanistan to climb mountains. Ouisa replies that she is not climbing mountains. Flan agrees with Ouisa that they have spent too much money for her to climb mountains. Tess asks if all she is an investment. Ouisa asks them to track down everyone in their high school class, both male and female, and not just homosexuals or drug addicts. She points out that the kid might be a drug dealer.

Doug asks why they looked at him when they mentioned drug dealer. He asked if they think he's an addict or a pusher and says he resents the accusations. Dr. Fine says they are not accusing him of anything. Larkin again says he does not want to know. Flan says that no one is accusing anyone of anything. He says he just wants them to go on a

detective search and find out if anyone has met a black teen that is pretending to be the son of a movie star.

Ben, Tess and Ouisa talk about the possibility of being in *Cats*. Tess reminds Ouisa that her parents hated *Cats*. Tess says the process is racist, and Ouisa protests that it is not racist. Doug remarks that he can't get in touch with his high school friends, because he has outgrown them. Kitty points out that he graduated only a year ago, so he couldn't have outgrown the friends. Ouisa gives them a copy of their yearbook and tells them to get phone numbers for everyone in their class. She says they can call the others from their apartment. Dr. Fine volunteers that they may charge the calls to his phone. Ouisa tells her children again to call all their classmates, and Doug refuses. Tess remarks, "This is the KGB." Dr. Fine points out that they are all on the phone all the time, and that it does not make sense that they are resistant to the idea. Tess says that this is the McCarthy era, and Woody says he just wants to clarify one thing. Woody complains about his parents giving Paul his pink shirt, explaining that he had gotten the shirt from them for Christmas, because he had been working out and had a larger neck size, He claims to have loved the shirt, which he refers to as "the first shirt for my new body." He protests, and says he hates it there, hates the house, and hates his parents.

Doug complains that his parents do nothing for him. Tess says they have never done anything for her except try to block what she wants to do. Ben says that he's only an extension of his father's awful personality. Doug complains again. Woody gripes again about them giving away the pink shirt. Tess says that they want her to be everything they were not. Doug reminds them that they immediately looked at him when drugs came up. The parents leave, seeming defeated and quiet.

The children are going through the yearbook, and Tess sees a face she recognizes. The boy is Trent Conway, and Trent Conway appears on stage. Tess remarks that Trent is at MIT. Tess speaks to the audience, explaining that she went to MIT and talked to Trent. Trent's taped voice is heard saying that he did know Paul. Tess' taped voice asks what happened between Trent and Paul.

The lights come up slowly on stage and Paul and Trent appear. It's raining and there is distant thunder with jazz music in the background. Paul has on jeans, a tank top, and high-top sneakers. Trent is coaching Paul, telling how to speak and not to pronounce words incorrectly. Paul comes across Trent's address book. Paul asks Trent to tell him about all these people in the address book. Trent sits beside Paul and tells Paul he wants to go to bed with him. Paul asks again about the people in the address book, and if they are all rich. Trent remarks that they just live hand to mouth on a higher level. Paul says it must be difficult to be around rich people, and that you must have to give them presents. Trent says this is not correct, and that if rich people do something nice for you, you just give them a pot of jam. Paul questions this, and Trent replies that the jam must be fancy and that there are entire stores filled with fancy English or French pots of jam.

Paul suggests that he pick a name, and Trent tells him all about those people. He picks the Kittridges. Trent obliges and tells him about each member of the family and about the Kandinskys. As Trent talks, Paul begins to take off items of clothing, starting with his

shoes. Trent promises Paul that he will go through his whole address book and tell Paul all about each family. He will teach Paul how to be the "most eagerly sought-after young man in the East." He says he wants to try for Paul's shirt. Paul kisses Trent, and says that's enough for now. Paul leaves. Trent turns to Tess and explains that Paul stayed with him for three months. He explains that he went through the address book with Paul; but Paul left him by the time they got to the Ls.

Tess asks what Paul's real name is. Trent does not know. Tess asks if Paul took things from him. Trent asks if she means besides the address book. He tells Tess that Paul took his stereo, his computer, his printer, his skis and his TV. Tess asks if he will press charges, and Trent says no. Tess comments that this is a felony. Trent asks why they want to find Paul. Tess says it's to find him. Trent says they should stay in touch, that they were friends in high school. Tess asks again if Trent will press charges. The two of them leave.

Ouisa appears on stage and explains to the audience that Tess played the tapes for her. Ouisa, again to the audience, exclaims that Paul learned all of what he learned in only three months. She likens Trent to Henry Higgins. When Trent worked with Paul, Paul said he would sail into this new world like Magellan and Columbus. Ouisa goes on to say that each person on the planet is separated from every other person by only six other people. She refers to this as six degrees of separation. She explains that there are only 6 degrees of separation between any two people. She uses the President of the United States and a Gondolier in Venice as examples. She says it is comforting that all of us are so close, but that it's also like water torture that we are so close. She says you have to find the right 6 people to make the connection, and that the six people can be anyone. She says it is profound that Paul found them, and that every new person you meet is a new door, opening up into other worlds. She replies again that there are only six degrees of separation between her and everyone else.

Flan comes in and also speaks to the audience. He tells us that they did not hear anything about Paul for a while. Then one day, their doorman came by and was very rude to Flan, even spitting at him. Paul had told the doorman that he (Paul) was Flan's son, and Flan did not acknowledge him. When they question the doorman, he says he's talking about the black son that they make live in the park.

Section 6 (pages 68-82) Analysis

Ouisa is now trying to figure out how Paul keyed in on them and his other victims. She realizes their children went to boarding school together. Larkin is anxious NOT to pursue anything regarding his son, seemingly afraid of what he may find out. The grown children of all the families Paul fooled are all together. Ouisa and Tess talk about Tess' desire to climb mountains, and Ouisa says that she is not going, because they have too much invested in her. She is referring to her daughter as an investment instead of her beloved child.

Larkin continues to protest that he does not want to know anything about his son, although most parents would want to know all details about their own children.

There is more bickering and discussion about the possibility of appearing in *Cats*. Tess reminds her mother that she and Flan hated *Cats*, another reflection of their continuing self-deception. Woody complains bitterly that his parents gave Paul his pink shirt, and he is clearly jealous, as brothers are jealous of one another.

Doug and Ben, sons of the other two families, complain about their parents. Tess joins in. Woody gripes again about the pink shirt. All of them are awful children in awful families, yet this is what Paul has been envying and wanting to be a part of. These are not happy families.

In looking through the high school yearbooks, the group identifies Trent Conway, who went to high school with all of them. It turns out that Paul and Trent had an affair, and that Paul picked Trent's brain to learn about all the families he later targeted for his scams. Trent teaches Paul how to speak, and how to fit in. Paul has prostituted himself in order to learn this family information.

It is in this part of the play that Ouisa explains that there are only 6 degrees of separation between any two people. She explains that there is a close connection between all of us, that we are all of a family, the human family.

Paul has apparently also told the doorman that he is Flan's son, who Flan refuses to acknowledge, and the doorman, who is also black, is hostile to Flan. Paul is again trying to create a family for himself, even if the "family" has to exist in bad conditions.

Section 7 (pages 82-94)

Section 7 (pages 82-94) Summary

Ouisa speaks to the audience, and says "The next chapter" is here. She says that Rick, Elizabeth and Paul are sitting together on the grass in Central Park. The three of them are laughing, singing together, attempting harmony, and generally enjoying themselves. Rick and Elizabeth are both attractive young people in their mid-twenties. Paul is wearing the pink shirt the Kittridges gave him.

Paul asks Rick and Elizabeth to tell him about their selves. They relate that they are from Utah, whereupon Paul asks if there are black people in Utah. Paul says that there may be two black people in Utah, brought there by the Mormons. Elizabeth and Rick explain that they want to be actors, and that Elizabeth won a state competition for comedy and drama. Rick adds that the two of them study and wait tables, which gives them a way to hone their techniques. Paul mentions Cyzanne, and Rick and Elizabeth are unfamiliar with him. Paul tells them that his father lives in the building near the park and loves paintings by Kandinsky and Cyzanne.

He points out the window of the Kittridges apartment and claims that Flan is his father. He says Flan registered his mother to vote and also married her. He explains that Flan has a white family now and won't see him. Paul seems bitter about his "siblings" who go to Andover, Exeter and Harvard. Elizabeth and Rick are sympathetic and make suggestions as to how Paul can reach Flan. Paul asks Elizabeth and Rick if they love one another, and they assure him that they do. Paul prepares to leave, and Elizabeth and Rick realize he lives in the park. They invite him to come home with them to their loft, and Paul accepts their invitation.

Paul begins to "educate" Rick as Trent educated him in the right ways to speak and to pronounce words. Paul claims that Rick and Elizabeth have given him the courage to attempt to see his father again. He leaves them alone. Rick and Elizabeth discuss their dreams and the parts they each hope to play one day. Paul suddenly runs back in, saying that his father has written him and that he will also give money to Paul. Elizabeth claims that she knew this would happen. Paul says he is moving out of their tiny flat now that he has money, but Rick and Elizabeth object, asking him to stay. Paul also says he will give the two of them money to stage a play to showcase their acting talents. He talks of them one-day winning Oscar awards. Elizabeth pretends to be making an award acceptance speech, and Rick joins in, thanking Paul.

Paul says there is one hitch in his plans. He claims that he is to meet Flan in Maine, and that he needs money to get there, and that he (Paul) will then be able to buy his mother a beauty parlor. He claims he has no way to get to Maine, because Flan's "new" wife checks all the bills. Paul wonders where he will come up with $250.

Elizabeth asks Paul how long he would need the money, and Paul assures her that he could wire it back in a week. Rick says quietly to Elizabeth that the two of them could lend Paul the money for a week. Elizabeth is hesitant, in case something happens. Rick accuses her of being like Paul's stepmother, holding onto the purse strings. Elizabeth still says no, and suggests that Paul's father should send him the money. She leaves for work.

