State of the Union Study Guide

State of the Union by Howard Lindsay

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

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

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

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse first staged their Pulitzer Prize—winning play *State of the Union* in 1945 and published it a year later. The play was inspired by events of the time. Following World War II, which ended in 1945, global politics became a concern of many American citizens, as the play indicates. Issues of declining relations with the Soviet Union, atomic weapons, and America's inclusion in the newly formed United Nations are mentioned at various points in the play, which explores the various underhanded and dubious political methods that candidates use to get elected president of the United States. The two playwrights wrote the work after a friend, Helen Hayes, suggested they write a play about a presidential candidate.

In the play, that candidate is Grant Matthews, a self-made businessman who is very popular with the public for his strong and controversial views□and who at least one critic feels is molded after the real-life 1940 presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie, a person who is mentioned in the play. A politician, James Conover, and a host of other politically influential supporters convince a reluctant Grant to run for president, and he agrees, thinking that he can do so without compromising his plan to be an honest candidate. Unfortunately, as Grant makes more and more concessions, he□and his wife, Mary□realize that in order to be honest, he must risk alienating special interest political groups, which could cost him the election. Ultimately, the playwrights, through Grant's final speech, encourage the American people to take a more active role in the political process. Although the playwright team wrote many popular plays during their partnership, *State of the Union* is arguably their most well-known. The play is available in a 1998 paperback edition from Dramatists Play Service.

Author Biography

Howard Lindsay was born on March 28, 1889, in Waterford, New York. Russel Crouse was born on February 20, 1893, in Findlay, Ohio. Unlike many writing collaborations, Lindsay and Crouse both became successful in their own careers before joining forces. Lindsay was introduced to writing early, through his uncle's newspaper in Atlantic City, *The Daily Union*. Lindsay's mother worked there, and at the age of eight or nine, Lindsay began working there, too, selling newspapers. Since his uncle's paper had a number of nonpaying advertising clients, the family often traded ads for services. As a result, Lindsay was given free elocution lessons and theater tickets, both of which helped prepare him for a career in the theater. In 1913, after graduating from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, Lindsay joined a theater troupe, where he honed his acting, writing, and directing skills. Gradually, Lindsay began to focus on playwrighting.

By contrast, Crouse's writing experience was mainly as a reporter. His love of newspapers grew out of his experience as sports editor of his high school newspaper. In 1910, after graduating from high school, he joined the staff of the *Commercial Tribune* in Cincinnati. From there, he worked at various newspapers as a general news reporter, sports columnist, and political reporter. Crouse became interested in playwrighting and had his first play, *Mr. Currier and Mr. Ives*, produced in 1930. This successful production led to others and attracted the attention of Lindsay, who at this point in 1933, was sick with the flu and in need of another writer to help him finish *Anything Goes* (1934), a rewrite of the book adaptation of the Cole Porter musical. From this beginning, the writing partnership took off.

Over the next three decades, Lindsay and Crouse produced a number of hits, including 1939's *Life with Father*, which ran for more than seven years (3,213 performances)□their longest-running play. It was *State of the Union* (1946) that won the pair the Pulitzer Prize in drama. In addition to plays, the team also contributed librettos to musicals, the most famous of which is the 1959 libretto for *The Sound of Music*. Crouse died on April 3, 1966, in New York City. Lindsay died on February 11, 1968, also in New York.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

State of the Union starts out during a meeting in the Washington, D.C., home of James Conover, a politician who is searching for a Republican presidential candidate popular enough to win the 1948 election. Kay Thorndike, a newspaper publisher, thinks that Grant Matthews, a wealthy, self-made businessman who has become very popular for his speeches, is the right candidate and encourages James to consider him. Spike McManus, one of Kay's reporters, is also at the meeting. Although he is a reporter, his political abilities make him more of a strategist. Grant is reluctant about the idea of being a presidential candidate, and so is James. They agree that the best way to figure out if Grant is the right man is to follow him on a speaking tour that he is doing at his various airplane manufacturing plants around the country. Unfortunately, word of Grant's affair with Kay has started spreading, so James suggests that Grant invite his wife along for the tour, as a very public statement that their estranged marriage is still okay.

Act 1, Scene 2

The next night, Grant is encouraged by James to take some of the passion out of his speeches. Grant works with Spike to change his remarks. Mary arrives, and, due to the lack of space in the house, she agrees to stay in the same room as Grant. While Grant is downstairs meeting some politically influential people, James lets Mary know that Grant is thinking about running for president. Mary correctly guesses that she has been invited along on the speaking tour to quell rumors about Grant and Kay□a relationship that she is aware of. James also lets her know that he is aware of Mary's own affair, with an Army major. Mary is pleased at the rumor and encourages James to let Grant know about it, so she can make him jealous, as he has made her jealous of Kay. Mary also recognizes right away that, although Grant says he wants to be an honest politician and not play any games, Grant is being manipulated by James and the others. When the maid brings a pair of Kay's glasses to Grant's room and asks him what address to send it to, Mary realizes that Grant has seen Kay recently, and it changes her mood. In a huff, she creates a makeshift bed on the floor and forces Grant to sleep there while she takes the bed.

Act 2

Several weeks later, Grant and Mary arrive at a hotel in Detroit to make his final speech at a banquet, both excited about the response that Grant has been getting on his other presentations. James and Spike, however, are not thrilled. While the speeches have excited the general population, the special interest groups and other political entities that sway the course of an election are not happy with Grant's statements□many of which come out in favor of the common citizen, at the expense of industry. Before the

speech, in the Matthews's hotel suite, Spike lines up several quick meetings for Grant with various special interest groups. In between meetings, James, worried about the content of Grant's Detroit speech, tries to get Grant to take out some of the more radical statements, but Grant refuses.