Rick speaks to the audience, and explains that he and Paul went to the bank against Elizabeth's wishes and withdrew the money for Paul. Paul says, "Let's celebrate!"

Elizabeth reappears and speaks to the audience. She explains that she went to a money machine and realized that the account had been closed. She then went to the Kittridge's apartment on 5th Avenue and told the doorman she wanted her hard-earned money returned. She leaves the stage again.

Rick appears again and speaks to the audience. He explains that Paul told him he had some money of his own, and wanted to take Rick out to celebrate. They rented tuxedos and danced at an expensive and famous restaurant, the Rainbow Room. When Paul and Rick started home, they took a carriage ride in Central Park. Paul propositioned Rick, and they had sex. Then Paul left. Rick explained that he later realized Paul had no money of his own, but had spent the $250 supposedly lent for the trip to Maine on their evening together. Rick is devastated. He does not know how he will face Elizabeth, and is very distraught. He goes off into the dark.

Larkin and Kitty appear on stage again. Larkin explains that last Valentine's Day, the two of them were at a roller-disco two of their clients owned. They came outside and saw a body on the street. Kitty relates that her legs were shaky from the skating since they had not skated in so long. Larkin says there was blood seeping out of the body, but it had not yet reached the curb. Larkin explains that the boy had jumped from an apartment above the roller rink. The next day, they saw the police putting a body bag on a homeless man who had frozen to death near Gracie Mansion. Larkin remarks that sometimes you see death everywhere.

The stage becomes dark again, and Ouisa and Flan appear in their robes along with the detective and with Elizabeth. The detective explains to Flan and Ouisa the story that Paul told her and Rick about being Flan's son. Elizabeth blames Paul for Rick's death, and says she will press charges and wants Paul in jail. Ouisa says they have not seen Paul. The detective says that they now have a case against Paul. :Flan says he will tell his friends who work for the newspapers. Ouisa tells the audience that this is what took place. Flan explains to the audience that the *Times* ran a story about New Yorkers being fooled by this confidence man who was now wanted by the police. The story was to run in the Living section or the Home section.

Kitty addresses the audience, explaining that the story did run, and Dr. Fine elaborates that it was in Section B on the front page. Larkin tells the audience that they never heard from Sidney Poitier. Ouisa, again addressing the audience, says, "Six degrees. Six degrees."

All the players leave the stage except for Ouisa and Flan. They pull off their robes, and are dressed in evening clothes.

Section 7 (pages 82-94) Analysis

At the beginning of this section, Ouisa explains that Paul's next victims are Rick and Elizabeth, a young couple who have come to New York to be in the theater. Paul is in central park with them, and wearing the pink shirt given him by the Kittridges. Paul begins his scam with this couple by telling them that Flan is his father. He again wants to be part of a family. Elizabeth and Rick seem devoted to one another, a family unit in their own right. Yet, Paul inserts himself into that family unit by lying to them and convincing Rick that he needs money. Elizabeth does not want to give him the money. She says his family should be helping him, not them, but Rick does take it out of their account anyway. Paul even seduces Rick physically. Once Rick realizes what has happened, he kills himself, destroying the family he and Elizabeth were beginning to form.

Rick kills himself by jumping off a building, and it happens to be the building housing a roller-rink that Larkin and Kitty visit on Valentine's Day, the day Rick kills himself. Certainly the fact that "love died" on Valentine's Day is significant.

Elizabeth confronts Ouisa and Flan about Rick's death, blaming them because she thinks they are Paul's parents. The police now have a case against Paul. Ouisa and Flan tell the audience that the story of this con man (Paul) has appeared in the Living section or the Home section of the paper----where family news is printed.

At the end of this section, Ouisa reminds the audience that there are only six degrees of separation between any two people.

Section 8 (pages 94-120)

Section 8 (pages 94-120) Summary

Ouisa explains to the audience that she and Flan are bidding on a painting by Henri Matisse that evening. Flan, addressing the audience, begins to talk about how high they will bid, but Ouisa interrupts him and tells him not to say the amount. However, he continues and tells the audience they will pay over 25 million for the painting. He goes on to explain that he won't make much money on the deal, but that he will enter a new market as a result of the sale. He mentions Geoffrey, their South African friend.

Ouisa explains to the audience that the auction is black-tie at Sotheby's. Flan is sure they will get the painting, which they will own for a few hours before shipping it off to its eventual owner. Flan leaves, and Ouisa phones Tess, who appears on stage. Ouisa tells Tess what she's wearing. They discuss "cruelty-free" cosmetics and the pain that rabbits go through in the testing of many cosmetics. Ouisa continues to go on in this vein, but Tess interrupts her and says she is getting married. Ouisa responds that she thought Tess was going to Afghanistan. Tess clarifies that she is both getting married and then going to Afghanistan. Ouisa says that Tess is not getting married. Tess comments that she is so negative. They continue to bicker. The other phone line rings, and Ouisa puts Tess on hold. Tess is annoyed. Paul appears on stage and seems frightened. Paul relates that he saw the story of Rick's suicide in the paper. Ouisa says she wants to put Paul on hold, because she is talking to Tess. Paul threatens that if she puts him on hold, she will never hear from him again. She hesitates, and Tess fades away.

Ouisa tells Paul he must turn himself in. She says he can strike a bargain, and compliments him on his brilliance. She says he has promise, and needs helpages Paul asks if she will help him, and Ouisa asks what he would expect her to do. Paul wants to stay with them, and Ouisa refuses because Flan feels betrayed. Paul asks if she feels betrayed. She criticizes him for picking up a hustler on the street and asks if he has AIDS. Paul says he does not. He asks again if Ouisa feels betrayed and says he will never bother them again if she feels that way. Ouisa does not respond to that, but asks him where he's been, or if he's in more trouble. Paul says he only visited them, and that the doctor left him alone. However, he says he and Flan and Ouisa spent time together. Ouisa asks what he wanted from them, and he replies that he wanted everlasting friendship. Paul mentions Trent and what he's told him about the Kittredges. Ouisa says she should hang up, and this causes Paul to panic. Paul lists several literary works he has read. He mentions the Sistine Chapel, and Ouisa says she has been there. She explains to Paul how it is cleaned. Paul asks her to take him to see it. Ouisa points out that people think he stole money and maybe even murdered someone.

Flan appears on stage, asking Ouisa for help with the studs on his shirt. She mouths to Flan that it is Paul on the phone. Flan goes to the other phone and picks it up. He says he will call the detective. The phone rings, and Tess appears. She tells her father that

they were cut off earlier. Flan suggests she call back later. Tess says she is getting married and moving to Afghanistan, but Flan tells her they cannot discuss this now. Tess is angry. She says, angrily, that she is doing this to hurt her parents.

The detective appears again. Flan tells him Paul is on the phone. The detective tells Flan to find out where Paul is, and then leaves. Flan seems to be at a loss as to how to do this. Paul asks Ouisa who is there. Ouisa asks Paul to come over. Paul says if he does, the police will be waiting for him, but Ouisa says Paul should trust them, because they like him. Flan asks where Paul is, and Paul asks who is there. Ouisa says Flan is there. Paul volunteers to come over and cook for them again. Ouisa explains that they are on their way out, and where they are going. Flan is angry that she has told him that. Paul wants to come to the auction with them. He tells Ouisa to say hi to Flan. Ouisa says he cannot come with them. Paul points out that he was helpful last time.

Paul seems to want to do what Flan does. Flan explains that Paul has seen only the nice side of the business, and that anyone in the business has to have a background in art history and in economics, which Paul does not have. Paul says he could learn it quickly and asks if their children will take over the business. Flan says no, that it is not a business you hand down. Then Flan loses patience, and tells Paul he has stolen money, embarrassed him, and that there is warrant out for Paul's arrest. Ouisa takes the phone away from Flan. She asks if Paul is still there, and what his real name is. He says he will tell them if he can stay with them again because that night was the happiest he has ever had. Ouisa tells Flan what Paul has said, but Flan does not believe it. Ouisa asks why it was a good night. Paul replies that he was able to use all the parts of himself. Ouisa agrees that it was a good night. She compliments Paul's cooking. Their conversation progresses, and Ouisa tells him he is both smart and stupid. Paul balks at being called stupid. Ouisa points out that he is stupid not to realize his potential. He wants her to elaborate, and to commit to being behind him in his endeavors.

Ouisa tells Paul that she thought Paul was laughing at them that night, which he denies. She says he must have brought the hustler back to their home to show his contempt for them. Paul explains that he was so happy after his evening with them that he wanted to add sex to the evening. He asks if Ouisa does that, too, and she says no. Paul offers to tell her his name, and she is listening. He tells her his name is Paul Poitier-Kittridge. Ouisa responds that Paul needs help, and that he should turn himself in so he can start over. Paul responds by asking what he is supposed to start over, and Ouisa says he should start his life over. He again asks if she will help him. This time she says that she will, but that he must go to the police and to jail. Paul asks if she will send him books, photos, cassettes and letters, and Ouisa says that she will. Paul asks if she will visit him, and she says she will.

Paul asks if she will dress up for the visits, and she says she will. She warns him to use condoms in prison. He says he won't have sex in prison, because he only has sex when he's happy. Ouisa again tells him to go to the police, and Paul asks if he will take her. Ouisa tells him she will give him the name of the detective to see. Paul says if the Kittridges take him, he will be treated well. Ouisa says she doesn't think they will kill him, and Paul reminds her that he is black. Ouisa then says she will take him, and Paul

says he will plead guilty and go to prison. Ouisa tells him it will only be a few months. Paul says that he will come and work for the Kittridges when he gets out of jail, and Ouisa evades his statement. Ouisa draws the line at his request to live with them, however. She says he should have his own place to live, and says they will help him locate a place, and even help him with furniture. He wants Philadelphia Chippendale, and Ouisa does have some. Paul restates that all he must do is go to the police, and Ouisa confirms that this would help make it all history and allow him to put the past behind him. Paul wants to go to the police that night, but Ouisa says they will take him tomorrow.

Paul asks to accompany Ouisa and Flan that evening, and she says they can't take him because the event is black tie (formal dress). Paul says that he does have a black tie, from when he went to the Rainbow Room, and asks if Ouisa has been there. She confirms that she has. Paul asks what time they have to be at their event, and she answers that they have to be there at 8 PM. Paul again asks to be taken to the police station, because it is still early, and he reasons they could do it before the 8 PM engagement. Paul again claims Sidney Poitier is his father as their conversation progresses. Ouisa reminds him that Poitier is not his father, and that Flan is not his father.

Flan comes in, dressed formally, and is angry that Ouisa is talking to Paul. He threatens to rip the phone off the wall. Ouisa reacts to this order by telling Paul they will come to get him immediately to go to the police. He tells her he is in the lobby of a particular movie theater, and she says they will be there in half an hour. Paul says he will give them a 15-minute grace period. Ouisa assures him they will be there, and that they love him. They hang up.

Ouisa tells Flan that they have time to pick up Paul and take him to the police and still be at the auction before 8 PM. The detective appears on stage, and Flan tells him where Paul is. Ouisa says they promised to bring Paul to the police, because he's special. The detective nods and leaves. Ouisa addresses the audience, telling them that they started out and hit traffic. Flan addresses the audience, saying that he ran into the theater, but Paul was not there. Ouisa asks if anyone has seen a young black man. Flan addresses the audience, explaining that the girl in the ticket window saw the police come and arrest a young black man, kicking and screaming, into the car. He kept saying he was waiting for his family. Ouisa tells the audience that she and Flan are not family, and Flan adds that the detective had been transferred. Ouisa tells the audience that they don't know Paul's name. She explained that they called the precinct, asked about charges, that they are not family, and don't know Paul's name. She says they also called the Criminal Courts, but were not family, and did not know Paul's name.

Flan asks Ouisa why this means so much to her. He says because Paul wanted to be them, to be everything they were. He wanted their life. He even stabbed himself to be in their lives. He envied them, even though Ouisa says they are "not enough to be envied." Flan says that they do have hearts, and Ouisa says that's not the point. She reminds Flan that they believed Paul at first, and she says that Paul did more for them than their

own children ever did. She reminds Flan that Paul wanted so much to be his son. She says that Paul is in trouble, and that she and Flan do not know how to help him.

Flan reminds her that Paul could have killed them. Ouisa reminds Flan that he found Paul attractive. He denies that, and says that she is on her own in that area. Ouisa goes on to explain that his youth and talent and the possibility of being in *Cats* attracted them. She asserts that their encounter with Paul was a real experience, and not just a story to tell their friends. She asks how they should go about preserving or holding onto this experience.

Flan addresses the audience, saying that this is why he loves paintings. The issues that Paul brought up are the issues that painters deal with, such as color and structure. Ouisa comments that there is color in her life, but maybe not structure. Flan again addresses the audience, explaining that Cyzanne would leave blank spaces in his paintings if he could not identify a reason for a particular brush stroke or color. Ouisa comments that she, then, is a "collage of unaccounted-for-brush strokes." Ouisa states that she is all random, and asks Flan how much of his own life he can account for.

Flan responds to her by asking if she is drunk. He reminds her that the Cyzanne sale went through and that they are wealthy, and so is Geoffrey. He tells her they will next buy a Matisse and then another painting the next month, and then another and another.

Ouisa looks at Paul. She demands he answer her question. He replies that he can account for all of his life, and that he is a gambler. Ouisa comments that she and Flan make a terrible match. Ouisa addresses the audience, saying that time passes. Ouisa says that she read today that a young man killed himself on Riker's Island (a prison). He tied a shirt around his neck and hung himself. She wonders if it was a pink shirt, and if it was Paul. She says they never found out who he was. Flan says he is sure it's not Paul, and that he will be back. Then Flan tells the audience that he and Ouisa must leave to go to an auction. He leaves to get the elevator for them.

Ouisa addresses the audience, wondering if it was the pink shirt. She remembers that the Sistine Chapel ceiling was cleaned and is now so colorful. Flan calls her. She begins to leave, but Paul is there, wearing the pink shirt. Paul says that the Kandinsky is painted on two sides. He seems to glow for a moment, and disappears. She considers this for a moment and then smiles. The Kandinsky begins to turn.

Section 8 (pages 94-120) Analysis

Early in this section of the play, Ouisa phones her daughter Tess and tells her where she and Flan are going that evening and what she is wearing. Tess interrupts to say she is getting married, a far more significant topic than Ouisa has been discussing. As Tess and Ouisa are bickering, the other phone line rings, and Ouisa puts Tess on hold to answer it. The other caller is Paul. Ouisa continues to talk to Paul, not Tess, and Tess eventually fades away. Ouisa and Flan's children are disconnected from them. Their

relationships are superficial at best. Paul, however, although not family, demands her attention.

Ouisa, in a motherly way, tells Paul he must turn himself in. She asks if he has AIDS. Paul wants to stay with them, the family he has tried to hijack for himself, but Ouisa says Flan is too angry and feels betrayed. Paul wants to stay connected to the Kittridges. He wants to be in their family. He talks about literary works and art works as if to demonstrate that he belongs in their world.

Flan comes on stage and answers a call from Tess, but Flan does not have time to talk to her, and tells her to call back later. This is even when Tess is talking about life-changing decisions; such as, getting married and moving out of the country.

Paul and Ouisa are still on the phone. He offers to come over and cook for them again to recreate the family feeling again. Ouisa declines, saying they are on their way out. Paul wants to go with them, as if he is part of their family. He even proposes he learn the business from Flan, like a son would. He attempts to deal with them, saying he will reveal his real name if he can stay with them again. Paul wants Ouisa to commit to being behind him in his future work, just as a mother might be. Ouisa says she will.

Paul wants Ouisa to accompany him to turn himself in, but she and Flan don't really have time to do so before they go to their auction. She is, as usual, more concerned with her own life and activities than those of someone else. Finally, Ouisa agrees to take Paul to the police station, and she and Flan leave. They are caught up in traffic, and as they do not arrive as expected, Paul is picked up by the police and taken off to jail. Ouisa and Flan have no idea who Paul really is and are unable to locate him in jail.

Flan, addressing the audience, asserts that he loves paintings, because the issues Paul brought up are the same issues that painters deal with. In other words, Paul does not have to deal with the messiness of what happens in real life, because the paintings cover it. Flan and Ouisa go on with their lives.

Some time later, Ouisa reads in the paper that a young man has killed himself in prison, and has hanged himself with his pink shirt. They wonder if it is Paul. Since they never found out who he was, they have no way of knowing. Flan says they must leave for another auction, must go on with their own lives, even in the face of death.

The play both begins and ends with the slow revolution of the Kandinsky painting, showing first one side, and then the other side to the audience. Ouisa and Paul have one "side" of reality as parents and family members, and yet another quite different side is experienced by their children, reflecting the continuing theme of two sides as represented by the two sided painting in focus.

Characters

Trent Conway

Trent Conway attended the same high school as the Kittredge children. While attending MIT, he met Paul in Boston. The two young men had a three-month affair Trent told Paul all about the wealthy New York families he knew.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth moved to New York from Utah with her boyfriend Rick. They want to become actors. They befriend Paul in the park and believe his story about being Flan's ostracized son. When Paul asks them for money, Elizabeth refuses but later learns of Rick's deceit. After Rick kills himself, Elizabeth presses charges of theft against Paul She believes that he has taken everything from her

Flan

See Flanders Kittredge

Geoffrey

Geoffrey is a liberal South African billionaire. He is an acquaintance of the Kittredges and is at their home when Paul arrives Geoffrey is charmed by Paul, and his supposed relationship to Sidney Poitier. He enjoys the evening so much that he gives Flan the money for the painting.

Flanders Kittredge

Flan is an attractive, middle-aged art dealer. His business is the discreet buying and selling of expensive works of art. Flan got into the art business out of a sincere love for art, but by the play's opening, he has lost this idealism. The passion he once felt for art has been supplanted by the great sums of money it can earn for him. He recognizes that some of the people to whom he sells great works of art value them not for their beauty but for their social cachet. Like his wife, Flan is drawn to Paul, but unlike his wife, when he learns the truth, he detaches from Paul. Even though he acknowledges the service Paul provided in obtaining the two million dollars from Geoffrey, he continues to refer to Paul as a "crook" and wants little to do with him.

Louisa Kittredge

Louisa Kittredge (often referred to as Ouisa) is a rich, attractive, middle-aged woman. She lives with her husband in a posh Upper East Side apartment In Manhattan. As the play opens, Ouisa is characterized by superficial traits: she is a good hostess, a quick conversationalist, and a dramatic storyteller. However, she also is the character most affected by the meeting with Paul. The experience leads to growth and her spiritual rebirth.

Ouisa gives voice to the play's title, that there are "Six degrees of separation. Between us and everybody else on this planet." This linkage allows her to recognize the potential for a sincere connection between herself and Paul despite their vastly different backgrounds. Although in the end she does forsake him to the heartless bureaucracy of the police department, her meeting with Paul leads to an inner transformation and a new way of looking at the world around her. She no longer values anecdotal experience but yearns for true experience, which indicates her desire to forge deeper relationships with others She comes to realize that while her life has been filled with interesting experiences it has no inherent meaning of its own.

Talbot Kittredge

Tess is the Kittredges' rebellious daughter. She tracks down Trent Conway and finds out about his relationship with Paul

Ouisa

See Louisa Kittredge

Paul Poitier-Kittredge

See Paul Poitier

Paul Poitier

Very little is known about Paul's true identity. He claims to be the son of Sidney Poitier as well as a Harvard classmate of the Kittredges' children. In reality, he became aware of the Kittredge children, and others in their social milieu, when he met a young man with whom they had attended high school. Paul used this young man to learn how to comport himself in upper-class society and also to learn enough details to pass himself off as belonging in the Kittredges' world.