While Grant is out of the room, James tries to coerce Mary to get Grant to change his speech, but this fails, too. James and Spike are also dismayed to find out that, without their knowledge, Grant has set up a New York meeting with the foreign policy association, a politically important meeting that will cause Grant to announce his candidacy—an announcement that James and Spike have been trying to postpone. James tries one last time, telling Grant not to alienate his Detroit audience, which is a good source of silent (illegally filtered) campaign contributions. Mary is dismayed to hear that Grant thinks it is okay to take silent money, as long as it goes to James, and not directly to him.

In the middle of their discussion, Spike comes in to announce that Grant has one more delegation to meet with. While he is gone, James says that, in order to kill off the rumors of Grant and Kay once and for all, Mary's upcoming dinner party, which was for one old political friend, should be expanded to include several prominent Republican supporters, including Grant's mistress, Kay. Mary is outraged because the party is on the night of their wedding anniversary, and she refuses. James says they should talk about it after the banquet. Grant, Mary, and Spike leave for Grant's speech. After they have gone, Kay appears, revealing that she was the last, unnamed "delegation" who met with Grant. She talks with James, telling him that all is well and that she set Grant's mind straight about the things he needed to say in his Detroit speech.

Act 3, Scene 1

Mary relents, and she and Grant host a number of people, including Kay, at their New York apartment two weeks later. At first, everything seems to be going fine. Mary is upset that Grant changed his speech in Detroit at the last minute, but she agrees to be civil for the night. Mary has even agreed not to drink, because she does not want to slip up, say something about Kay or about her disapproval over Grant's being manipulated, and spoil Grant's night. But when the guests start arriving, things start to unravel. Sam, the only dinner guest with whom Mary is friends, does not realize that Kay's presence in Detroit was meant to be kept a secret. When Grant starts talking to Kay about the Detroit banquet in front of Mary, she realizes that Kay is the one who met with Grant right before his speech and who got him to change it. Mary's mood immediately changes. She starts drinking and interjects catty comments into the political conversation, much to Grant's dismay. She continues drinking until just before dinner, becoming very drunk. Grant takes her aside and asks her to support him during the dinner, and they walk in together.

Act 3, Scene 2

An hour later, Mary sits in the living room with Lulubelle, the wife of one of the guests. While Mary frantically drinks cup after cup of coffee, Lulubelle continues to drink alcohol. As the two women talk, it is revealed that Mary made a scene during dinner and that she cannot remember all of the ways she insulted her guests. Lulubelle goes into another room, and James comes in to talk to Mary. He tries to convince her that if she does not help Grant to see that he needs to compromise his morals to get votes, then he will not get elected. Furthermore, he tells her that the White House is the only place that Mary and Grant can hope to remain married, because otherwise, Grant will probably leave Mary for Kay□something Grant could not do if he was in the public eye. As the party breaks up and guests start to leave, they all try to manipulate Grant in different ways and talk about the political ploys they will need to use to win certain votes. At James's urging, Mary tries to go along with this, but she can only take so much. Mary finally explodes, sober this time, saying that they are trying to take away everything that is good about Grant and that nobody is looking out for the American people. Her comments affect Grant, and he tells James, Spike, and Kay that he is not going to be a presidential candidate anymore. They all leave, and when Grant and Mary are alone, he suggests that they take a trip back to the place where they honeymooned, a good sign that their marriage is going in a positive direction.

Characters

Judge Jefferson Davis Alexander

Judge Alexander is the husband of Lulubelle Alexander and a prominent Southern Republican who attends the Matthews's dinner party. He spends much of the time before dinner fixing drinks for his wife, Lulubelle, and Mary Matthews. The judge has been stuck in the same state judicial appointment for years, and he hopes that if Grant gets elected, he will appoint the judge to a federal position. In fact, he goes so far as to give Grant a list of the major decisions that he has made in his time on the state bench, to try to sway Grant's mind.

Mrs. Lulubelle Alexander

Lulubelle is the wife of Judge Jefferson Alexander and a guest at the Matthews's dinner party. Because Lulubelle does not trust anybody else to make her Sazaracs□potent cocktails□she has her husband do it. Lulubelle and Mary Matthews spend most of the night drinking together, and Lulubelle tries to console Mary after she makes a scene at dinner.

James Conover

James Conover is a Republican politician who tries to coax Grant Matthews through the beginning part of his campaign. In the beginning of the play, James is desperate to find a strong Republican candidate who can win the presidential election in a few years. Even with Kay Thorndike's urging, James is not sure that Grant is the right man, so the two postpone that decision until after Grant's speaking tour. During this tour, James, along with Spike MacManus and Kay, attempt to mold Grant into a politician by forcing him to compromise his beliefs and morals. At James's suggestion, Grant also invites his wife, Mary, along for the speaking tour, to quell the rumors of Grant's and Kay's affair. Inviting Mary turns out to be James's downfall, because she sees right through his intentions and works hard to encourage her husband to speak the truth, even if it means that he will not get as many votes. James is frustrated at this fact, and also at the fact that Grant is making political decisions□such as agreeing to speak at a politically charged meeting in New York□without consulting James first. James tries to regain control by having Kay talk to Grant, which works for a little bit. After Mary makes a scene at the Matthews's dinner party, James takes her aside and tells her that, if she does not want her husband to leave her, she should play along with James and help the Matthews get into the White House. Otherwise, he says, Grant will not have any motivation to stop his affair with Kay. Even with this coercion, however, Mary refuses to go along with James, and in the end, he is wrong. Grant decides to stick by his beliefs and by his wife, and decides not to run for president.

Mrs. Grace Draper

Mrs. Draper is a member of the Republican National Committee and a foreign affairs expert who attends the Matthews's dinner party. She proves to be one of the toughest people Grant Matthews has to deal with, since she believes that, now that the United States is part of the United Nations, it should use this membership as a tool to get each individual ethnic American group riled up and earn their votes. Grant has a hard time going along with this.

William Hardy

William Hardy is a labor representative who attends the Matthews's dinner party. He is sullen at first, because he is dressed up, while everybody else is not. His biggest issue is to keep labor's financial books closed, because if management knew how much money labor had, then the company could predict how long labor could hold a strike for.