Though Paul is not really an actor's son, he is a good actor himself He easily convinces the Kittredges of his false identity; and his affability is a crucial determinant in Geoffrey's

decision to invest the money in the Cezanne painting His articulate and intelligent conversation belies his background.

Paul is equally adept working himself into the good graces of Rick and Elizabeth, a young couple who have moved to the city from Utah to become actors. Paul's experience with the couple, and his seduction of Rick, teach him that his self-centered actions and lies can have devastating results on others. At Ouisa's urging, he turns himself into the police, but he maintains his hope of becoming a better man in the future-the man he pretended to be.

Rick

Rick has moved to New York from Utah with his girlfriend Elizabeth. They want to become actors The couple met Paul in the park and believe his story about being Flan's ostracized son When Paul needs money, Rick secretly withdraws it from his and Elizabeth's account Rick and Paul dance together at the Rainbow Room and then have sex in a hansom carriage in Central Park. Devastated by what he has done-betraying Elizabeth's confidence and having sex with a man-Rick commits suicide by jumping out a window.

Tess

See Talbot Kittredge

Themes

Race and Racism

Paul is the only African-American character in the play. He recognizes that his race is a detriment in the society in which he wants to immerse himself, so he makes the best of it by claiming to be Sidney Poitier's son. Paul draws on the appeal of one of the first African-American actors who successfully challenged the race barrier, much as he is attempting to do now.

Paul makes pretensions to that world. He tells the Kittredges "I never knew I was black in that racist way till I was sixteen and carne back here [to the United States] I don't even feel black." He claims not to experience the typical problem of "being black in America" while he pretends to be of their world. Once the truth about his background has emerged, however, and Paul faces arrest, he admits the falsity of his earlier words. He asks Ouisa to take rum to the police station because "I'll be treated with care if you take me. . . . If they don't know you're special, they kill you." When Ouisa protests, he says, "Mrs. Louisa Kittredge, I am black," which is his first admission that race has had its effect on his life, his actions, and rus choices.

Family

Paul's primary motivation in tricking the Kittredges and their acquaintances is to win their "everlasting friendship." Most important to Paul is creating a family for himself. Although his chum that Sidney Poitier is his father is calculated to win the trust of the liberal, wealthy Manhattanites, the lie also plays into Paul's sublimated desire for a family. Similarly, when he claims to be Flan's neglected son, his yearning to forge a relationship with his father is quite real. Paul's fantasies all surround familial ties, but significantly, those that he describes to others are all broken relationships. Paul reveals nothing about his past, but his isolation is physically and symbolically indicated by his first introduction to any member of Manhattan's upper class, when Trent Conway finds him standing alone in a doorway.

Paul preferred the Kittredges to the others because they paid attention to him and welcomed into their circle. Kitty and Larkin as well as Dr Fine all left him alone, but at the Kittredges, , 'We all stayed together. "

The final conversation that takes place between Ouisa and Paul shows his desire to belong to them. He wants to live with them or take over Flan's business. He has started to call himself Paul Poitier Kittredge. For her part, Ouisa understands what Paul wants and she seems to demonstrate some willingness on the telephone to make it happen. As she tells rum, "We'll have a wonderful life." Despite this, and for reasons that are somewhat inexplicable, she tells the police Paul's whereabouts instead of taking him down to the station herself. In so doing, she loses all connection with him. As she tells

the audience, although she tried to track him down, she was unable to do so, for "I wasn't family."

Imagination

Imagination is an important theme in the play. Paul has an active and vivid imagination. For one thing, It allows him to assume easily and convincingly the role of an upper-class young man. He uses his imaginative talents to persuade others to trust him and like rum. With Rick and Elizabeth, Paul spins a story of being forsaken by his father, and the couple feels so badly for him that they invite h1m to stay with them. In a sense, they become a surrogate family, standing in for the Kittredge family that denies itself to Paul. He appeals to the Kittredges and their acquaintances by allying himself with theater royalty and also by promising bit parts in the movie rendition of the Broadway hit *Cats.*

Paul shows his interest in imagination through his talk about *The Catcher in the Rye.* Later in the play, it becomes obvious that when Paul says, "I believe that imagination is the passport we create to take us into the real world," he is speaking literally. Paul has created a persona for himself to bring him into the upper-class world he wants to join Paul's imagination makes him want to be a part of the Kittredges' family, and he comes up with a very imaginative plan to make his dreams come true.

Style

Symbolism

The play's primary symbol is the Kandinsky painting that hangs in the Kittredges' living room. It is the audience's focal point; as the play opens, "A painting revolves slowly high over the stage. . . . [Kandinsky] has painted on either side of the canvas in two different styles. One side is geometric and somber. The other side is wild and vivid. The painting stops its revolve and opts for the geometric side." The two-sided painting symbolizes human duality. Paul is the living embodiment of the Kand1nsky. The "somber" side he introduces to the Kittredges, with his preppiness, his Brooks Brothers shirt, and his Poitier pedigree. When Ouisa a startles Paul the next morning, however, she comes across the "wild" side of Paul, the young man who purchases sexual favors from gay prostitutes. Throughout the play, Paul wavers between both personalities. To Rick and Elizabeth, he appears as the young man of good breeding; this time, instead of claiming Sid11ey Poitier as ills father, he claims Flan Kittredge. After he has won their trust and money, however, he reverts. His actions and his speech become coarser once again, eventually asking Rick "if he could f- me."

Other pieces of the play emphasize this duality. Dr. Fine says, "There are two sides to every story" Indeed, Paul is like a story with two sides. Trent Conway, in a moment of "fierce tenderness," tells Paul, "We'll give you a new identity I'll make you the most eagerly sought-after young man in the East And then I'll come into one of these homes one day-and you'll be there and I'll be presented to you. And I'll pretend to meet you for the first time. ' , Trent's words demonstrate that Paul cannot exist in the world of the Kittredges without pretending to be someone he is not.

Setting

The setting of the play is the Kittredges' living room in their Upper East Side Manhattan apartment. The Kittredges' home and their friends reflect their social milieu. They have money, breeding, culture, and education. They send their children to East Coast boarding schools, like Groton, and private universities, like Harvard. Their material and cultural wealth is emphasized by the Kandinsky painting that hangs in their living room.

Paul does not belong in this setting, though he tries to enter it. He makes pretensions to being a part of this h1gh-class New York world through his claims to attending school with the Kittredges' children and to being the son of Sidney Poitier. In reality, Paul only became intimately acquainted with th1S world after being picked up by a wealthy college boy when he was standing in a doorway in Boston.

Elizabeth and R1ck occupy a different social setting than the other people that Paul meets. They are naive wannabe actors who have settled in New York from their native

Utah. Their background represents a more wholesome environment, *yet* they are similar to the Kittredges in that they are all duped by Paul.

Structure

The play has a nontrad1tional, fluid structure. The play is not divided into acts or scenes-one segment of the play flows into the next. For instance, the play opens with Ouisa and Flan relating the previous evening's events to the audience, but quickly moves into a re-creation of the evening, complete with all the relevant players upon the stage The characters' words provide the aural bridge that links various segments and lines. The characters also appear on stage when the narrative calls for them, so, for instance, when Tess phones her parents with the news of her upcoming marriage she is physically thrust upon the stage. Similarly, Paul's liaison with Trent Conway is acted out for the aud1ence. Since the entire story is actually told through the Kittredges' recollections, this technique makes the characters come alive. Guare also infuses the play with many storytelling techniques, such as monologues, dreams, and direct conversation with the aud1ence.

Point of View

The whole play 1S filtered through Ouisa Kittredge. In a sense, she "narrates" the play.

Although the segments of the play are acted out for the audience, the events are really presented how Ouisa imagines them or how she has been told they occurred. Ouisa's perception of Paul, his actions, and others' reactions to him form the backbone of the play. She alone among the characters has been emotionally affected by meeting Paul. As she tells her husband and the audience-whom she rightly recognizes is more receptive to her- "He did more for us in a *few* hours than our ch1ldren ever d1d." Ouisa's statement, and the fact that she continues to be drawn to Paul desp1te the knowledge that he is a liar and an impostor, reflects the inadequac1es of her life and family.

Historical Context

The Reagan Years

Ronald Reagan was the pres1dent of the United States throughout most of the 1980s, from 1981 to 1989. Reagan was a conservative Republican. He believed in the theory of supply-side economic, which argued that lowering the top income tax rates would cause people to invest their savings, thus spurring economic growth overall. Under Reagan, Congress passed a plan to cut federal income taxes by 25 percent. Congress also supported Reagan in decreasing government involvement. His economic plan called for cutting back on government regulations in industry, as well as cutting back on funding for social programs.

By the mid-1980s, the economy was booming, but many critics charged that not all Americans were benefiting equally. The very small percentage of wealthiest Americans grew richer, while the incomes of the middle class fell. Spending cuts on federal programs also hurt poor people. While employment rose, joblessness remained high among minority groups

Racial Issues

As in the decades before it, racial tensions continued to be a concern in the 1980s and 1990s. Several incidents became headline incidents around the country. In 1984, a white man, Bernhard *Goetz* shot four African-Americans youths on a New York subway He claimed that they were trying to rob him, but he was still put on trial for attempted murder. In 1987, he was acquitted of these charges. Civil rights leaders expressed their op1mon that if the youths had not been African American, the trial's outcome may have been different.

A racial incident In Howard Beach, Queens, also attracted considerable attention. In 1986, three white teenagers chased a young African American into the path of an oncoming automobile Michael Griffith died, and the teenagers were charged with manslaughter. When they were found guilty the following year, crowds disrupted the subway, claiming the ruling was too lenient.

Throughout the 1980s, many students on college campuses protested racial incidents and practices. In January 1987, tens of thousands gathered in Cumming, Georgia, and held the biggest civil rights protest since the 1960s. Also that year, President Ronald Reagan came under attack The U.S. National Urban League called his administration morally unfair and economically unjust to African Americans. Noted African-American Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall ranked Reagan at the bottom of U.S presidents on civil rights.

Americans and Apartheid

Many Americans also protested civil rights violations abroad, particularly South Africa's apartheid system. Over the decade, these racist policies began to attract increasing attention from foreigners as well as foreign governments. In 1985, a dozen Western nations, including the United States, voted to impose economic and cultural sanctions against South Africa's government. Measures included the prohibition of most loans to the government as well as the sale of computer and nuclear technology. A few months later, the South African government barred television camera crews and photographers from covering racial incidents Officials claimed that the foreign press was misrepresenting the country.

Some Americans companies began pulling out of South Africa. For example, In 1986 General Motors left South Africa Spokespeople said the company was losing money but also disapproved of the government's refusal to adopt reforms in the policy of apartheid. Students on university campuses launched major protests Students at some campuses, such as at the University of California at Berkeley, protested and even shut down administrative and class buildings.

Other Social Issues

Many other issues concerned American in the 1980s Crime rates In the United States had dipped In the early 1980s, but by the middle of the decade crime rates were on the rise again, significantly so for violent crimes The rising crime rate was a major issue in the 1988 presidential elections. Republican adverf:1smg portrayed Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis as weak on crime Dukakis was governor of Massachusetts when a convicted murderer, out of prison on a weekend pass, attacked a couple In Maryland The murderer was African American, so some critics charged that the ads played on racist fears of black criminals.

AIDS also came to the forefront of the American consciousness. The first cases of AIDS In the United States were reported in the early 1980s By the mid-1980s, more and more Americans were becoming concerned by the spread of AIDS. In 1993, AIDS was the leading cause of death between men ages 25 to 44 In 64 U.S. cities. Between 1986 and 1990, new AIDS cases reported for women more than tripled.

The abortion debate was also an important Issue throughout the decade The Supreme Court upheld several challenges to the constitutional right to legalized abortion. However, Reagan's administration, along with the growing conservative movement and fundamentalist Christian organizations, opposed abortion. State legislation as well as federal courts eroded a woman's right to obtain an abortion, and the availability of abortions became restricted over the years. Two divisions grew: pro-choicers, who wanted to eliminate most legislative restrictions on abortion and pro-lifers, who wanted to outlaw almost all abortions. Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group, organized the barricading of abortion clinics, and some abortion clinics were even bombed.

The Theater

In the 1980s, many "blockbuster" musicals were produced in theaters all over the world. These musicals involved spectacular sets and lavish musical arrangements, and often had unusual themes or settings. British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber produced several musicals In London *Cats,* which was based on the work of English poet T. S. Eliot, became the longest-running Broadway show in history.

Critical Overview

Six Degrees of Separation opened in New York City in 1990 and was an Immediate critical and popular success. Outstanding reviews and full houses greatly extended the play's original ten-week run. Eva Resnikova, writing in the *National Review,* called it "the lone original American play of the season." Guare's play went on to win the New York Critic Circle Award for Best Play of the Year and London's Olivier award, and to be nominated for a Tony Award In the *New York Times,* Frank Rich wrote that viewing *Six Degrees of Separation* was "a transcendent theatrical experience that is Itself a lasting vision of the humane new world of which Mr. Guare and his New Yorkers so hungrily dream."

Critics applauded the actors, the characters, and Guare's imagination and skill. *Newsweek* reviewer Jack Kroll wrote of Paul, he "is a major creation: he's a figure of dizzying ambiguity, weirdly innocent, sexually seductive, socially unsophisticated, startlingly insightful." Rich further called the playa "masterwork" in hIs review. "Among the many remarkable aspects of Mr. Guare's writing," he added, "is the seamlessness of his Imagery, characters and themes, as If this play had just erupted from his own Imagination in one perfect piece." Indeed, as Guare wrote in his Production Note to the published version of the play, he completed *Six Degrees of Separation* "very quickly" but was "[A]rmed with a lot of preparation"

The play is loosely based on real events reported in the New York papers in 1983. Guare uses the actual occurrence of a young African-American man who maneuvered himself into the households of wealthy New Yorkers as his starting point to explore human relationships, particularly in the American family. This issue has been of primary concern to Guare throughout his career. As Tish Dace pointed out in *Contemporary Dramatists, Six Degrees of Separation* contains that element so crucial to Guare's work, "dramatizing. . . the love/ hate relationships in the American family." She further remarks on Guare's technique:

His freewheeling Imagination unfettered by the constraints of realism as he employs such presentational devices as narration, soliloquies and asides to the audience, and poetic speech, Guare nevertheless grounds his play in contemporary American life, especially the sudden end of a family Unit.

The play delves into issues critical to modern life. As William A. Henry III noted in his review in *Time,* the story "takes on deep resonances."

Resnikova called it partly a "comedy of manners" and partly a "morality tale." Other critics noted its farcical and satirical nature, techniques that are integral to much of Guare' s work.

In his body of work, Guare frequently deals with metamorphosis, parent-child relationships, and violence, and Six *Degrees of Separation* is no exception. Ouisa Kittredge, who is alienated from her children, finds in Paul a substitute child, even

remarking that "[H]e did more for us in a few hours than our own children ever did." The dissatisfaction of the relationships in the Kittredge family is made clear by Ouisa's interest IN Paul, who is an acknowledged liar.

One of the most Important themes raised by the play is the ambivalent feelings that the rich feel for the poor As Henry pointed out, the play shows "liberals' fantasies of rescuing the poor." As aptly demonstrated by the Kittredges's actions, these fantasies go unfulfilled. The Kittredges are also unsure of how to respond to Paul as a young African-American man. Wrote Henry, "the encounter devastatingly sketches the uneasy state of U.S. race relations, in which white liberals may endorse the black cause in theory, yet not know any blacks socially and thus fawn on or patronize them." Henry referred to Paul's "analysis" of *The Catcher in the Rye* as an example of this. "the hosts are spellbound by his vocabulary and miss the fact that his rap becomes comic nonsense".

The play also brings up other sources of conflict: class Issues, generational disagreements, sexual orientation, and race. The characters' dysfunction demonstrates that these are simply more places for modern humanity to become isolated from others.

Criticism

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

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses the significance of the play's cultural, social, and political references, and discusses how these elements affect its development.

Loosely based on an actual episode that took place in New York City in the 1980s, Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* is a contemporary play in both spirit and execution. It deals with general themes that concerned (and continue to concern) many Americans in the late 1980s, such as family relationships, class divisions, and racism. It raised specific social concerns such as abortion, AIDS, the fall of communism, and apartheid. Additionally, the characters' constant references to popular culture symbols and icons firmly ground the play in its own era. All of these stylistic elements, combined with techniques such as the characters' tendency to directly address the audience, make *Six Degrees of Separation* a witty, biting commentary on late twentieth century urban American life.

Paul and the Kittredges inhabit vastly different worlds. The Kittredges are upper-class, white New Yorkers. They live on Fifth Avenue in the same apartment building as Jackie Kennedy Onassis and the writer Louis Auchinsloss. Their children attend prestigious private schools such as Harvard University and Groton Academy. Their house is filled with trappings of the rich, from the ornate silver Victorian inkwell to the double-sided Kandinsky painting. They casually mention monetary figures that would astound the average American.

Not only are the Kittredges wealthy, but they also are aware of the cultural wealth of America and of other countries. They pepper their conversation with allusions to the artS, dropping references to Pepe le Moko, a famous French film gangster trapped in one of his films in an Algerian Casbah, as easily as to a host of successful Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals. They name-drop writers and characters: Donald Barthelme, the famous postmodernist; Aeschylus, the Greek tragedian; Henry Higgins, the English professor who transformed the uneducated Eliza Doolittle into a cultured, desirable woman in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion;* Scheherazade, who spun out the captivating and imaginative tales of *The Thousand and One Nights.* These references flow naturally in the conversation of the Kittredges and their friends, for these icons of culture are an accepted pan of their world.

They also refer to societal ills that take place in the world around them. One theme the Kittredges and their friend Geoffrey raise at the beginning of the play is the effects of racism on society as well as their own position regarding whites versus blacks. Geoffrey is a South African billionaire, thus living within the system of apartheid. As Ouisa describes Geoffrey, "He's King Midas rich. Literally. Gold mines. . . . But he's always short of cash because his government won't let. . . its white people take out any money. So it's like taking in a War Baby." Geoffrey fully acknowledges the inequities imposed by his country's government. While he alludes to wanting to correct the system and

empower the suppressed Africans-he declares that he "has to stay there [South Africa] to educate the black workers and we'll know we've been successful when they kill us " His only concrete suggestion for bettering the situation is hosting a Black American Film Festival in his country. He can invite Spike Lee, Eddie Murphy, Diana Ross and her husband (with whom ills wife went fishing), and his acquaintance Bill Cosby.

The characters continually demonstrate their inherent self-absorption and their inflated egos. Ouisa believes that she and her husband live in a charmed world. In referring to nearby culinary delights, Ouisa calls New York "the Florence of the sixteenth century" with "[G]enius on every corner." Her cultural knowledge is demonstrated by her acquaintance with the Renaissance, a time when Italian artists produced works of great beauty and lasting import. At the Same time, however, her statements show the haughtiness with which she regards her world, equating it as she does with the Renaissance, which was one of the most artistic and creative periods the world has experienced.