Senator Lauterback

Lauterback is a Republican senator who attends the Matthews's dinner party. The senator's biggest constituent group is farmers, whom he thinks should have special exceptions to the trade policy that Grant Matthews is suggesting.

Spike MacManus

Spike MacManus is one of Kay Thorndike's reporters, who also serves as Grant Matthews's political strategist and advisor along with James Conover and Kay. Spike is famous in Washington for his investigative reporting, but as Kay notes, Spike never writes a thing; instead, they give him six telephones. By using all of these phones, Spike is always in the know on the political scene. As a result, many people are wary around him, because they never know when he might dig up information on them that he can use. At the beginning of the play, Kay gives Spike a two-week leave of absence from his newspaper job so that he can follow Grant on his speaking tour and help him rewrite his speeches so that they are less inflammatory. Spike also lines up meetings with special interest group delegations and takes care of other logistical arrangements on the trip. He is also aware of everybody's drink preferences at the Matthews's dinner party and makes arrangements beforehand with the butler to have specific drinks served.

Grant Matthews

Grant Matthews is Mary Matthews's husband and a self-made business tycoon who considers running for president. In the beginning, Grant is reluctant when his mistress, Kay Thorndike, encourages him to run for president. He warms up to the idea quickly, however, even though it means spending two weeks on a speaking tour with his

estranged wife. Grant tries hard to stick to his beliefs, but almost immediately, he begins to bow to pressure from James Conover, Spike MacManus, and Kay. It starts out small, with Spike rewriting certain sections of Grant's speeches. As the play goes on, the concessions that Grant must make become larger. He tries to comfort himself, and justify his actions to Mary, by saying that he is not responsible for these things□such as illegal campaign contributions□since James is handling it. Mary sees through these types of statements and tries to get her husband to be true to himself. In Detroit, on the last engagement of his speaking tour, Grant and Mary are excited by the reception that Grant gets from the audience.

As Grant learns from James, the popular vote does not matter; it is only the special interest groups that can bring in the votes that Grant needs to get nominated as the Republican Party's presidential candidate. Still, Grant refuses to be browbeaten into changing his Detroit speech. Then, unbeknownst to Mary, Kay meets with Grant right before his speech, and he decides to change it so that it is more politically safe. At the Matthews's dinner party two weeks later, Mary is still upset that Grant caved and changed his speech. When she finds out it was Kay who talked him into that change, she is even more outraged and gets drunk at the party, insulting everybody else in the process. Grant smooths things over but realizes that to continue appeasing the special interest groups, he is going to have to compromise his beliefs. After Mary's final outburst, Grant is thoughtful, and ultimately tells James, Spike, and Kay that he no longer wishes to run for president. At the end of the play, the relationship between Grant and Mary has been healed, and they both look forward to the future.

Mary Matthews

Mary Matthews is Grant Matthews's wife and the one who ultimately talks him out of selling out his beliefs to get elected president. In the beginning, Mary is at home in New York taking care of the couple's two children. But when James says that Grant needs Mary by his side on his speaking tour, to quell rumors of the affair between Grant and Kay Thorndike, Grant invites her. James is the one who tells her that Grant is thinking about running for president, and she correctly guesses that she is only on the tour to keep rumors about the affair quiet. Although she knows about the affair, and she has had one with a military man in retaliation, it still irks her. While she is not happy about the affair, Mary still loves Grant, and over the course of the speaking tour, the couple begin to show signs that they are still in love. Mary is the only one of the cast who encourages Grant to speak his mind, regardless of the political consequences, and James, Spike, and Kay realize too late how strong of an influence Mary has on Grant.

Both times in the play that Mary finds out Kay has been visiting with Grant without her knowledge, her mood abruptly changes. During the first instance, she makes Grant sleep on the floor at James's house. During the second, when she finds out that Kay visited with Grant and got Grant to change his Detroit speech at the last minute, Mary decides to get back at everybody. She drinks heavily before their dinner party and then tells off Grant and all of her dinner guests. When she sobers up later, she regrets being an improper host but does not regret speaking her mind. When James takes her aside

and says that she could be jeopardizing her marriage if she destroys Grant's presidential chances, Mary tries to go along with James and the political maneuvers that he is proposing for Grant. It becomes too much, and she ultimately blows up again. This time, however, Grant is moved by her speech and decides to call off his election plans. At the end of the play, their relationship is on the road to being healed, and they both look forward to the future.

Norah

Norah is James Conover's maid. When she finds Kay Thorndike's glasses and shows them to Grant Matthews, Mary Matthews realizes that Kay and Grant have been seeing each other again.

Sam Parrish

Sam Parrish is a businessman and friend of the Matthews, who attends their dinner party. Although Sam and Grant Matthews are friends, they have often clashed in the past about their views on the responsibility of industry to their labor forces. When Grant starts to cave on this issue, at the urging of Kay, Sam is very happy.

Kay Thorndike

Kay Thorndike is a newspaper publisher who is having an affair with Grant Matthews. She is also one of the people who strongly encourages Grant to run for president, and who, along with James Conover and Spike MacManus, helps to run Grant's campaign. For Kay, this also includes telling Grant what to do and say. As she notes to James, she can handle Grant. Kay's affair with Grant is noticed by some, and James gets wind of this fact. Worried that this scandal could hurt Grant's chances to get elected, Kay stays away from Grant for most of the play to help quell the rumors. But in Detroit, before Grant gives his speech, she shows up unexpectedly. In a secret meeting that is only later revealed to Mary, Kay gets Grant to change his mind about what he is going to say in his Detroit speech. Yet, since Grant and Mary have the opportunity to grow closer in their marriage again during the speaking trip, Kay ultimately begins to lose her control over Grant. At the end of the play, she refuses to believe that she has lost her edge over Grant and that their affair is over.