In order to enter their world, Paul must develop these arrogant habits. Just as casually as the Kittredges do, he manages to drop numerous references into ills conversation He speaks easily about the Russian playwright Anton Chekov and the English novelist/playwright Samuel Beckett. He even demonstrates a close and imaginative appraisal of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye,* analyzing its effects on society. He brings up political actions such as the assassination attempts of Mark David Chapman and John Hinckley, Jr., and the 1976 Soweto riots in South Africa. Paul's general knowledge was, in fact, a criticism that Eva Resnikova lodged in the *National Review.* "The greatest hurdle of the evening is suspending disbelief sufficiently to accept the premise of the impostor's transformation After all, even Eliza Doolittle was trained only to make small talk, not to hold forth on weighty intellectual topics." What this reviewer overlooks, however, is that Paul's knowledge is essentially stolen from other people and sources His *Catcher in the Rye* monologue was a "[G]raduation speech at Groton two years ago." Notably, Paul never is called upon to respond to comments from either the Kittredges or Geoffrey about his theory of how the novel signifies the "death of the Imagination." Additionally, Paul's knowledge about the Soweto riots likely came from seeing a movie such as the 1989 film *A Dry White Season,* instead of seeing a movie being shot. By the end of the play, in his final telephone conversation with Ouisa, Paul also admits that he purposefully studies culture-arts, books, even furniture-to learn how to interact in her world. He even "made a list of things I liked in the museum Philadelphia Chippendale" In a sense, Paul is the collage described by Barthelme-the "art form of the twentieth century."

The musical *Cats* takes prominence in the play. *Cats,* produced by Andrew Lloyd Weber, was one of Broadway's most successful musicals When Guare wrote the play, it had been running for many years. The basic premise of *Cats* is much as Tess Kittredge puts it: "a bunch of chorus kids wondering which of them will go to *Kitty* Kat Heaven." Tess reminds her parents that they originally pronounced *Cats* to be "an all-time low in a lifetime of theater-going" When hearing that Sidney Poitier is going to make a movie of It, however, the Kittredges quickly change their opinion. Of course, It is not the show

that interests them but the desire to be in it; or as Frank Rich writes in *The New York Times,* the "desire to bask in the glow of the rich and famous."

Ouisa suppresses her distaste for *Cats* and the meaningless art that it represents. She has a dream in which Paul takes on the role of his "father," Sidney Poitier. Paul/Sidney explains his concern with the world that is "too heavy with all the right-to-lifers." "And you can get all that into *Cats?"* Ouisa asks When Paul/Sidney answers that he is "going to try," Ouisa decides it is acceptable for her to playa bit role in the movie Ouisa infuses a trite musical with the social significance of the pro-choice debate that strongly gripped the country in the *1980s* in order to justify her participation.

Guare also infuses the play with actual biographical information on Kandinsky and Poitier, a technique that further grounds his work in reality. This is a subtle way of reminding the audience that odd events do happen, although they seem highly unlikely. Tills biographical information also links with Ouisa's theory that there exists only six degrees of separation between us and everybody else on this planet. The president of the United States, a gondolier in Venice. Fill in the names... .you have to find the right six people to make the connection. It' s not just big names. It's *anyone.* .. It's a profound thought. How Paul found us How to find the man whose son he pretends to be Six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet. But to find the right six people."

Ouisa's acceptance of the truth of her words allows her to form a bond with Paul, despites his treachery, his background, and his sexuality. She wants Paul to turn himself into the police so "You can start. . . . Your life." At the same time, however, Ouisa has come to understand that she too must start her life, for, like the Kandinsky painting, her life has "color" but no "structure." She calls herself "a collage of unaccounted-for brush strokes. I am all random." Hearkening back to the Barthelme quote, Ouisa also represents the twentieth century, but a twentieth century lacking purpose Paul offers the human connection that her life has been missing. As the play closes, she hears Paul's voice telling her, "The Kandinsky. It's painted on two sides." The stage directions state *"The Kandinsky begins its slow revolve.* " Ouisa now has the option to make more of her life. She may choose to learn from her experience with Paul and give her life the structure and meaning that it lacks. Though Paul was unable to accomplish this formidable task for himself, Ouisa's continuing interest in his whereabouts-to the point of imagining that a young man who committed suicide in jail was Paul-indicates that she may be a success.

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on *Six Degrees of Separation,* In *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001

Critical Essay #2

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English, and specializes in writing drama and film. In the following essay, he explores Guare's use of a duality motif in Six Degrees of Separation.

Guare has long been recognized as a playwright who can successfully blend the two genres of farce, a type of outrageous comedy, and tragedy. In Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation,* this farce/tragedy duality is used as a structural springboard to introduce other contrasting Ideas and elements, which collectively disorient the audience members.

From the first stage direction, Guare sets up the viewer for a play full of contrasts. Guare calls for a two-sided Kandinsky painting to revolve above the set before the play begins. On one side, the painting is chaotic; on the other, it is ordered into somber, geometric shapes. Before the play starts, "the painting stops Its slow revolve and opts for the geometric side." The painting settles on the ordered side, setting the tone for the structure of the play in the beginning. But even though the play follows an ordered construction in the beginning, it still unfolds very quickly.

Says Guare, in the production note of the published play, "All I knew about the play was that it had to go like the wind." In an interview in 1995 in *The Playwright's Art,* when discussing another production of a different farce, Guare explains why "it took thirty seconds or a minute to change each scene, and in a farce that's an eternity." A farce is traditionally fast and a tragedy generally unfolds slower so that it can build up dramatic tension. But in Guare's hands, the deliberate use of contrasting subjects in this very fast-paced farce pays off in some very dramatic, and ultimately tragic, effects.

The action of the play starts in the posh New York apartment of Flan and Ouisa Kittredge, who are wealthy art dealers. They begin by telling the audience that they have had an intruder. "Did he take anything?" Ouisa asks the audience. This is the first of many times that Guare will have his characters address the audience, a technique that playwrights sometimes use to make a more intimate connection with the audience In this case, it also highlights yet another of the play's dualities: art versus life. But even though the characters address the audience, they don't wait for a response. In most cases, the audience is quickly addressed, then dismissed as the characters turn back to the play. This contrasting of the playas art and the audience members as real life serves to disorient the audience even more.

The audience's disorientation continues when Flan and Ouisa start reenacting the events of their dinner that night. From this point on, the majority of the play is acted, rather than told, in flashback, a technique that causes the audience to forget that what they are watching is not "live," but is instead a depiction of a past event.

This pseudo-live effect is enhanced during the Kittredge's dinner with Geoffrey, a wealthy South African from whom they are trying to secure money for an upcoming art

acquisition. They are interrupted by the introduction of Paul, a young black man claiming to be friends with their children at Harvard. Paul, who has apparently been stabbed during a mugging, gives the appropriate details about the Kittredges to make them believe his connection to their children.

Paul, who later claims to be the son of film star Sidney Poitier, is a charming individual, and quickly creates an atmosphere of intense intellectual conversation, in the process winning over Flan, Ouisa, Geoffrey, and the audience. Paul's charm provides the catalyst for Geoffrey to give the money to Flan and Ouisa for the painting, and leads to Paul being invited to stay the night It is at this point that Guare turns the tables on the audience, who has been led to think of Paul as a decent, interesting young man.

Robert Andreach, in *Creating the Self In the Contemporary American Theatre,* explains how Guare tricks the audience: "The stranger, Paul, is so ingratiating, and his anecdotes are so captivating, that the theatergoers forget the reason for the reenactment." For those members of the audience that do remember the mugging from the beginning, Andreach says they will most likely think it was somebody else, "until the scene erupts, that is."

The catalytic event that exposes Paul as a fraud takes place when Ouisa goes to wake Paul up in the morning "No printed text can communicate the power of the experience as the scene ends." Andreach says. Ouisa opens Paul's door to find him with a male prostitute. Ouisa, Flan, and the audience are all shocked, and the play abruptly switches from an ordered, if fast-paced, dinner conversation, to a chaotic search for the true identity of Paul.

As Ouisa, Flan, and the other wealthy socialites duped by Paul dig into the events surrounding Paul's scams, the next major duality in the play, fantasy versus reality, is revealed.

All of the characters in the play function on two different levels, a realistic level that includes their current social positions, and a fantasy level that includes their desires and illusions In the cases of Flan and Ouisa, their friends Kitty and Larkin, and Dr. Fine, they are all very successful financially, but they secretly yearn to touch the celebrity of Hollywood.

This is not a new idea in Guare's works. As William A. Henry III said in his review in *Time* magazine, "Like his most famous play, *The House of Blue Leaves,* John Guare's wry new off-Broadway work concerns the almost mystical longing of the unfamous for contact with celebrities."

Paul recognizes that the wealthy New Yorkers have this desire, and uses it to his advantage Frank Rich, in his review in the *New York Times,* described the situation. "Here that hunger takes the delirious form of a maniacal desire to appear as extras in Sidney Poitier's purported film version of 'Cats,' a prospect Paul dangles in front of his prey."

The wealthy socialites are not the only ones who are duped by Paul from his promise to fulfill their desires. The same is true for Rick and Elizabeth, the poor couple from Utah who have come to New York to be actors. They also find themselves drawn to Paul because he is confident and gives them courage to pursue their dreams. He also makes monetary promises, telling them that he will give them the means to put on a play: "agents will come see you and you'll be seen and you'll be started."

As in the case of the wealthy socialites, Paul is once again playing off of his victims' fantasies. In reality, however, he ends up swindling them out of their hard-earned money and luring Rick into a homosexual affair that pushes Rick to suicide, thereby destroying Rick and Elizabeth's fantasies of acting success and once again shocking the audience. Up until now, Paul's antics, though troubling to his victims, have not had tragic consequences. The pendulum shifts from farce to tragedy, and the audience is dragged along for the ride.

Although the other characters all have both realities and fantasies that they can identify with, Critics have noted that Paul lacks a real identity. This is the most striking duality in the play, and the one that in the end produces the most dramatic effects.

Paul's real identity is never exposed. He lives almost entirely in the fantasy world that he has created Even at the end of the play, the audience never finds out his real name.

Paul is the consummate actor, picking up pieces of life from ills victims, and assimilating these pieces into ills consciousness. At one point, Paul himself hits upon this Idea, when discussing his "father," Sidney Poitier, who "being an actor, has no real Identity." Later on in the same speech, Paul expands upon this idea: "he has no life-he has no memory-only the scripts producers send him in the mail through his agents. That's his past "This is an accurate description of Paul's own life. He started out as a con artist trying to achieve his fantasy-to be like the Kittredges of the world.