Themes

Election Politics

As is clear from the beginning of the play, *State of the Union* is about politics in the United States, specifically the presidential election process. The main plot concerns the Republican Party's desire to win back the White House in the 1948 election. As Kay notes to James in the first scene, "If we get a strong candidate in '48 we've got better than a fighting chance." Kay feels that Grant would be the right candidate, because the buzz from her newspapers tells her that "The party's best chance in '48 is to put up a candidate who's never been identified with politics." Kay, as well as James and Spike, knows that image is everything when a candidate is trying to win a presidential election. Because of this, as soon as Grant has said that he is considering the run for president, they all start working on his image, trying to make him look like the best candidate to the largest possible group of voters. This leads to some ludicrous suggestions. For example, when Grant says offhand that he was a premature baby, Spike seizes on that fact. "Say, drop that into an interview sometime. There may be some votes in that. There are a lot of people who think they were seven-month babies." They also work on Grant to try to get him to tone down his speeches□the same speeches that have made him popular in the first place.

Although Grant resists this idea, he soon begins to cave. His reluctance about running gives way to a desire to be president, so that he can do good. On the few occasions when he does not listen to James and Spike and instead listens to Mary and speaks his mind during his speeches, he gets a good response from the American public□a fact that becomes evident in the play when Grant and Mary arrive at their Detroit hotel for the last speech and are mobbed by admirers. Grant also receives several telegrams congratulating him on his speech. "Just look at these, Mary□it shows how hungry the American people are for leadership." Yet, when Grant tries to defend the controversial content of his speeches to James by using the telegrams as proof that they worked, James notes that applause means nothing in election politics. "Mary, if applause elected Presidents, William Jennings Bryan would have had three terms." Like Grant, William Jennings Bryan□a real-life person□was a charismatic candidate and popular speaker, who ran for president but was never elected. When Grant and Mary push the issue about winning over the public, James gets angry and says that the people will have nothing to do with Grant's nomination. "You're not nominated by the people□you're nominated by the politicians! Why? Because the voters are too damned lazy to vote in the primaries! Well, politicians are not lazy." Grant begins to realize that if he wants to get enough votes to win the primary, he is going to have to cater to politicians. Spike helps enforce this concept by lining up meetings with Grant and several special interest groups. As he notes to James, "He wants to be President, all right. So what I keep throwing at him is votes□get those votes□don't lose those votes."

Honesty

In the beginning, Grant notes that he wants to run an honest campaign. When James and the others tell him that he might have to compromise on that issue, Grant abhors the idea. "I'm not going to pull any punches! I want that understood!" But as the speaking tour gets rolling, Grant thinks that maybe he can compromise a little and be okay. It starts out with the speeches, which Spike tells him are too fancy. The next night, James comes in to Grant's room, where he is changing his speech. "What Spike said last night had me worried. I'm trying to unfancy it a little bit." After this first concession, Grant travels a slippery slope, first of all changing his speeches, then agreeing to take illegal campaign contributions as long as James is the one who accepts them, and finally agreeing to compromise his beliefs and make tentative promises to several politicians at the Matthews's dinner party.

Grant's only salvation is Mary, who recognizes right away that her husband and even Mary herself are being manipulated. When James tells Mary that Grant is thinking about running for president, she correctly guesses why she has been asked to come along on the speaking tour. "These public appearances that Grant and I are to make together□are they designed to kill off any talk about my husband and Mrs. Thorndyke?" Mary insists on keeping things out in the open and being honest. When she finds out about Grant's presidential bid, she says she is proud of him. "It isn't only that you have the brains for it.□The important thing to me is, Grant□you've always tried to be honest." Of course, as she notes, he has cut corners in business to get where he is, but she says, "you always had the decency to be unhappy about it."

Mary is the only one who tries to protect Grant's sense of honesty, starting with the speaking tour. At her urging, he speaks his mind during some of his speeches, which makes James very nervous that Grant is turning off potential primary voters. Mary picks up on this. When they arrive in Detroit for the last speech, Mary encourages Grant to avoid talking "to Jim about what you're going to say tonight." Grant attempts to do this, and James gets frustrated and starts asking Mary if she knows what is in the speech, starting out with a gentle probe into the matter: "You've probably read Grant's speech anyway, haven't you?" James says to Mary, who neatly deflects the question by saying "I'm sorry you won't be there." Since James's presence in Detroit would indicate Grant's intention to run for president, he must stay hidden and so will not be able to hear Grant's speech.

Style

Political Drama

State of the Union is a good example of a political drama. While many literary works touch on issues of political importance, they are not always central to the work's message and may just serve as a theme or means to generate additional conflict in the work. In political dramas, however, the commentary on political issues *is* the message. In the case of *State of the Union*, the playwrights touch on several political issues that were being discussed in the mid-1940s when the play was first being performed. For example, in the beginning of the play, Kay notes that President Harry Truman is "strong with labor," because of a veto that the president made. In the 1940s, conflict between labor unions and business was a major political issue, and earning both votes was a big deal. Kay says that Grant is a good candidate to win both of these votes, because "No employer in the country's got a better labor record. And business is bound to go along with him."

This is a big issue throughout the play, because the aspects of Grant's personality□namely his honesty□that make him popular with both camps, do not work in a political sense. Grant wants to be totally honest and advocates radical changes that fire some people up, but which are too radical to fire up the greater majority of voters. At the end of the play, Grant appears about to compromise on the issue with Bill Hardy, the labor representative who comes to the Matthews's dinner party. "Just keep in mind what I said. Our funds are our secret weapon. If an employer knows how much we've got in the bank, he knows just how long we can stay out on strike." Grant, smiling, tells Hardy that "As an employer I can understand that." Earlier, however, Grant was adamant to James about the necessity of opening labor's books: "Some of the biggest and best unions in the country had already opened their books." There is a hidden issue here, which goes beyond whether labor is better off with open books, as James indicates in a response to Mary about looking at labor's funds: "Well, some of that money went into campaign contributions." In other words, as long as the books are closed, then politicians can get some of these hidden funds as contributions. If the books are opened, it might be easier to track this illegal, "silent money"□which is a huge source of campaign contributions.

Conflicts between labor and management are just one issue that the play addresses. Lindsay and Crouse also address a laundry list of other topics, including the farming industry, America's inclusion in the United Nations, and even the dubious methods by which some judges are appointed. As the example of Judge Alexander shows, sometimes the judicial and executive branches scratch each other's backs. Right after Alexander gives Grant a list of his most important judicial decisions, he lets Grant know that, in the primary, he thinks he "can safely promise you the votes of five Southern States." In the end, the playwrights' message goes beyond all of these individual issues. The true issue is the fact that the political process, as illustrated by all of these examples, is not truly democratic. Instead of representing the individual American,

politicians have turned issues into bargaining chips. Politicians play the biggest chips, manipulating the emotions and desires of the largest and most influential special interest groups, which in turn help these politicians get elected, through both campaign contributions and votes. In the end, Grant refuses to do this, and in his speech to James, he says that the president is the one person who should not get caught up in party politics. Yet, even though he is not running for president, Grant tells Mary that he is still going to remain involved in politics. His speech, and the main message of the play, is that people should get involved in politics, if they want to change the system and give political power back to average Americans:

I'm going to be yelling from the sidelines; you've got to be yelling; everybody's got to be yelling. I'm going to be in there asking questions, and I'm going to see that the people get the answers.

Setting

As noted above, the time period in which the play takes place affects the action greatly. The post-war period in the United States was very volatile and gave politicians many issues to use to further their political agendas. Besides the time setting, the many locations in which the play is set are also important to the plot. The play starts out in Washington, D.C., the political center of the United States. Here, Grant is surrounded by politically savvy supporters,□such as Kay, James, and Spike□and here Grant seriously considers a bid for the White House. But then, in between the end of the first and the beginning of the second act, Grant and his entourage travel around the country to the speaking engagements at his various airplane manufacturing plants.

By the time the second act starts and all of this action has happened offstage, there is a noticeable change in Grant's demeanor. As he gets away from Washington□and from Kay's influence□and interacts with regular Americans in these cities, Grant, with the help of Mary, feels right at home and is able to get in touch with his honest side and speak his mind. In Detroit, Grant is planning on speaking his mind again, but Kay shows up at the last minute and talks him out of it. By the end of the play, Grant, who has felt at home at his various plants, is literally at home, and here, away from the lure of Washington, he has the hometown advantage. After a frantic outburst from Mary, Grant sees that he would have to change his values to get to Washington, and he is not willing to do that. He chooses Mary and home over Kay and Washington, and at the end, he even says to Mary that they should take a trip to their honeymoon location.

Historical Context

Political Causes of the Two World Wars

Although the play takes place in 1946, a year after World War II ended, the monumental war affected politics on a global scale, a fact noted several times throughout the play. In fact, the historical context for the play dates back even further, since World War II ultimately began as a consequence of post—World War I political events. At the end of World War I, the Allied forces and Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles, which included a war guilt clause stating that Germany caused the war and should therefore pay for the Allies's losses and damages. After several years of German payments that gradually increased in size, the British and French governments started renegotiations with Germany for their final reparations payments. Yet, the political situation was too volatile in Germany for this kind of move. Germans, inspired by Adolph Hitler and frustrated over their rising unemployment, became increasingly hostile on the issue of war reparations payments. Using this issue as one of his main campaign focuses, Hitler and his Nazi Party gained popularity and ultimately gained power in Germany.

World War II and Atomic Power

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland and began attacking other European countries, prompting a global response that ultimately included many countries. The Axis powers (which included Germany, Japan, Italy, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) faced off against the Allies (which eventually included the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and more than a dozen other countries), in a bloody war that lasted several years. In August 1945, in an effort to end World War II quickly and decisively, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The immediate explosive and long-term destructive forces were unlike anything that humanity had ever seen. These two events, which led to the rapid surrender of Japan and the end of World War II, also served to usher in the atomic age□and the threat of atomic war. In the play, Mary Matthews notes the public's fear about atomic weapons, when she discusses the need for humane politicians to wield this power. After the Matthews's dinner party, she asks James: "Are you willing to trust the people you brought here tonight with atomic power?"

Strained Relations with the Soviet Union

Although the United States and the Soviet Union fought on the same side in World War II, events near the end of the war and in the years immediately following quickly drove a wedge between them. In February 1945, as Nazi Germany was getting ready to fall to the Allied powers, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin□the respective leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union□had a historic meeting at Yalta, a Russian city. Here, they discussed how Europe should be

divided after the war. Stalin wanted to instill communist governments in Poland and Germany and wanted Germany□its biggest foe□disbanded as a nation. Churchill and Roosevelt feared the spread of communism, however, and wanted to maintain Germany's status as a nation. They negotiated a compromise, but Stalin did not abide by the agreement. Following the war, Stalin capitalized on the weakness of many Eastern European countries, using the Soviet Union's military prowess to quickly place communist governments across much of Eastern Europe. As Caspar Nannes notes in his 1960 book *Politics in the American Drama*, New York city residents who went to see *State of the Union* were aware of these political machinations and were concerned "with the atom bomb and relations with Russia." As a result, the play's discussion of current events resonated with them.

The United Nations Is Formed

Following the horrors of World War II, which also witnessed a Nazi-supported extermination of an estimated six million Jews, 51 countries agreed to form the United Nations, a unified, peacekeeping body that replaced the League of Nations□a similar body that was formed during the peace treaties that had ended World War I. The United Nations hoped to prevent further aggressions among countries by giving them a forum through which to discuss and resolve international issues. While this was a good idea in theory, in practice, the growing tension among nations like the United States and the Soviet Union undercut the intended purpose of the United Nations. While some politicians in the United States resented America's inclusion in the United Nations, they were not above using this membership as a political tool, as Mary witnesses at her dinner party. In Mary's impassioned speech at the end of the play, she angrily sounds off on this concept:

Now that we're in the United Nations let's use it!□use it to get the Italian votes and the Polish votes□lets use it to get the votes of those who hate the Russians and those who hate the British! How long is it going to be before you ask us to forgive Germany to get the German vote?