He wants it so badly that he wipes away all traces of his uneducated, streetwalker self, and fills the void with information about the wealthy socialites' lives. Andreach describes it as follows. "He is so driven to belong that he stabs himself to gain entrance into others' lives, because he has no sense of self!"

But perhaps a more accurate description is that Paul has the sense of too many selves, and can't distinguish between them by the end of the play. In an impassioned speech about the imagination as a link between our inner, fantasy lives and the outside, realistic world, Paul asks, "What is schizophrenia but a horrifying state where what's in here doesn't match up with what's out there?" This is ironic, because one could argue that Paul himself is schizophrenic, seizing on different identities as he accumulates more experiences.

Paul demonstrates his schizophrenic tendencies at the end of the play. When he first meets the wealthy socialites, he tells them his name is Paul Poitier. When he's duping the two young would-be actors from Utah, he tells them that he is Paul Kittredge. And finally, when he is on the telephone with Ouisa at the end, he says he is "Paul Poitier

Kittredge. It's a hyphenated name." But when Paul talks in the same conversation about his "father," and Ouisa asks him which one, he exclaims, "Sidney!" Even Paul can't keep his identities straight at the end.

Paul is so far gone in his delusions, that at this point even he may not know his own real name. He tries to become in actuality what he has up until now only been in fantasy In *Contemporary American Playwrights,* Christopher Bigsby discusses Paul's transformation. "He has the actor's skills to enter another sensibility." But the danger with taking on too many other identities, is that you can lose your own. Bigsby addresses this fact. "Paul's inventions become all-consuming, until he treads the edge of madness. "

It is this attempt to live in a fantasy world, ignoring reality, which triggers the major tragic events in the play, beginning with Rick's suicide and ending with Paul's. Howard Kissel, in his review for New York's *Daily News,* described it as thus: "Ultimately, he is his own main victim. He can follow his newfound 'friends' along the high wife, but, without their money, he has no safety net."

The examination of Guare's use of duality in the play could go on and on. Truth versus lies, parents versus children, black versus white, rich versus poor. Even the title of the play has caused a sharp divide in critics' interpretations. The phrase, "six degrees of separation," refers to a scientific study that took place at Harvard in the late 1960s, which concluded that each person on this planet is separated from any other person by approximately six other people.

Cntics of the theory have interpreted this to mean that we are all connected, all alike in some way. Some of the play's critics agree with this interpretation. "The world's Pauls and Ouisas will find it worth the effort to follow the chain to one another," says Melanie Kirkpatrick, in her review in the *Wall Street Journal.* But other critics have noted that even though this connection may be statistically true, everybody still exists in Isolation. Bigsby says that "the more remarkable thing is how separate people are from one another, not how close, how little the responsibility each feels for the other."

So where does this leave the disoriented audience? What should they take away from their theatergoing experience? The answer comes through the play's heroine, Ouisa.

At the end of the play, Ouisa is distraught over Paul's suicide, over her failure to comprehend what Paul was, and what her experience with him has meant and should mean in her life. In this way, Ouisa is much like the audience member, disoriented, wondering what to make of all of this. It is at this point, at the very end of the play that Ouisa sees an image of Paul, who speaks to her. "The Kandinsky. It's painted on two sides," Paul says. Then he disappears, and the Kandinsky painting from the start of the play "begins its slow revolve" once again.

Says Rich, "Every aspect of 'Six Degrees of Separation,' its own story included, literally or figuratively shares this duality, from Paul's identity to a Kandinsky painting that twirls above the Kittredge living room" Bigsby adds this thought: "But the painting revolves at

the beginning and end of the play. Neither side predominates." And just as neither order nor chaos predominates in the painting, neither does any of the other dualities predominate in the play, or in the audience members' lives. Like life itself, there are no concrete answers.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *six Degrees of Separation,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Weales presents a detailed summary of the Six Degrees of Separation *and also comments on the differences found between the characters.*

By now presumably everyone-or everyone who reads celebrity gossip columns-knows that John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* is distantly based on events that took place in 1983; a teen-ager, passing himself off as Sidney Poitier's son, imposed on several affluent New Yorkers, pretending to be a friend or classmate of their children, cleaned-out by a mugger and in need of temporary shelter. The success of Guare's play has turned the real con man-whose name happily escapes me-into a celebrity of sorts. A friend of mine tells me that during a recent television interview the young man was asked what his gullible hosts were like. "Very shallow people,"_ was his answer. Whether or not that is an accurate description of the original victims, it is clearly a proper label for Guare's good Samaritan suckers.

Caricature is central to Guare's most successful *work-The House of Blue Leaves,* for instance-so it is not surprising that the characters in *Six Degrees* are broadly comic figures, made the more obvious by the presidential style, the fragmentation that never allows them the space or the time to develop. Much of the action of the play takes place offstage and is announced to the audience or to other characters. The one deception that we witness involves an art dealer, more concerned with the deal than the art; his wife, who has a talent for non sequitur; and their guest, a liberal South African billionaire, Having enchanted the three of them, the fake Paul Poitier manages to lose his cozy nest when he is discovered in bed with a male hustler. a scene which establishes his homosexuality (useful later in the play) and allows a naked actor to run around the stage. The other too willing hosts include a foundation executive and a doctor, but their occupational levels are meaningless in a context which demands only that they be beguiled by the prospect of meeting a "movie star" and appearing in a film version of *Cats.* Their children are classic cliché brats, college age parent-haters with no redeeming qualities. Much of this is intended as an abrasive joke, of course, and there are funny lines, but the play lacks the inspired kookiness of the best of *Blue Leaves.* Jerry Zaks, who directed the successful revival of that play at Lincoln Center in 1986, is again bringing his hard punching style to Guare, but this time the result is noisy nervousness.

A sentimental subplot emerges late in this very brief play when Paul, momentarily without prosperous gulls, meets a naive couple in the park innocents from Utah or somewhere in the West who have come to conquer the city-and moves in with them, steals their money, and-offstage-seduces the young man, who discovers he likes sex with another man and promptly kills himself. I don't think there has been a character like that since the soldier who blew out his brains in James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* back in 1951. If the sequence has any purpose in the play (Guare's admirers love him for the absurdist jumps in his work), it is to indicate that Paul's charm and his lies can be fatal as well as funny.

Yet, that is not where the seriousness in *Six Degrees* lies. "My concerns are about the imagination and how we live in this city," Guare told the *New York Times* (June 10, 1990). The two characters who embody these concerns are Paul and Ouisa, the art dealer's wife, the only ones who escape stereotype and provide opportunities for the best performances in the production-those of Courtney B. Vance and Stockard Channing. Vance's tour de force is Paul's analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* as a protest against the loss of imagination in our society-a presentation that is itself an act of imagination. When Paul calls Ouisa at the end, he may still be playing his lying games, but the desperation in his voice reaches her. She attempts and fails to save him, but what she is trying to save is the perception, planted by him, of the hole at the center of their lives. Channing does a fine transition here, turning the ditzy dame of most of the play into a woman with the imagination to feel pain and distress. Guare's theme is a solid one, but the play is as light as its mannerisms; amiably attractive, it is finally as slickly trivial as most of its characters.

At some point, Ouisa explains that she has read that everyone is connected with everyone else in the world with only six persons between you and whomever. The trick is to discover the six. The conceit gIves Guare his title, but if I am going to play connection games, I prefer the network of interconnected minds that Wallace Shawn proffers in "On the Context of the Play," the essay accompanying the Grove Press edition of *Aunt Dan and Lemon.*

As it happens, while Guare' s animated cartoons were moving their successful show from the small to the large theater at Lincoln Center, Shawn was touching another aspect of the lives of comfortable New Yorkers in *The Fever,* a monologue that played briefly at the Public Theater. It will return to New York in the spring, after Shawn has performed it in England for a few months. The persona in *The Fever,* a character very like Wallace Shawn (and not simply because he is performing it), is in a "poor country where they do not speak my language," suffering from the titular fever. Between bouts of vomiting, he recalls, lovingly, his protected childhood, bemoans his affluence in the face of the world's poor, defends that affluence (sounding like Aunt Dan), and imagines retribution for the life he leads. His presentation assumes that the audience shares his background and his anxiety. His fever is not physical, it is metaphysical. It is his inability to keep those others, those accusers, at bay. Unlike the characters in *Six Degrees,* he has the imagination to see people more clearly than his upbringing taught him he should. One review that I read suggested that *The Fever* is a dated Marxist critique, but the reviewer simplified in a way that Shawn, who has one of the most fascinating minds in contemporary American drama, never could. There is no cure in *The Fever.* There is only the disease, the portrait of a man trapped by perceptions that pull him deeper and deeper into a disaffection with his own life while he tries desperately to hold on to the perquisites of his position. *The Fever's* fever is societally induced anguish.

The production consists of Shawn's sitting onstage alone and talking for almost two hours. There are occasional humorous lines and images and changes of voice (indicating sides of his character) to break the even flow of the monologue, but it is a demanding work passing itself off as a comfort able conversation. It is never going to

reach the large audience that has made *Six Degrees of Separation* a hit, but I was happier-which is to say, more uncomfortable-with Shawn than with Guare.

Source: Gerald Weales, "Degrees of Difference," in *Commonweal,* January 11, 1991, pp 17-in.

Critical Essay #4

Kroll exposes the various elements that are employed within Six Degrees of Separation.