Critical Overview

When it was first performed in 1945, *State of the Union* was a wildly popular play. It also received rave reviews. Both positive responses were largely due to the current events at the time. As Caspar H. Nannes says in his 1960 book, if the play had been performed in the nineteenth century, it "probably would not have lasted a week." Produced in the politically charged mid-twentieth century, however, Nannes notes that "its 765 consecutive performances made the play the forty-fifth longest running show in the history of the New York stage." Nannes notes that, following World War II, the American populace was more versed in politics and that the play, "national in theme and international in implications, was written for an audience presumed familiar with important political names and situations on a world basis." Indeed, the play's main themes address several issues that were of political importance, the most important of which was the developing rift with Russia, which would eventually spark the Cold War. As Thomas P. Adler notes of this "mildest of comedies of manners" in his 1994 book *American Drama: 1940—1960: A Critical History*, the protagonist, Grant Matthews, "maintains belief in the best instincts of the American public, refusing to prey on either the emerging Cold War hatred of the Russians or on the easy solution of lower taxes."

But the play addressed other realities besides the post-war international situation. It also addressed the perils and dishonesties of the modern political process itself. And it did so more boldly than other plays had done in the past. Nannes notes that early reviews give the play high marks for not pulling any punches. In the past, political dramas had failed to mention specific political parties or candidates, for fear of offending them. *State of the Union* mentions both. As Edmond M. Gagey notes in his 1947 book *Revolution in American Drama*, the play, despite its "light satirical treatment, had a serious intent." Nannes, who is the critic that suggested the character of Grant Matthews was modeled after real-life presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, underscores the play's "sophisticated approach, clever dialogue, and outspoken study of the contemporary political scene." Nannes cites the scene where it is noted that Grant's charisma has caused him to be mobbed by supporters on his speaking tour. As Nannes says, "When Willkie toured the country in the months preceding the Republican convention of June, 1940, he produced similar reactions."

Other critics have discussed the play, and specifically the character of Grant Matthews, in terms of similar political dramas. As Jane Bonin notes in her 1975 book *Major Themes in Prize-Winning American Drama*, "Like most other political heroes in these plays, Grant, afraid he does not have the qualifications to lead the country, is at first reluctant to consider running." Bonin says that, as is the case with other similarly themed political dramas, "*State of the Union* implies that the only decent politician is a man who does not really want the job." Such a person, of course, also does not want to play the political game and will insist on being honest, as Grant does. Nannes points to this as the play's main theme, saying the drama "insists that the American people will respond to a candidate who tells them what he stands for, regardless of the consequences."

In the end, this is exactly what Grant chooses to do. As Adler notes, this optimistic ending, in which Grant refuses to play political games but still vows to be involved, "underscores the playwright's message that if a society wishes to be truly democratic, no one of its citizens can hide from responsibility in an apolitical stance." Likewise, Nannes says that the play "called upon Americans to take politics away from the politicians and into their own hands." Not every critic thought that the ending totally achieved its purpose, however. As Bonin says, several plays in this genre, including *State of the Union*, "issue a clarion call for people to wake up, but wake up and do what, exactly, is never quite clear."

Gagey notes in 1947 that "It is the fate of drama to become more rapidly dated than other literary types," since drama tends to deal with specific, contemporary issues that may not be relevant in later years. However, fifty years after *State of the Union* was first produced, it was still in the public consciousness. So much so, in fact, that in 1997, a very odd charity benefit performance of the play was produced, in which current politicians occupied many of the roles. As Kevin Chaffee notes in his *Washington Times* review, the play "was played for laughs with a good bit of self-deprecating humor from the all-star cast. So much so that it was hard to tell who had the most fun, the audience or the players."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette explores the relationship of Grant and Mary Matthews in the play.

When *State of the Union* was first performed in 1945, it struck a chord with the American public, who kept it on the stage for 765 consecutive performances. The play tapped into the American public's frustration with politics as usual, as well as the widespread fear over atomic power and tensions with the Soviet Union; the play also suggested that the public take back politics for themselves. Through the use of the character Grant Matthews, Lindsay and Crouse chronicled the campaign of a man who wants to be good and honest, but who, once he is in the modern political system, starts to compromise his morals to gain votes. Yet, while this main story drives the play, Lindsay and Crouse also included a subplot about Grant's marriage with Mary, through which the playwrights explore the politics of relationships. As Thomas P. Adler says in *American Drama: 1940—1960: A Critical History*, "The word 'union' in its title refers to both the public and private arenas . . . with the romance plot almost superseding the political."

It is clear from the beginning of the play that the relationship between Grant and Mary is very impersonal. When Grant calls Mary from James's house to invite her on the speaking tour, his tone and their conversation is businesslike, as he informs her he is in Washington, asks her about how their daughter is recovering from an illness, and then invites her on the tour. With the exception of a few exclamatory remarks, which are quickly stifled, there is very little emotion, and it is almost as if Grant is following a prescribed list of tasks that he needs to accomplish during the phone call. Mary confirms the emotional distance of their relationship when she arrives in Washington and has a private conversation with James. He lets her know that the public appearances of Mary and Grant are his idea. Mary says, "I don't know whether you know□(*She stops and looks at him sharply*.)□or perhaps you do□that Grant and I haven't been very close for the last year or so!" It is in this scene that Mary first shows her aptitude and political savvy. She recognizes right away that she has been invited along on the trip solely to quell the rumors of Grant's affair with Kay Thorndike.

She also demonstrates that she can exploit another person's weaknesses. In this case, that person is her husband, and the weakness is Grant's hypocritical jealousy over Mary's affair with a military man. James says he knows about the affair with the major, who Grant thinks is in the United States. Mary encourages James over to talk about the affair with Grant, and, for good measure, tells him: "But when you tell Grant about him, don't let him know the Major's out of the country." Mary knows that, if her husband knew her lover was in another country, Grant could rest easier, and she does not want that.

While these types of examples could simply be taken as the actions of a jealous wife, they go deeper than that. Instead, Lindsay and Howard frame the Matthews marriage so that it mimics a political relationship. In a different conversation with James, Mary

comes right out and says "let me straighten you out about Grant and me. Our personal relations are strictly political." This is not the only time that the playwrights mix discussion of relationships with politics. For example, when Mary first hears that Grant is going to run for president and realizes that James has started to influence Grant's thinking, Mary calls Grant on it. Grant gets flustered in an attempt to say that he is going to be honest in his campaign, and Mary responds, "Take it easy. I'm going to vote for you."

In fact, when it comes to politics, relationships or otherwise, Mary proves to be far superior than Grant or even James. Mary is the variable that James and Spike do not see coming, and the one that sabotages all of their efforts to mold Grant into a politician. Kay tries to warn the others about the Mary factor in the beginning, by telling them, "the more important her husband becomes the more determined she is to make him feel unimportant." James thinks that this criticism is a good thing, and Spike agrees, saying to Grant: "Yes, your wife might be good training for you. Toughen you up." But after Mary's presence on the speaking tour helps Grant ignore the political advice that James and Spike give to him, Spike changes his tune. When Spike calls James to Detroit to help him rope Grant back in, James asks why things have gotten out of hand. As Spike notes, "She (*He points to R. bedroom*.) knew he was planning to talk about labor in Denver and when he didn't, she spent the rest of the night tossing harpoons into him." So Mary's criticism, which both James and Spike thought would help them by keeping Grant tough, turns out to be an effective tool at undermining their efforts.

Again, Kay is aware of the danger Mary poses to the group's political goal of getting Grant into office. But Kay also thinks that she has the upper hand when it comes to manipulating Grant. For example, although Grant tells James and the others in Detroit that he is not going to change his speech, at the last minute, Kay shows up and has a secret meeting with Grant. Her influence is enough to undo Mary's protective efforts and get Grant to change his speech. As Kay notes to James, "I told you in Washington I could handle him." When Mary overhears later that Kay was in Detroit, Mary realizes that it was Kay's influence that caused Grant to change his speech. It bothers Mary that Kay has this kind of power over Grant, and James taps into Mary's emotions about Kay to try to convince her to support Grant. As James says, "the White House is the one place where she can't be with him." In other words, if Mary continues to sabotage Grant's chances of winning by trying to get him to run an honest campaign, then Mary might lose Grant to Kay. But in the White House, and in the public eye, Mary would get to keep Grant.

But James underestimates the underlying strength of Mary's and Grant's relationship, and it is this factor that ultimately helps Mary win the relationship power struggle with Kay. The crucial turning point comes at the Matthews's dinner party, when the guests are beginning to leave. After James's speech to Mary about losing Grant, Mary tries her best to go along with everything the politicians are saying and all of the political promises that Grant is making to the guests even though she knows that they go against Grant's nature. Finally, she cannot take it anymore. She lashes out at the politicians who are trying to coerce her husband, "throwing harpoons" at them as she did during the dinner, an act that only served to make Grant angry. But her anger soon

subsides into sorrow about the future that they are proposing by making political compromises to win the election, and she breaks down: "Well, it's time somebody began thinking of the next generation. (*She covers her face with her hands, sobbing as she runs upstairs. There is a pause*.)" The others try to blow it off, and turn to Grant to continue the conversation, but as the stage directions indicate, "*GRANT is standing in thought, without moving. There is another pause*." The compassionate pleas of Mary, coupled with her breaking down, moves Grant and are the wake-up call that he needs to see that he does not want to be president if it means selling out the American public and his own morals. Grant tells James:

The President of the United States is the one man elected to protect the welfare of this country as a whole. You want a candidate who will make deals with every special interest just to get votes. I can't play that game, Jim, so I'm afraid I can't be of any interest to you.

The play ends with Grant smacking Mary's bottom and calling her by her old nickname, "Maizie." When she was speaking with James in the Detroit hotel room, Mary noted that these were two things that Grant used to do when their relationship was good. The fact that he does them now is a clear sign that their relationship, which has been political for many years, is now becoming personal again.

In the end, this subplot, the Matthews's relationship, helps to support the main message that Lindsay and Howard are trying to convey. Without compassion and selflessness, any relationship□whether it is as personal as husband and wife or as broad-reaching as a president and the American populace□is doomed to be more about the empty games of politics than about mutual progress.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *State of the Union*, in *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Adaptations

State of the Union was adapted as a feature film in 1948 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, directed by Frank Capra. The film is available from MCA/Universal Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

Write a one-page description indicating how you would direct the play's second act, which takes place entirely in the Matthews's hotel room. Feel free to explore creative alternatives such as set or prop changes.

Research the major political issues discussed in the play, as well as the current hot political issues in the United States. Plot both sets of issues on a chart. Include a capsule description for each issue, including its historical background, the arguments given by the issue's supporters and opponents, and the side that you support.

Research the controversial United States presidential election of 2000. Plot the major events of this election on a timeline.

Research the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States and write a short report comparing the two political orientations. Choose one prominent person from each party and write a biography about each, including specific aspects that led to this person choosing to be a member of his or her party.

In the play, one of the characters notes that the general American public does not vote in primary elections, and so they do not have as much political influence as special interest groups, who do vote in primaries. Research the concept behind the primary elections and discuss whether or not you think this system is necessary. Feel free to suggest other alternatives to the primary system, using your research to support your claims.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: The United States and much of the rest of the world attempt to re-adjust to life after the horrors of World War II. While the Allies's victory is militarily decisive, the fallout from the war creates new political tensions between certain countries, most notably the United States and the Soviet Union.

Today: The United States and many other countries are mired in an ongoing conflict in Iraq and other regions of the Middle East. Due to the guerrilla and terrorist tactics used by insurgents, some wonder if the war can ever be decisively won. Tensions between the United States and some of its allies increase when a Bush administration report indicates that America will only award Iraq reconstruction contracts to allies that supported the United States's largely unilateral decision to go to war.