John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* begins with a scene of pure urban hysteria Ouisa Kittredge (Stockard Channing) and her art-dealer husband, Flan (John Cunningham), flap about their ritzy New York apartment in a frenzy they've discovered that they've been hoodwinked by a young black man, Paul (James McDaniel), who's passed himself off as the son of actor Sidney Poitier. Claiming to be short on cash while awaiting the return of his "father," Paul has talked himself into the hospitality of Flan and Ouisa, who later discover their guest copulating with a male hooker. Frazzled With fear and horror, the couple throw Paul out. It turns out that Paul has pulled a similar scam on other upscale New Yorkers. Events escalate into a surreal comedy that highlights the confusion between illusion and reality in the increasingly chaotic metropolis

Guare has based his piercing play on a true story from the early' 80s. The figure of the con artist has fascinated American writers from Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* to David Mamet's film *House of Games.* In Melville's novel, a savage satire on American moral complacency, the confidence man assumes several shapes, including that of a poor black man Melville was making a statement about pre-Civil War America. Guare is talking about race and other disconnections that sunder the city in 1990.

Since this is John Guare *(The House of Blue Leaves, Bosoms and Neglect)* the play takes off on a careening ride from disorienting comedy into unexpected pathos and tragedy. Even greater than the gulf of misunderstanding that separates white from black is the gap across which parents and children regard one another with appallingly hilarious hostility. A daughter threatens her parents with an elopement to Afghanistan; a son goes bananas when his parents give a favorite shirt (it showed off his "new body") to Paul. What at first seem like the scary but bloodless crimes of a clever hustler take on darker aspects that lead to the suicide of one of Paul's young dupes.

Perverted potential: Paul is a major creation he's a figure of dizzying ambiguity, weirdly innocent, sexually seductive, socially unsophisticated, startlingly insightful In an impassioned speech he talks of the death of the imagination, that faculty which, he says, is "God's gift to make the act of self-examination bearable." Guare (and McDaniel) make every shift of Paul' s sensibility believable and disturbing. It's as if this apparition from the shadows embodies all the fragmented potential that his privileged victims have perverted. Flan, for example, has real insight into the nature of creativity, but his energies are directed to big scores in the madly inflated art market.

It's Ouisa who's awakened by the amoral Paul to the emptiness of life in the fast lane to nowhere. "He did more for us in a few hours than our children ever did," she says wonderingly to Flan. Stockard Channing's performance is the peak achievement of director Jerry Zaks's fine 17-actor ensemble at New York's Lincoln Center. Channing has become a superb American stage actress. It's doubtful that anyone else could move so inexorably and affectingly from ditsy comedy to transcendent radiance.

Source: Jack Kroll, "The Con Games People Play," in *Newsweek,* Vol. CXV, No. 26, June 25,1990, p 54

Critical Essay #5

The following is a note from the author discussing the production of Six Degrees of Separation.

Armed with a lot of preparation, I wrote *Six Degrees of Separation* very quickly. (The question actors get asked is: How do you remember the lines? The question playwrights get is: How long did it take you to write it? The answer on this one from a playwright born in 1938 about a play written in 1989 is fifty-one years.) I brought *Six Degrees* to Lincoln Center Theater, which had produced the 1986 revival of *House of Blue Leaves.* Gregory Mosher and Bernard Gersten, the director and executive producer of Lincoln Center Theater, read it and put the play into immediate production, making it a rarity in today's theater, no workshop, no readings, and seventeen actors. Lincoln Center reassembled most of the *Blue Leaves* design staff. Jerry Zaks, who'd directed *Blue Leaves,* agreed to direct. We began auditions in October and saw an average of fifty actors for thirteen of the roles. We used that time of casting to discuss the play, to understand the rhythm of the play, to hear what the play wanted to be. All I knew about the play was that it had to go like the wind.

Jerry Zaks felt it crucial to translate that speed into stage terms. The play was to open at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater, which has a thrust stage, meaning the audience sits three-quarters of the way around the stage. Meaning it's ideal for a play that addresses the audience in a very intimate, friendly fashion. Meaning also it's a long way for entrances and exits and pulse-killing scene changes. Jerry met the challenge. He and Tony Walton devised a production scheme whereby the actors (except Paul, the Hustler, and the Doorman) sit in the front row for the course of the performance, appearing and vanishing, handing up, holding up, and receiving props and costumes as needed.

We decided that when anyone speaks on the phone, he or she simply steps into a special light that lasts for the length of the conversation. No one mimes handling a phone. They just talk. A click signifies the call's termination.

Tony Walton designed a deceptively simple set, a bright red carpeted disc, two red sofas, and, hanging over the stage, a framed double-sided Kandinsky which slowly revolved before the play began and when it was over. He encased the back wall, made of black scrim, in a gilt picture frame and then divided that into two levels. The openings on either level were framed in gold. When actors appeared in the upper level doors, the set would give the feeling that they floated in the dark. The geometric interplay between the circle of the bright red disc and the rectangle of the back wall caused a palpable tension.

The audience only sees through the black scrim once, when Ouisa goes down the hall and opens the door.

Paul Gallo's lights defined the different locations and changes of time. William Ivey Long costumed the actors in vivid stained-glass colors.

Rehearsals began. Oh boy. We had made one casting error, which rectified itself after two days but left us stranded with sixteen actors and no lead. Every actress we wanted was working Or busy. Or out of town. We kept rehearsing. We went into our second week of rehearsal with no lead. Peter Maloney's wife, Kristin Griffith, filled in. Steven Beckler, the stage manager, filled in. One morning we read in the paper that a play, starring Stockard Channing, expected to open next on Broadway would instead terminate its run in San Diego. Stockard had been nominated for a Tony for her work in *House of Blue Leaves.* We sent her the script. Stockard, the exemplar trouper, closed in San Diego on a Sunday and came to us on Tuesday and we didn't miss a beat. Has any other actress been scheduled to open in New York at a certain time and indeed did open at that time, however in another play?

Our original ten-week run was extended. Magazines did stones on people hopefully waiting in line for ticket cancellations. Stockard left temporarily to honor a movie commitment made when we were on a limited run. Swoosie Kurtz, who'd won the Tony for *Blue Leaves* and had been shooting a pilot during our rehearsal panic, came in and was brilliant for nine weeks. James McDaniel left to go into a TV series. Courtney B. Vance succeeded happily into the part and would remain with it when Swoosie left at the end of October to do her TV series and Stockard would return for a now-indefinite run upstairs at the Vivian Beaumont Theater.

The experience has been remarkably happy. I wrote this play for a specific theater and they did it. It's a wonderful thing for a playwright in the 1990s to belong to a theater.

What else to say?

Six Degrees of Separation is performed without an intermission and takes approximately ninety minutes to perform.

Source: John Guare, "Production Mote," in *Six Degrees of Separation. A Play by John Guare,* Random House, 1990, pp xi-xiii.

Adaptations

Guare wrote the screenplay for the film adaptation of *Six Degrees of Separation,* directed by Fred Shepisis The film starred Stockard Channing (who played Ouisa IN the original production), Donald Sutherland (Flan), and Will Smith (Paul). The film is available from MGM/UA Home Video, 1994.

The play was recorded in audio version for L.A. Theatre Works IN 1999. Swoosie Kurtz spoke the role of Ouisa, Alan AIda the role of Flan, and Chuma Hunter-Gault the role of Paul.

Topics for Further Study

Many critics have remarked on the satiric elements in *Six Degrees of Separation.* Remember that satire is the use of ridicule, humor, or wit to criticize human nature and institutions and provoke change. Do you think the play is satirical? Why or why not?

Paul talks about the death of the imagination in his *Catcher in the Rye* speech. How does his monologue show his imaginative powers?

Conduct research to find out more about race and class relations in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s Do the Kittredges strike you as realistic representations of wealthy, white New Yorkers? Explain your answer.

The play references numerous works of art. If you had to depict the play in a visual form, what would it look like?

Imagine that Ouisa had arrived at the Waverly Theater before Paul was picked up by the police. What do you think she would have slid to him? Write their dialogue.

At the end of the play, Ouisa says of Paul, "He did more for us in a few hours than our own children ever did." Does the play support this assertion? Explain your answer.

In his review of the play, William Henry III writes that the play "confronts the ambivalence that the sane feel toward the mentally ill" and calls Paul "pathological." Do you agree with the assessment? Why or why not?

What Do I Read Next?

Guare's *The House of Blue Leaves,* his most well-known work before *Six Degrees of Separation,* contains the author's darkly humorous vision of modern America. This farce features a working-class Queens zookeeper who fails as a songwriter and takes out his frustration on his insane wife.

Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925) tells the story of a young man who, to Win a society girl, takes on the persona of a well-bred young man. In his attempt to hide the truth about his past, Clyde Griffiths finds himself involved in murder.

Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) is a scathing portrayal of wealthy New Yorkers who have all the material comforts they could desire but lack any true values or meaning in their lives. Wolfe's protagonist is a rich bonds trader who finds his whole world coming into question when he is implicated in the hit-and-run death of a young African-American man from Harlem.

Native Son (1940), by Richard Wright, concerns Bigger Thomas, a young African-American man hired by a liberal, wealthy northern family. The family encourages him to participate in social events, but one night, afraid that he will be accused of improper actions, he accidentally kills the daughter. In prison, he reaches the conclusion that violence is the only alternative to submission in white society.

George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1914), the author's funniest and most popular play, tells the story of Henry Higgins, who on a bet transforms a Cockney flower seller into being able to pass for a duchess. The play delves into the English class system as Eliza Doolittle, having successfully completed her lessons, ends up belonging to neither the upper class nor the lower class.

Further Study

"Chaos and Other Mess," in *American Theatre,* April 1999, p. 26.

This article is an interview in which Guare discusses language and other sources of inspiration.

Drukman, Steven, "Prescriptions for a Troubled Theater," in *New York Times,* October 31, 1999, Sec 2, p 1.

This article is a discussion of the state of contemporary theater among modern playwrights, including Guare.

Michner, C, "The Bard of Jackson Heights," in *New York,* December 24, 1990, p. 84.

This article provides a nice profile of Guare.

Wilmeth, Don B., "John Guare," in *American Playwrights Since* 1945, edited by Philip Kohn, Greenwood Press, 1989, pp. 142-54.

This article is a survey of Guare performance, criticism, and research to 1989.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

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- 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.
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- 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.□
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- 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.
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- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
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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.
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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.

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

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Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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