1940s: Following the American decision to drop atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, the world enters an atomic age. Both the United States and the Soviet Union use suspicion of the other government to justify a massive arms race, developing enough weapons of mass destruction to blow the world up several times over. Many American citizens live in fear of such an apocalyptic nuclear war.

Today: Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as reports by the Bush administration that Iraq is one of the nations that may possess weapons of mass destruction, many Americans initially support military action in Iraq. As the search continues in vain for these weapons, the administration is accused of inflating the actual threat of the weapons of mass destruction in order to justify going to war.

1940s: In 1945, in response to the horrors of World War II, 51 countries, including the United States, form the United Nations as an attempt to engage in a unified effort to support global humanitarian missions and prevent future aggressions.

Today: There are currently 189 countries in the United Nations. Following the ongoing refusal of Saddam Hussein to let United Nations inspectors search for weapons of mass destruction, American President George W. Bush appeals to the United Nations to authorize a United Nations—backed force to attack Iraq. When the majority of the United Nations delegates oppose this course of action, the United States and its few allies attack Iraq anyway. Some political commentators note that this course of events calls into question the effectiveness and authority of the United Nations.

1940s: In 1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt defeats Wendell Willkie to serve an unprecedented third presidential term. Roosevelt is elected to a fourth term in 1944, but dies in office a year later.

Today: As a result of the 22nd Amendment (1951) to the United States Constitution, which is enacted largely as a results of Roosevelt's four consecutive terms, presidents may now serve a maximum of two four-year terms in office.

What Do I Read Next?

Life with Father, Lindsay and Crouse's 1939 stage adaptation of a 1935 book by the same name, is one of their most popular plays. Unlike conscientious businessman Grant Matthews, the main character in this play is a tyrannical stock broker, who only gets worse as the play progresses.

Sidney Kingsley was one of the most well-known political playwrights in America. *Sidney Kingsley: Five Prizewinning Plays* (1999) collects some of his better-known plays that were produced from 1933 to 1950, including *The Patriots*, whose protagonist, the real-life Thomas Jefferson, is, like Grant Matthews, reluctant to enter politics.

In *Deadlines Past: Forty Years of Presidential Campaigning: A Reporter's Story* (2003), Pulitzer Prize—winning Associated Press reporter Walter Mears offers his reflections and observations from forty years of working the election beat. Mears discusses the dirty tricks used in some campaigns, the physically demanding aspects of conducting a presidential campaign, and various other aspects of political journalism in the last half of the twentieth century.

Robert E. Sherwood's Pulitzer Prize—winning 1938 drama *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* follows the life and career of one of America's most popular presidents. Like Grant, Lincoln realized that he would have to make political compromises as president.

In the play, Grant Matthews does not want to play politics as usual because he abhors the injustices he sees in government. In his essay "Civil Disobedience," which was first published in 1849 as "Resistance to Civil Government," Henry David Thoreau also advocates rebelling against traditional government. The essay was reprinted with Thoreau's other major essays in *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (1993).

Further Study

Bike, William S., *Winning Political Campaigns: A Comprehensive Guide to Electoral Success*, Denali Press, 1998.

Bike, a communications consultant, offers a guide to campaigning from his experience in advising political candidates. The book covers every subject that a potential candidate should consider, including advertising, fund-raising, and even personal grooming. The book also features a number of anecdotes showing successful or failed approaches, checklists, legal advice, a media glossary, and direction to further resources.

Boller, Paul F., *Presidential Campaigns*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

In this engaging history of political campaigns, Boller examines everybody from Washington to Clinton. Every election from 1789 to 1992 is covered in its own brief essay, and the book also includes a number of interesting anecdotes, as well as songs, poems, slogans, and miscellaneous other things inspired by these elections.

Keegan, John, *The Second World War*, Arrow, 1989.

Keegan's history of World War II is viewed by many as the best one-volume coverage of this monumental conflict. The author examines the war chronologically, including providing vivid descriptions of the battle scenes. Throughout the book, he also includes carefully placed discussions on specific themes, such as war production, resistance, and espionage.

Neal, Steve, *Dark Horse: A Biography of Wendell Willkie*, Random House, 1986.

The character of Grant Matthews has been compared to the real-life political candidate, Wendell Willkie, who is also mentioned briefly in *State of the Union*. Neal's biography examines the meteoric rise of political newcomer Willkie, whose engaging personality and insight into the danger of Nazi Germany helped him to win the Republican Party nomination in 1939.

Schumaker, Paul, and Burdett A. Loomis, eds., *Choosing a President: The Electoral College and Beyond*, Chatham House Publishers, 2002.

Published in the wake of the controversial 2000 election in which Al Gore won the popular vote but lost the electoral college vote, this book examines how the current electoral college works and proposes six alternatives to it. For each one, contributors examine how each reform would affect the government and the national two-party system, as well as what effect reform would have on campaigning itself.

Skinner, Cornelia Otis, *Life with Lindsay and Crouse*, Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

Skinner, a noted theatrical personality herself, takes readers through a guided tour of the lives of Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, including their partnership. The book also includes several photos of the playwrights.

Bibliography

Adler, Thomas P., *American Drama: 1940—1960: A Critical History*, Twayne Publishers, 1994, pp. 14—18.

Bonin, Jane F., "Politics," in *Major Themes in Prize-Winning American Drama*, Scarecrow Press, 1975, pp. 93—111.

Chaffee, Kevin, "Pols Legislate a Wacky 'State of the Union,'" in the *Washington Times*, June 4, 1997, p. 10.

Gagey, Edmond M., "State of the Theatre," in *Revolution in American Drama*, Columbia University Press, 1947, pp. 266—83.

Lindsay, Howard, and Russel Crouse, *State of the Union*, Dramatists Play Service, 1946.

Nannes, Caspar H., "Two Worlds: Past and Present," in *Politics in the American Drama*, Catholic University of America Press, 1960, pp. 1—14.

Copyright Information

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

Project Editor
David Galens

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

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

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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

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

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

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

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

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

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

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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